Montgomery County’s Agricultural Reserve
A National Model of Farm Land and Open Space Preservation
Photo: Lee Langstaff
The Founding of the Ag Reserve

• Until World War II, farming was the primary industry in Montgomery County, and most of the region was productive farmland.

• Development pressures grew in the second half of the twentieth century and Montgomery County’s farms started to disappear at an alarming rate.
• The 1960s- Wedges and Corridors
• The 1970s- A Rural Zone- 1 house/5 acres
• In 1980, Master Plan deliberations established an “Agricultural Reserve” of 93,000 acres (of which 30k is Parks) in the northern and western part of the county.
• 1 house/25 acres with Transfer Development Rights (TDR) to concentrate development elsewhere.
The Ag Reserve: A Place with Purpose

The Ag Reserve benefits residents throughout the region by providing:

• Local Farm Products
• Environmental Protection- Air/Water Protection and Habitat
• Historic and Cultural Preservation- History in natural context
• Economic Advantages
• Quality of Life-Recreation, Education, Resource Protection
A place for...savoring...
...learning
...growing
...inspiration
The Reserve’s Impact on the Economy

• The 745 Farms in Montgomery county add nearly $251 Million to the economy each year.  

• Number 1 Pumpkin producer in the state, number 2 berry grower.

• Over 10,000 residents work on County farms.

12007 Ag Census
Montgomery Farm Products

- Table Crops (vegetables, herbs, berries, fruit)
- Specialty Crops (Christmas Trees, Pumpkins)
- Commodity Crops (Corn, Soy, Wheat)
- Livestock (beef, dairy, pork, poultry/eggs, goats, sheep, alpacas)
- Value Added Products (jams and other conserves, textiles)
- Equine
- Horticultural Products (ornamental trees, plant stock, natural sod, etc.)
Percent Ag. Lands Remaining

- Arlington 0-3%
- Montgomery County 14-21%
- Frederick 39-49%
- Jefferson 60-70%
Center for a Livable Future,
Johns Hopkins University 2010
Maintaining a Working Landscape

Savage Dairy Farm, Mt. Ephraim Rd
Meeting the demand for Local Food

- There is exploding demand for local food; farmers find that they must set up waiting lists for their CSAs (community supported ag shares)
- 77% of state residents are more likely to buy farm products from Maryland farmers. ¹

¹ – 2009 Survey by the U of Baltimore Schaefer Center for Public Policy
Threats to the Ag Reserve
The proposed “Techway,” a 6-8 lane outer beltway would slice through the Ag Reserve, fragmenting farmland and promoting sprawl. It remains in Virginia’s long range transportation plan.
25 Sand mounds approved/built south of Poolesville within a 3 mile radius since 1994.
St. Paul’s Community Church, the Heart of Sugarland Forest
Built by Freed Slaves

A typical residence near the Church
In 2004, five estate lots with sand mound septic systems were approved just west of St. Paul’s Church, introducing McMansions to the community.

△ This 13,000 sq.ft residence sold for $2.3 million.
Clustering

• This is not about farming. Over 50 acres removed from farming.

• Friction between “suburban mentality” and intended Ag uses. The only remaining working farm receives neighbor complaints.
This 100 acre farm was subdivided into 4 + 25 acre lots. The Nichols farm grows 1,700 lbs of organic tomatoes per week for Whole Foods.
Woody Woodroof’s Red Wiggler Farm grows crops on 7 acres with a surrounding 8 acres for house, barn, road and buffer.
• Largest farm over 800 acres left.
• This subdivision (26 units) will be larger than the existing town of Barnesville.
Water Quality and Clarksburg Stage IV
Large, Non-Farm Institutions

Proposed Global Mission Church
138,000 sq ft, 85 ft tall, parking for 397, 1,160 seat sanctuary, 500 seat dining hall, multi-purpose use hall

Sugarloaf Mountain
Tools for Preservation and Next Steps
Conservation Easements

- MALPF- Maryland Ag Land Preservation Foundation
- MET- Maryland Environmental Trust
- AEP- MoCo Ag Easement Program
- Rural Legacy- a state program of grants
- BLT- Building Lot Termination
- TDR- Transfer Development Rights
- Sugarloaf Countryside Conservancy- local land trust
Our Park System

- Among the best in the nation.
- Makes up 30k acres of the Reserve
- We are fortunate to have County, State and Federal parks in our County.
- Park users are keenly interested in protecting open space for recreation opportunities.
Promote the Production of Sustainable Local Food

- Keeping the “Ag” in the Ag Reserve.
- The demand for local food is massive - a way for downcounty to interact with the Reserve.
- Small Farms = Small Businesses - the engine of local economies, keep food dollars local.
Need for Greater Public Awareness

More work needs to be done to educate about the Reserve
For More Information

Montgomery Countryside Alliance
www.mocoalliance.org
info@mocoalliance.org

Audubon Naturalist Society
www.anshome.org
Contact@audubonnaturalist.org

Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission- MNCPPC
www.mncppc.org/commission_home.html