

FAIRFIELD COUNTY, OHIO

FARMLAND POLICY EVOLUTION



1965 to Present

Supporting:

Economic
Development

Nationally Significant
Farmland

Critical Resource
Protection

Cultural Resource
Protection

Protecting Public
Health, Safety and
Welfare

Summary
Prepared by the
Fairfield Soil and
Water
Conservation
District
5-01-2023

1965 "A Study of Economic Development of Fairfield County, Ohio" by Dummond, Sifford and Associates Consulting Engineers. Prepared for the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners.

NOTE: Regional Planning did not exist yet, and their creation was a recommendation of the plan.

Summary and Conclusions: The Soil Conservation Service has mapped the soils of the county. Some of these soils are suitable for housing developments, some for industry **and some for farming only.**

1974 "Land Use Inventory and Preliminary Land Use Plan" by Burgess and Niple, Limited, Consulting Engineers and Planners. Prepared for the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission.

Development Constraints

Page 23 Groundwater- "Inasmuch as these aquifers are maintained by direct recharge either from the surface through porous materials overlying them... Open space uses such as parks, recreation or **agriculture are recommended for these areas.**"

Page 26 Soils-"those soils in the severe limitation group include those soils with a high watertable, those soils subject to flooding, areas of soils over shallow bedrock, or where permeability is low....**The more productive agricultural soils of the county are also included in this group.**"

Irreversible Commitments

Page 74 Irreversible Commitments-"Some agricultural areas will be lost in order to encourage growth and **to protect the remaining agricultural areas from haphazard growth.**"

1977 "Land Use and Development Plan, Fairfield County, Ohio" by Hartzler and Boyle. Prepared for the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission.

Between 1974 and 1977 all of Fairfield County worked to develop a plan for the future. This statement is a guide still today: "It is believed that only through just consideration of such factors can the health, safety and welfare of any future society be preserved."

- Floodplains
- Groundwater
- Water quality
- Erosion potential
- Slope
- Presently forested areas
- Local Wildlife

Development Constraints are highlighted page 47-99

Proposed Land Use Environmental Effects page 178-179

“If continuous growth in the county would occur with the present low level of control, certain undesirable impacts upon the environment would occur by the year 2000. Such effects would include, but not be limited to, the following: ...**The loss of vast amounts of prime agricultural land to large lot residential.**”

“If the proposed land use plan is implemented, many of the detrimental effects upon the environment will be substantially reduced. In addition, there will result several beneficial effects to include:....**The preservation of** major natural features such as floodplains, marsh and wetland, significant wooded areas, and **prime agricultural lands.**”

1982 “Spring Planning Meeting Public Questionnaire and Public Meeting.” Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District.

Farmland preservation ranked number 1 of 7 District priorities.

Education on farmland preservation ranked 1 of 6 topics for the District to increase.

Limitation on the development of prime farmland ranked number 1 in areas of concern in urban areas in the District.

1990 “Overall economic Development Plan (Initial Document), Fairfield County Ohio.” Fairfield County Board of Commissioners and Fairfield County Economic Development Committee. Prepared by Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission.

Topography and Soils- Page III-4 “**Major concerns in 1989 were**-need for stormwater management, erosion control, water quality-surface and ground, **the inefficient use of land being converted from agricultural to urban uses, and sludge disposal.**”

Assumptions Regarding Economic Trends- Page V-1 “**Agriculture is an important facet of the local economy.** There may be a shift toward serving local and specialty markets.”

Table 26. Project Categories-**Priority list**- Page V-6 “**Economic Development Activities Agricultural research and Agribusiness development projects.**” (Ranked 2 of 7)

1997 “Ohio Farmland Preservation Task Force Findings and Recommendations”. Report to George V. Voinovich, Governor.

Page 10-12, “ A 1997 American Farmland Trust publication entitled, “Farming on the Edge: Farmland in the Path of Development, used US Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Inventory data to identify **counties in Ohio with areas of higher than the state’s average for prime and unique farmland and land development. Identified areas include** all or most of the following counties: Allen, Auglaize, Butler, Clark, Crawford, Delaware, **Fairfield**, Greene, Henry, Marion, Medina, Miami, Morrow, Ottawa, Preble, Sandusky, Shelby, Union, Warren, Wayne and Wood.”

1999 Fairfield County Farmland Taskforce created by the Fairfield County Commissioners



The Fairfield County Commissioners and Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District accept the updated USDA-NRCS soil survey that is the basis of our 2000 Farmland Preservation Plan, 2002 and 2018 Land Use Plans.

2000 "Fairfield County Farmland Preservation Plan 2000" By the team of Burns, Bertsch, & Harris, Inc. & Bennett and Williams Environmental Consultants, Inc., funded by the Department of Development CDBG and the Fairfield County Commissioners, Fairfield County Engineer, and the Fairfield County Sanitary Engineer with overall coordination through the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission.

18 meetings 42 members

Goals, Objectives and Action Points Page 7 Proposed Farmland Preservation Goals-

-Protection of agricultural resources is critical to the sustainability of the agricultural economy of Fairfield County. Highly productive farmlands at risk should be protected from indiscriminate development patterns.

-Protect farm operations from being curtailed or restricted and encourage the development of "value added" agricultural products.

-Encourage ongoing development of the of the agricultural economy.

-Preserve sensitive environmental areas and the rural landscape.

-Redirect new development into an established community center or newly defined activity centers where infrastructure exists.

-Recognize and maintain only those services that are essential and appropriate in rural areas.

-Concentrate urban development in existing community centers or designated activity centers where central water and sewer utilities and adequate transportation systems exist or are programmed for installation. Scattered development patterns are very costly to maintain and usually lead to higher taxes or diminished services.

Farmland Preservation Objectives and Recommended Action Points Pages 8-10

Lands prioritized for agricultural and critical resource were processed though the Land Evaluation Site (LESA) Assessment process.

Cost of Community Services (Liberty and Hocking Townships) Page 53

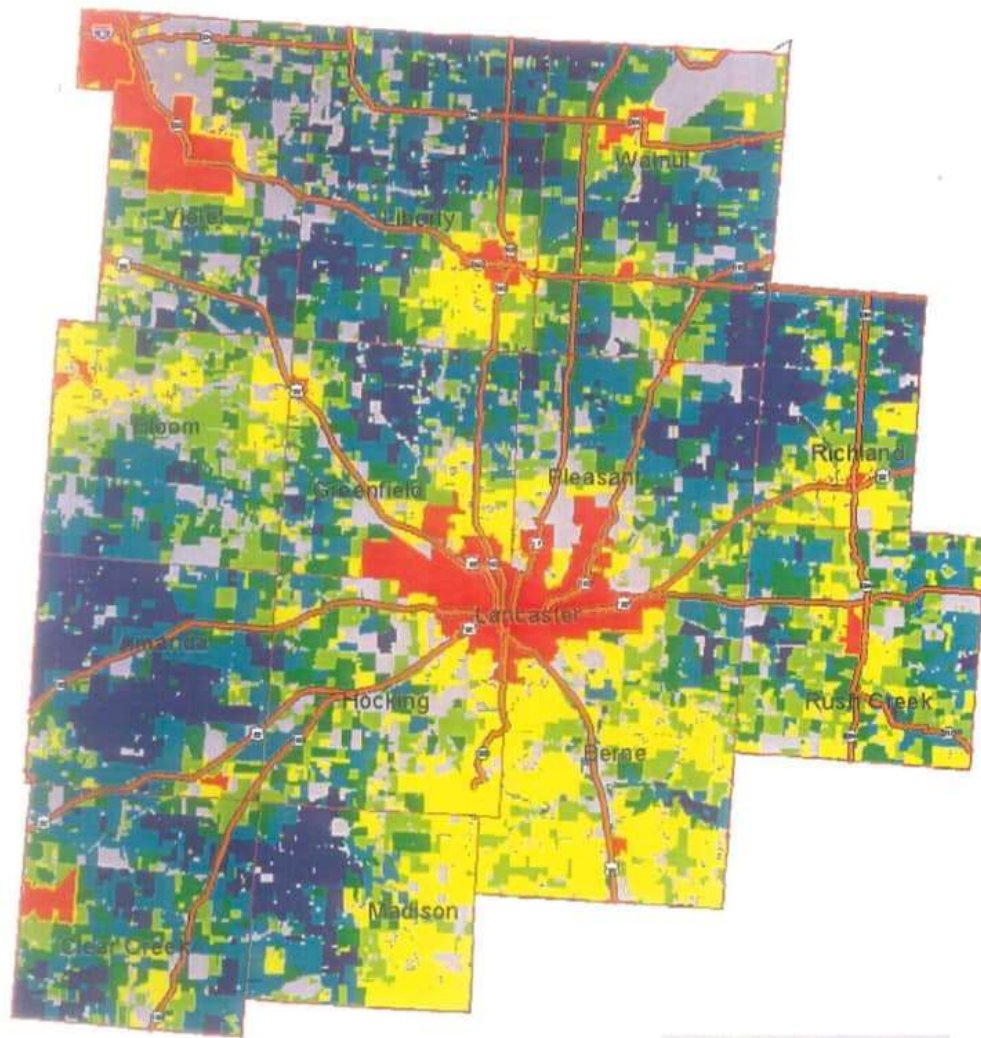
Hocking Twp	COCS Ratio Residential 1.10	Comm/Ind 0.27	Farmland 0.17
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Liberty Twp	COCS Ratio Residential 1.15	Comm/Ind 0.51	Farmland 0.05
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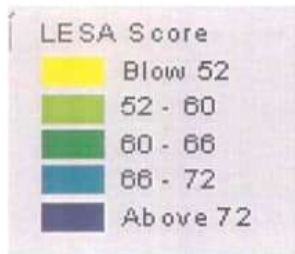
Tools Recommended Page 55-64

These studies contributed nationally to the American Farmland Trust "Cost of Community Services Studies."





Fairfield County Farmland Preservation Plan 2000
 Submitted by: The Team of Burns, Bertsch, &
 Harris, Inc. & Bennett and Williams
 Environmental Consultants, Inc.



Darker tones represent land prioritized for agricultural preservation by the LESA process that generally includes a high percentage of prime and unique soils, size of parcels and distance to sewer an water.

2002 "Fairfield County Development Strategy and Land Use Plan" Evolution of the LESA model from 2000. The plan was prepared in response to a directive from the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission funded by the Fairfield County Commissioners.

The Plan has two objectives; first, to provide, for the first time, an overall planning and policy ethic for Fairfield County identifying goals, policies, and objectives for the future of the County. In this way, the Plan provides a vision of what the County could be and, as such, serves as a benchmark for guiding planning related decisions and as a point of reference for more detailed plan implementation action by responsible officials and agencies.

Second, the Plan provides a broad framework for local municipalities and townships when evaluating and coordinating local plans, policies, and goals. The Plan serves as the focal point for discussion among those interested in the future of the County. The Plan should be subject to continuous examination and testing, for if the Plan is to achieve its defined Goals and Objectives, it will require local action and citizen support. It is intended that existing local plans and policies will be modified, where appropriate, reflecting the County's development ethic.

Summary of land uses includes:

Fairfield County Future Land Use Plan Summary

Future Land Use Categories	Total	
	Acres	Percent
Agricultural Conservation Easement Protection Area	480.31	0.15%
Agricultural Preservation	99997.51	30.74%
Rural Residential	58984.37	18.13%
Suburban Residential	21895.05	6.73%
Mixed Use Residential	1834.37	0.56%
Neighborhood Commercial	193.72	0.06%
Highway Commercial	681.06	0.21%
Office	741.80	0.23%
Light Industrial	774.28	0.24%
Industrial	325.43	0.10%
Public Facility	1995.00	0.61%
Open Space	4216.01	1.30%
Critical Resource	115673.41	35.55%
Other	1502.44	0.46%
Incorporated	16057.02	4.94%
Total	325351.78	100.00%

2003 The Fairfield County Commissioners support and sign their first agricultural easement with the Ohio Department for Agriculture under the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program. Fairfield SWCD supported the process and pledged to monitor the easements on the Commissioner's behalf. **This was one of four in the State of Ohio. Efforts continue annually by Commissioner resolution in conjunction with the current Comprehensive Land Use Plan .**



The Miller Farm in Liberty, Pleasant and Walnut Township's is the first Agricultural Easement co-held by the Board of Fairfield County Commissioners and the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

This was one of the first four easements under the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program in the State of Ohio. The USDA-NRCS is also a coholder.

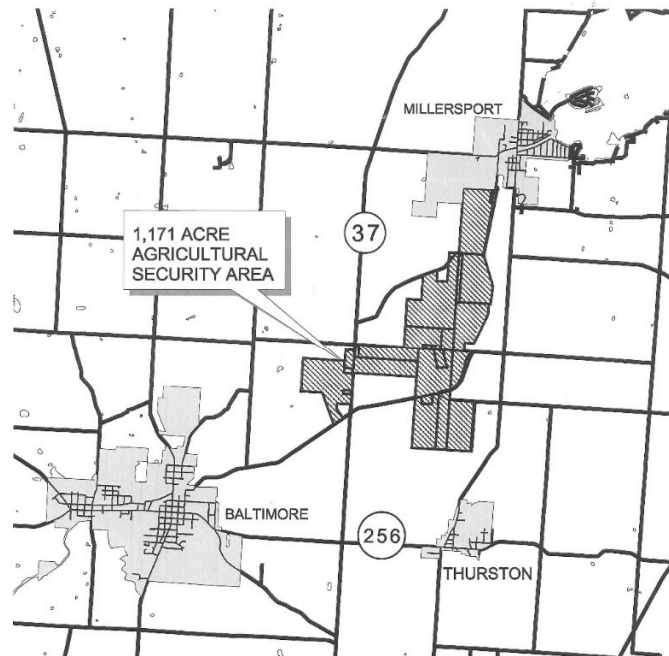
2005 Fairfield Land Preservation Association (Private Land Trust) achieved Federal 501(c)3 exemption. The FLPA was created as a recommendation of the “Fairfield County Farmland Preservation Plan 2000” with support from the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission and ongoing support from the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District under a Memorandum of Understanding.



The Dixon Family of Walnut Township closed the first conservation easement with the Fairfield Land Preservation Association (Land Trust) with support from the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission and the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District.

2008 Establishment of the Walnut Township Agricultural Security Area (ASA) -The Fairfield County Commissioner's and Walnut Township Trustees approved the ASA through public hearings and subsequent renewal in the same manner in 2017. *Currently set to expire in 2027.* The use of ASAs was as a recommendation of the "Fairfield County Farmland Preservation Plan 2000" led by the Fairfield County Farm Bureau with support from the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District.

ASA: The County and Township pass a resolution committing not to initiate, approve, or finance any development for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes, including construction of new roads and water and sewer lines within the ASA for 10 years. Likewise, landowners commit to exclusively engage in agricultural activities and development. Included with this, landowners can request approval to operate any business that does not impair their ability to engage in agriculture, and does not cause the land to become ineligible for valuation and assessment for real property tax purposes in accordance with its Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV). The commissioners and trustees must approve the request by resolution. Landowners are also permitted to construct or establish one single-family residence, for relatives only, per each 40 acres of the owner's land within the ASA.



FAIRFIELD COUNTY'S FIRST
AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREA

Walnut Township 1,171.75 acre Agricultural Security Area.
This ASA includes five agricultural/conservation easements as of 2023.

2009 Transfer of Development Rights Legislation-In 2009-2010 House Bill 471 was supported by a diverse cross-section to enable the Transfer of Development Rights to allow local communities to increase housing density and conserve open space or working lands. Fairfield County’s State Representative Stebelton Co-Sponsored the bill. The Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District provided Committee testimony. **The bill stalled due to the decline in building activity but the need for TDR still exists as a tool to balance growth.**

2011 “Fairfield Growing-An Agricultural Economic Development Plan,” by The Ohio State University, for Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission, the Fairfield County Economic Development Department, the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District, the Lancaster -Fairfield Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Lancaster.

Farmland Preservation Page 6 **“Fairfield County has experienced a decrease in total farmland acreage of nearly 20% in the last 20 years. The county has already begun efforts to stem this tide. By the end of 2011, there will be 2,800 acres of county farmland permanently preserved. This has been made possible through programs enacted to preserve farmland.”** There have been direct donations to the Fairfield Land Preservation Association and easements purchased through the Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). There are also non-permanent programs for Fairfield County called Agricultural Districts and Agricultural Security Areas (ASA). **“Building upon these existing efforts and seeking new methods to preserve and enhance agricultural land is vital to the county’s economy as well as to its heritage.”**

2018 “Fairfield County Comprehensive Land Use Plan” by Reveille Planning + GIS + Economic Development for the Fairfield County Regional Planning Commission.

Mission: To capitalize on growth opportunities in our urbanized areas while maintaining the natural resources required for our county’s long-term sustainability.

Farmland Preservation ranked in the top 6 of Fairfield County Priorities in the next 10 years.

Priority	Survey Rating
K-12 School Quality	4.33/5
Protection of Natural Resources	4.01/5
Additional Resources to Promote Community/Economic Development	3.88/5
Small Business Development	3.83/5
Elimination of Neighborhood & Property Blight	3.81/5
Farmland Preservation	3.79/5

Lands prioritized for protection remain prioritized via the LESA model of 2000.

Increased discussion on priority areas round old landfills, contaminated sites, areas downstream of high hazard dams, human waste/biosolids application sites and aquifer protection.

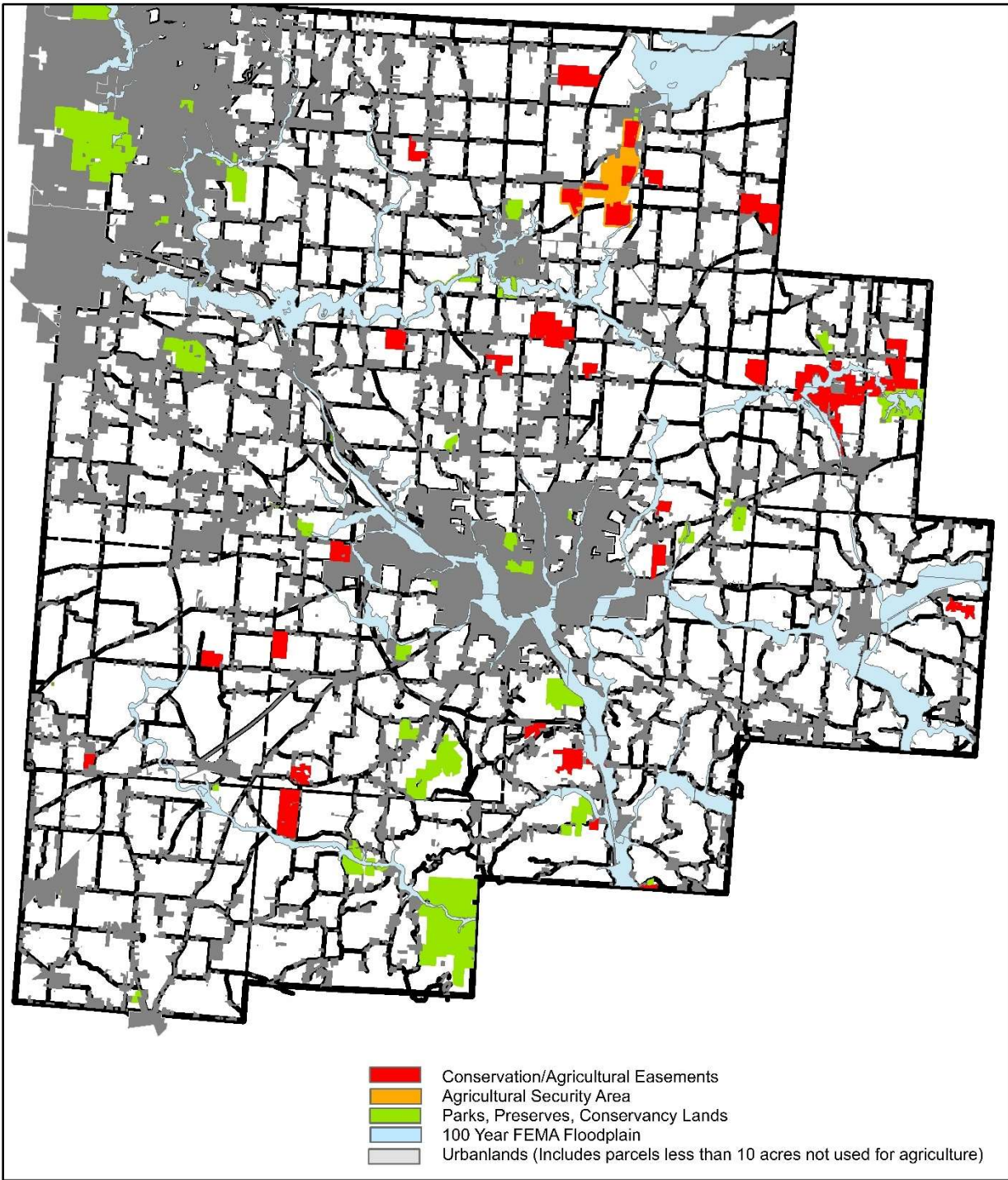
2022 “Fairfield Growing-An Agricultural Economic Development Plan (Update),” by Brian Williams, Local Nexus, LLC., For the Fairfield County Commissioners.

Recommendations- Farm Viability-Page 21 **“Seek additional funding for agricultural easement purchase programs. This might include seeking state policy changes – such as ensuring that, when CAUV land is taken out of production for development, the recouped taxes can be dedicated to future easement purchases. Similarly, any local taxes collected on solar farms should be used to mitigate the loss of farmland.** Seek more public funding for farmland preservation. With the likely growth of solar farms, holders of leases are expected to pay CAUV recoupment fees in the form of Payment in Lieu of Taxes for the land taken out of production. County Commissioners should dedicate county portions to farmland preservation.”

As of 2023 **The Board of Fairfield County Commissioners co-holds 32 agricultural easements totaling around 4,133 acres** with the Ohio Department of Agriculture and/or the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service in accordance the 2002/2018 Land Use Plan.

The Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District provides the required annual monitoring and application oversight process for the Commissioners.

Among three land trusts operating in the County and the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service independently, there are an additional 977 acre of agricultural lands are under conservation easements. **These together represent around 5% of the 2002 goal for agricultural preservation in the County.**



0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles



Fairfield County, Ohio
2023

Cultural resource protection highlights found on preserved farms in Fairfield County, Ohio



Intact Canal-Greenfield Township



Intact connection to the Zane's Trace corridor-Pleasant Township



National Register of Historic Places-Winegardner Village-Richland Township



Ben Gelber with WCMH 4 interviews Canal Road neighbors Mike Thomas, Roger Wolfe and Brad Berry working on a community goal for farmland preservation in Walnut Township. 2011