

**Agricultural Easement Program**  
**Application Selection Committee Guidelines**

The intent of the selection criteria guidelines and method of ranking applicants as outlined in Selection Criteria Categories defined herein is to ensure that: 1) compelling agricultural properties are selected and can provide water quality protection within the New York City Watershed, 2) WAC and DEP staff resources are effectively and efficiently administered to protect the maximum number of compelling properties, 3) land owners are treated fairly and equitably.

The Following Guidelines will be used to consider and select applicants for the Agricultural Easement Program:

**1) Property Criteria/Eligibility:**

**Whole Farm Plans**

- Landowners will be: 1) required to have a Whole Farm Plan (Whole Farm Summary / WFP2) that has been approved by the Agricultural Committee and 2) be farming in accordance with a Whole Farm Plan, and 3) not have a suspended Whole Farm Plan, in order to have their application reviewed by staff and considered for selection by the easement committee

**2) Documents Required from Landowner in order to be reviewed by staff  
(Attached to application):**

<b><u>Type of Landowner</u></b>	<b><u>Required Documents</u></b>
<b>1) Owner/ Operators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Whole Farm Plan (Summary /WFP2 with Owner's name and signature)</li></ul>
<b>2) Owner with Lease (lessor)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Whole Farm Plan (Summary /WFP2) with lessor's  (land owner's ) name and lessee's (WFP operator's) name and lessor and lessee's signatures</li></ul>
<b>3) Owner (lessor)/Non Operator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Whole Farm Plan (Summary /WFP2) in</li></ul>

leasee's (operator's name)  
with lessor's (owner's)  
and lessee's (operator's)  
signatures.

**4 Additional WAC Documents (Attached to application by staff  
after submission by landowner):**

- 1) Map with layers that include: Water Resources layer, tax parcel outline of property, location of the property in relation to other WAC easements, DEP easements and fee land, DEP priority areas

**2) Project Ranking: Selection Criteria Methodology**

In order to provide an unbiased method of selecting properties for the Easement Program WAC will develop a ranking system as prescribed in attachment "A" "Selection Criteria Worksheet." The ranking system, based on a series of points per category, will enable Easement Staff to score and Easement Committee to prioritize potential applicant properties based on their agricultural and water quality characteristics. Project ranking criteria has been carefully identified based upon successful agricultural easement programs in combination with water quality considerations.

The contents of Attachment "A" may be amended by the Easement Committee periodically to reflect changes in agricultural practices, land ownership, economics, or water quality in the region.

**•Water Resources**

Emphasis will be given to properties which contain the following hydrologic features:

- Streams, Lakes, & Ponds buffered by 300ft
- Reservoirs buffered by 1000ft
- NWI wetlands
- NYSDEC wetlands
- FEMA 100 yr floodplain boundary

These surface water features and buffer distances track the Natural Features Criteria as per MOA Paragraph 63(b).

**•Priority Areas in Watershed**

New York City has established priority areas within the watershed to designate those areas most critical to the long-term water quality of its reservoirs. The permanent protection of farmland with Agricultural Easements within these priority areas will aid in the long-term water quality of the reservoirs. Emphasis will be placed on farms located within the top priority areas within the watershed.

- **Conservation Corridors**

Adjacent farm land allows for the future expansion of agricultural operations and supports the future viability of farming

- **Acreage**

In an effort to and protect the maximum natural resources within the watershed, emphasis will be given to farms greater than 300 acres.

### **3) Selection Committee and Selection Process**

- The application selection working group shall consist of 3 staff members, one from DEP and two from WAC, appointed by the Easement Committee through a motion. Members will be appointed as needed to review applicants as determined by the Easement Committee and Program Manager. Selection committee members will utilize the Selection Criteria Worksheet (Attachment "A") to evaluate each property. Members will score each category based on points available for each category.
- Applicants will not be considered qualified for scoring by members of the selection group unless they have all required documents attached to the application ( see section 2 "Required Easement Documents").
- Scores for individual properties will be determined by averaging the three Selection Criteria worksheets from working group's member.
- Once the average score is calculated for each property, the properties will be ranked from highest to lowest score . All ranked properties will be reviewed by the Easement Committee. Once the ranked list of properties is accepted by the Easement Committee, landowners will be contacted by Easement Staff in the order they are ranked to determine interest in proceeding with a conservation easement.
- Landowners who do not wish to proceed with a conservation easement will be sent a letter confirming their desire not to proceed.

### **4) Applicant Properties That Don't Have a Complete WFP2**

Only properties that have the required documentation defined in Section 2 "Required Documentation" will be considered eligible for review by easement program staff.

- Applicants who have incomplete Whole Farm Plans based on required documentation established in Section 2 ,shall be notified via letter that their application requires further action by the Agricultural Program before they can become eligible to apply to the Easement Program.
- Applicant's whose Whole Farm Plans require administrative action by the Agricultural Program will be scored by the selection group. Scores will be ranked highest to lowest and then given to the Agricultural Program Staff. Agricultural Staff will work to develop complete Whole Farm Plans for applicants based upon the rank.
- Once the WFP for the property has been completed by Agricultural Program Staff, the property will be presented to the Easement Committee for selection. If selected , the property will then be inserted into the existing list of previously ranked applicants based upon its score.

## **5) New Applicants**

Review, scoring and selection of new applicants received after selection is made from the existing groups of applicants will be established via Easement Committee motion based upon production needs and capacity of the Easement Program as identified by the Easement Program Manager.

## Attachment "A"

### Selection Criteria Worksheet

#### **I. Water Resources: 30 Possible Points**

Emphasis will be given to properties which contain the greatest percent of hydrologic activity based upon the following categories:

- Streams, Lakes, & Ponds buffered by 300ft
- Reservoirs buffered by 1000ft
- NWI wetlands
- NYSDEC wetlands
- FEMA 100 yr floodplain boundary

#### Scoring:

<u>Points</u>	<u>Criteria (Acres with Water)</u>
30	> or = to 27 acres
15	15 – 26.99 acres
5	< 15 acres

#### **II. Priority Areas in Watershed**

New York City has established priority areas within the watershed to designate those areas most critical to the long-term water quality of its reservoirs. The permanent protection of farmland with Whole Farm Easements within these priority areas will aid in the long-term water quality of the reservoirs. Emphasis will be placed on farms located within the top priority areas within the watershed.

#### **NYC DEP Priority Areas: 10 Possible points**

<u>Points</u>	<u>Criteria</u>
10	1. Within a Priority I or II area

### III. Conservation Corridors: 20 Possible Points

Adjacent farm land allows for the future expansion of agricultural operations and supports the future viability of farming

Conservation Corridors and Prospects for Continued Agricultural Use: May receive points both categories.

<u>Points</u>	<u>Criteria</u>
15	Adjacent to WAC protected farm
5	Adjacent to DEP fee or easement

### IV Acreage: 40 possible points

In an effort to protect the maximum natural resources within the watershed, emphasis will be given to farms greater than 300 acres.

#### Acreage to be protected by Applicant under a Conservation Easement:

<u>Points</u>	<u>Criteria</u>
40	> 300
35	200 – 299
25	100-199
15	50 -99
5	10 - 49

**Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_ / 100

