

Agriculture in Developed Communities

Chester County Planning Commission
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Chester County's strong agricultural industry is usually associated with the county's rural and farming communities, but food production can also thrive in developed areas, as either a business, as an accessory use to residential properties, or as a related use, like a farmers' market. With more public interest in local food, many developed municipalities are fielding more requests for agricultural uses and businesses.

As a starting place, municipal ordinances should define agriculture. A basic definition of agriculture could be:

An enterprise that is actively engaged in the commercial production and preparation for market of crops, livestock and livestock products and in the production, harvesting and preparation for market or use of agricultural, agronomic, horticultural, silvicultural and aquacultural crops and commodities.

There are four primary ways that a developed municipality might want to allow agriculture:

- 1 Allow Agriculture as a Permitted Use in Low Density Residential, Rural, and Agricultural Areas
- 2 Allow Controlled-Environment Agriculture in Industrial and Commercial Areas
- 3 Regulate Agricultural-Related Accessory Uses in Residential Zones
- 4 Facilitate Food and Agriculturally-Supportive Uses



1 Allow agriculture as a permitted use in low density residential, rural, and agricultural areas

Even though most of a community may be developed, there may be larger properties or areas that are appropriate for traditional crop or livestock farms. These properties will most likely be in low-density residential and agricultural zoning districts but might also be in other zoning districts that could allow agriculture as a by-right use. In addition, it is important to note that many small properties can have thriving farms, such as those growing vegetables, fruits, and flowers, as well as farms using a Community Supported Agriculture model.

To maintain their economic viability, many farms have secondary uses that are critical to their ongoing operations, and these secondary uses should be allowed, with appropriate restrictions to limit their potential impact on nearby residences.

For more information

Planning eTool: Secondary Farm Business ►

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Allow controlled-environment agriculture in industrial and commercial areas

A new trend in agriculture is controlled environment indoor agriculture, which uses technology to grow food in intense, indoor settings. These facilities mimic industrial and commercial properties and should be allowed by-right in the same locations as these uses, with “Controlled-Environment Agriculture” added to the list of by-right uses in the zoning district.

For more information

Planning eTool: Controlled-Environment Agriculture ▶

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Facilitate food and agriculturally-supportive uses

Many uses, from community gardens to farmers’ markets to wine tasting rooms, help people grow food or sell their agricultural products. Municipalities should find appropriate locations for these types of uses, while potentially helping with infrastructure, zoning, and permit issues.

For more information

Planning eTool: Community Gardens ▶

Planning eTool: Farmers’ Markets ▶

Planning eTool: Wineries ▶

3



Regulate agricultural-related accessory uses in residential zones

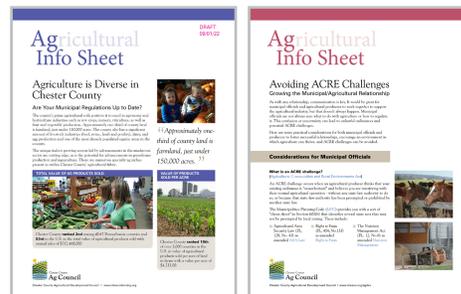
Nowadays, many homeowners want to grow their own food, but this can create nuisances for neighbors if not properly regulated, particularly uses like backyard chickens or beekeeping. Municipalities may want to regulate these uses in a manner that allows the use but limits the impact on neighbors.

For more information

Planning eTool: Backyard Chickens ▶

Suburban Homestead, A Primer on Best Practices and Management. This guide covers beekeeping, chickens, composting, and gardening. Montgomery County Planning Commission ▶

Urban Agriculture, a Guide for Municipalities, University of Pittsburgh ▶



Municipal Compliance with the Agriculture, Communities, and Rural Environment Act (ACRE)

In whatever way municipalities choose to regulate and support agriculture, they must do so in accordance with the commonwealth’s ACRE law, which requires municipalities to allow normal agricultural operations.

For more information

Agricultural Info Sheet, Are Your Regulations Up to Date?, Chester County Ag Council ▶

Agricultural Info Sheet, Avoiding ACRE Challenges, Chester County Ag Council ▶