



About the Clean and Green Act and How Donna Asure Screwed Farmers and Open-Space Landowners

By J.J. Publius

One of the best and most effective programs in Pennsylvania for preserving farmland and open-space is "Act 319", the *Clean and Green Act*. It encourages farmers and landowners to hold on to their farmland, woodland, and open-space properties. To do this, a preferential assessment for property tax purposes is given to land enrolled in the Clean and Green program.

Thus, rather than assess farmland, woodland, and open-space land in the Clean and Green program at the inflated land values in high-development areas such as Monroe County, Clean and Green land is assessed at much lower values. These lower values are based on the value of land used for agricultural and open-space purposes rather than for development purposes.

"(a) . . . The act provides for land devoted to agricultural use, agricultural reserve use or forest reserve use to be assessed at the value it has for that use . . . The intent of the act is to encourage the keeping of land in one of these uses." (7 Pa. Code §137.b1)

If it were not for the Clean and Green Act, many farmers would be forced or enticed to sell their lands to developers because of the high taxes on their acreage. That's because without the preferential assessment, the

return on investment in their property if not preferentially assessed goes negative -- very negative. Likewise for owners of open-space and woodland.

Until the 2006 assessment-year, the farmstead land in Monroe County was assessed at the Clean and Green program preferential-value. In 2005, Donna Asure voted to take the farmstead land in the agriculture reserve and forest reserve categories out of the preferential-value assessment and assess that farmstead land at full-development land value.

Farmstead land is the part of a property enrolled in the Clean and Green program upon which the house and farm buildings are situated -- usually about an acre.

The **slick and dirty trick Dona Asure pulled off** by taking farmstead land out of the Clean and Green assessment is to **increase the Monroe County property taxes paid by the owners of these agriculture reserve and forest reserve farmstead properties** without hiking the County millage rate.

There are three ways property taxes can be hiked:

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- (1) by increasing the millage levied against a property,
- (2) by increasing the appraised value of a property, or
- (3) by increasing the assessment ratio.

For all intents and purposes, increasing any one of these three values is a property tax hike.

The total millage for Township, School, Library, and County taxes for a property in Chestnuthill Township is 143.65 mills altogether. The property tax for a \$100,000 property in Chestnuthill Township, is \$3,591.25. (\$25,000 assessed value x 143.65 mills)

[Details and explanation at WWW.WestEndVoice.com]

Donna Asure voted to take the farmstead land in the agriculture reserve and forest reserve categories out of the preferential-value assessment and assess that farmstead land at full-development land value. Thus, Asure increased the assessment on some 1,300 Monroe County properties in the Clean and Green Program.

Let's guess an average market value for an acre of land in Monroe County to be about \$15,000. That means that taking the farmstead acre out of the preferential assessment increases the Monroe County property tax about \$54.38 per farmstead. That comes to about \$71,000 (\$70,687) in additional property tax revenue for Monroe County (County millage is 14.5 mills).

However, consider the total 143.65 mills when you add the Monroe County, PVSD, Chestnuthill Township, and Library tax levies together. Then, the increase in

total property taxes for that farmstead acre in the Chestnuthill Township example comes to \$542 altogether. That amounts to a 15% property tax hike over the \$3,591.25 computed above.

Using Chestnuthill Township as a representative municipality, **Donna Asure screwed 1300 Clean and Green property owners out of \$704,600** just to get an extra \$71,000 for her to add to her Monroe County spending spree. That's not fair. That's not right!

A 15% hike in property taxes easily could force some farmers and open-space landowners to sell or subdivide their farms and open-space land. That's because they can no longer afford to pay the higher property taxes. Or because the higher property taxes no longer justify preserving the farmland or open-space land. **Taking the farmstead properties out of the Clean and Green program was just plain careless and stupid!**

Donna Asure is doing enough damage with her fiscal irresponsibility and tax hiking ways in Monroe County. How much more damage would she do in Harrisburg?

Send Donna Asure a message that you do not like what she is doing. Let Donna Asure know that you do not like her hiking taxes, hurting farmers, hurting open-space preservation, and screwing up Monroe County. And let Donna Asure know that you do not like her misrepresenting her tax-hiking activities. Vote against Donna Asure on November 7, 2006.

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