Balance: Lancaster County’s Tragedy

by

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ABSTRACT

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania residents are proud of their agricultural heritage. They do not want to see their farmland disappear. But the County continues to be developed into residential subdivisions. This thesis explores the inconsistency in the perspectives and actions of residents regarding farmland preservation and development.

Contrary to what you might expect, those in the County who want to preserve farmland and those who are developing the land are often the same people. Individuals talk about the importance of saving farmland, even though they just bought a home that was built on what was an active farm. Farmers, who have a deep connection with the County’s land and know its importance, choose to develop their farms.

It’s not a complete mystery as to why this is happening, but it is a wonder how these individuals deal with their personal inconsistencies. How do such individuals confront the inconsistencies that they face? Furthermore, how do they justify their actions regarding the development of farmland? How do these groups of people as individuals see themselves in relation to the conflict between farmland preservation and development? Are they simply ambivalent?

In an attempt to find out, I interviewed Lancaster County residents in two locations in the County where a farm had been developed into their single family homes. The farmer owners/developers were interviewed as well.

The interviewees respond in numerous ways, but they all expressed a desire for balance. They support farmland preservation efforts, but they also believe that growth is necessary. This “balance” is how they expressed their ambivalence towards the subject.

The interviews showed specific ways that information can enlighten the balance between development and farmland preservation. The County government is encouraged to take on the provision of information as a tool of intervention in this area. An informed public can then make better choices as to what the “balance” will look like.

Local governments are responsible for implementing this balance by using zoning to control and direct development away from the County’s agricultural land.

Coordinated action in the County is required to avoid the County’s farming character tragically disappearing.

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“That which is common to the greatest numbers has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks carefully of his own, hardly at all of the common interest, and only when he is himself concerned as an individual.”
-Aristotle

“On a wider view, however, the land is seen as a priceless asset which it is man’s task and happiness “to dress and to keep.” We can say that man’s management of the land must be primarily oriented towards three goals—health, beauty, and permanence.”
–E.F. Schumacher.
Preface

My interest in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania is a personal one: I was born and raised there. My family, on both sides, has called Lancaster County home for many generations, and I believe this fact enabled me to do this research. My heritage was an entrance pass of sorts. To the people I talked to, especially the ones from Lancaster County, my being one of them was crucial to their reception of me.

As a child and then a teenager in the County, the rural, working agricultural landscape was home, and it was commonplace. Even though most of the ways of the Amish and Old Order Mennonites were a mystery to me, their presence was a normal, daily fact. When I saw horses pulling plows, I didn’t think, “Why don’t they just use a tractor.” I was schooled in the ways of driving in Lancaster County...at any turn in the road, there could be a horse and buggy trotting along at its own slowed down pace.

As a teen, I resented my rural surroundings to some degree. Being young and wanting to experience the world, being in the “middle of nowhere” was frustrating at times. Contrary to legend, cow tipping is not really a rural pastime (at least for me it wasn’t).

More than I resented the rural essence of my homeland, I took it for granted. I knew that the County is a special place because of the plain sects, but I didn’t know just how special it is and that there are so many reasons why. I knew there is a lot of farming, but I didn’t know that Lancaster County boasts of the most fertile non-irrigated soils in the world. I ate the produce from the stand down the road but didn’t realize that people in other locations cannot enjoy such a pleasure. I experienced a direct connection with the land that grows our food. I looked at the Amish farms and thought they were unique, but I didn’t realize that they are a living example of sustainable land stewardship that is essential to our nutrition and health as people.

My yearning for denser, more vibrant places led me to the Boston area. I’ve been living in Massachusetts for close to a decade now. My family still lives in Lancaster County, and I make the trip south whenever I can. The time and distance (and possibly the fact that I am now a more educated individual) has changed my feelings toward the agricultural landscape that I ultimately consider home. My eyes could finally see what was right in front of me for so long. The patchwork fields have become visually stimulating; Silos and sunsets—works of art on the rural canvas; the Amish and Mennonites, still a mystery, but a mystery that illustrates the simplicity that we all idealize and crave.

Each time I returned to Lancaster County, I noticed changes to the scenery: scattered new residential developments, farms for sale, and new cheaply built strip malls lining the roads. Little changes that would go almost unnoticed to those who pass it everyday, stick out like Las Vegas style neon signs. I remember several instances when my mom and I were driving in her car and I literally yelled, “What is that!” in horror. I just couldn’t make sense of some of the world’s best soil being turned into sprawling subdivisions.

At first, I pointed a finger at the hypocritical actions of the residents of Lancaster County. It was easy to point out the inconsistencies that these people live in: talking about the importance of farming but at the same time doing things that destroy it. And then it hit home.

About two years ago, my grandparents, who both grew up on Lancaster County farms, moved into a new home that had been built on what was active farmland. These are people
who care very much about Lancaster County’s agriculture, who had made a decision that seems to lead to the demise of the thing they care about. This action and my curiosity about the inner workings of individuals provided inspiration for this research. Because I care deeply about Lancaster County, I needed some honest answers from individuals who have dealt with these personal inconsistencies, however complicated those answers may be.
Introduction

Life’s not so cut and dry. All of us are faced with conflicting desires. We support causes. We sign petitions that support the greater societal good. And then we find ourselves doing things that go against those same causes. For example, saying that you don’t support big corporations, and then stopping at Starbucks for a latte.

Personally, I have for many reasons been avoiding Wal-mart for many years. But during my month and a half stay in rural Pennsylvania, I found myself driving to its oversized parking lot and walking into its doors. Not because I wanted to, but because it was the only place I knew to go for what I needed. My hypocrisy made me fell uneasy. But reality is complicated.

The setting of the particular inconsistency that I will discuss in the following chapters is Lancaster County Pennsylvania. Agriculture has been and continues to define this county, which has some of the most fertile soil in the world. Even so, the rich farmland is being developed into single family homes by people who themselves would admit the importance of agriculture in the County.

It is easy to point out the hypocrisy in these actions. But as I walked into Wal-mart on day in January, I realized that these people are just like everyone else. They want the best for their families. They aren’t necessarily out to destroy the soil or Lancaster County’s heritage. They are faced with complicated desires that don’t always coincide.

But how do they deal with the inconsistency in their actions and desires?

I stopped pointing my finger, and set out to have a better understanding of what is happening in Lancaster County. When I talked to some of the residents, my suspicions were confirmed. They spoke honestly about the conflicting desires that they hold and the inconsistent actions that come from them.

Their ambivalent answer was the need for “balance”.

A balance of farmland preservation and development assumes that each side can be accurately valued in order to create a balance that is socially agreeable. However, the market cannot adequately reflect the full value of Lancaster County’s agricultural land. Considering this fact, an acceptable balance will not happen on its own.

The ambivalence residents expressed in our conversations not only confirmed my suspicion, but showed how we can shed light on the issue and how we can work toward an informed balance; if a balance is what we deem appropriate.
1  The Garden Spot

Location
For those of you who are not familiar with Lancaster County, it sits in the southeastern corner of Pennsylvania, between Harrisburg and Philadelphia. Major highways pass through the northern part of the County, providing easy access to these cities. New York City, Baltimore, and Washington DC are all within a few hours drive.

The County, formed in 1729, is currently home to approximately 470,000 people spread across 949 square miles (US Census, 2000). Lancaster, the County seat, is known as the “oldest inland city” and boasts a population of about 55,000 people (US Census, 2000).

The “Garden Spot”
When the first settlers, Swiss German Mennonites, arrived in the early eighteenth century, they knew they had stumbled upon a treasure which appeared to have been made especially for them (Walbert, 2002).

By the time the English and Germans arrived in Pennsylvania two centuries later, most of the original human inhabitants had died of European diseases such as smallpox, and the relatively unoccupied land appeared as God’s gift to its new inhabitants. Rivers teemed with fish; deer ran freely in the woods; giant hardwoods—of the kind German farmers knew to mark good soil—towered over the landscape (Walbert, 2002, 15).
The settlers were correct in their assessment of the land: The soils were uniquely fertile; the climate temperate; water was in ample supply; and the hills were gently sloped. It was perfectly suited for farming. They quickly cleared the land for farming. In fact, by as early as the 1760s, up to sixty percent of Lancaster County’s old-growth forest had been cleared for agriculture and industry (LCPC, Heritage, 2006).

Certainly the vision of a New World garden for men to till and keep without toil was a tempting one, and the associations of its natural bounty with Eden colored the early labeling of Lancaster County as a Garden Spot (Walbert, 2002, 15).

These farmers brought with them a proud legacy of farming to their new land, and their expertise with the land did not go unnoticed. The County quickly earned a reputation: “As early as 1779, residents of the mid-Atlantic referred to Lancaster County as the ‘Garden of Pennsylvania,’ and by 1800, it was being called the ‘Garden Spot of America’” (Walbert, 2002, 19).

Agriculture’s Significance
Agriculture continues to define Lancaster County, both in the minds of people all over the world and also as the dominant use of land in the County. It is the most extensive land use, with 5,293 farms covering approximately 411,848 acres, which is about 69% of the land cover in the County (Blue Ribbon Commission, 2006).

All of these acres of farmland help to supply food for all of us to eat. This is the obvious reason that the County’s agricultural land is important: for the production of food. I can go to my supermarket in Massachusetts and buy Turkey Hill brand products, which were proudly “imported from Lancaster County.” But the County’s farmers feed the nation more
than ice cream and iced tea. According to the Blue Ribbon Commission (2006), each year, Lancaster County farmers feed:

- 11.9 million people..................................................................eggs
- 10.2 million people.........................................................milk
- 3.3 million people.........................................................chicken
- 4.6 million people.........................................................pork
- 727,000 people.........................................................beef

But the importance of the County’s agriculture is not just the number of acres in production or even the amount of food it produces. The more outstanding thing is the combination of the two: the productivity of the land.

The Soil
Lancaster County’s soil is known as some of the most fertile non-irrigated soil in the world, with only a few other locations rivaling it. This designation isn’t just a product of Lancaster County pride, it’s scientific. Over half of the County’s soil is classified as prime farmland of national importance by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service; and seventy-five percent is classified as prime farmland or soils of statewide importance (LCPC, Growth Management, 2006).

Just how spectacular the land is can be seen directly in how productive Lancaster County farms are. Even though the County’s farms are smaller on average, their sales far outstrip most of the country’s agriculture land. The County’s farms generate an average of $1,938 in sales per acre, which far outstrips the national average of $214 (Blue Ribbon Commission, 2006).

In 2002, average sales per farm in Pennsylvania were $73,263. Nationally the average was $94,245. Lancaster County’s average sales were $150,000—with an average farm size of 78 acres compared to Pennsylvania’s average of 133 acres. And the average per farm net cash return for Lancaster County was $33,441. That is more than double Pennsylvania’s average of $14,853, and far exceeds the national average of $19,032 (Blue Ribbon Commission, 2006, 5).

At the end of last year, the local newspaper, the Lancaster New Era, reported that County dairy farmers had their second straight record breaking year (Robinson, 2006).

Despite having smaller farms than all but two other Pennsylvania counties, Lancaster continued to dominate most livestock and crop categories.

It ranked No. 1 in sales, farms, milk, eggs, cattle, swine, broilers, corn for grain, corn for silage, hay and barley in 2005.

Altogether, county farmers sold nearly $859 million of livestock and other farm products and $119 million of crops.

That total of $978 million was more than twice as high as the next highest county’s total sales, Chester County’s $460 million.
It is easy to point out the economic importance of the County’s farmland because it is exceptionally productive. What is talked about much less is the importance of keeping the soil productive. From the time the land was settled, the soil was known to be fertile. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that it will always be fertile. It has to be properly managed.

**Stewardship**
Lancaster County’s farmers and the plain sects in particular, have shown the world that productive farming does not mean that you have to have the biggest farm. The County’s farms are small scale family farms averaging 78 acres; a scale at which farmers can care for their land in a sustainable way that keeps the soil productive into the future.

The plain sects (Amish and Mennonites) have been working Lancaster County’s soil for nearly 300 years. These religious communities, with their distinct simplistic culture and commitment to the land, have acted as stewards of the land and have increased its natural fertility by nurturing, conserving and improving the prime soils (Blue Ribbon, 2006).

Amish farmers captivate our attention with their simple ways and commitment to a certain way of life. In our minds (if not always in reality), the Amish exemplify a simplicity that the modern world has lost. They are a living illustration of the past when we were all directly connected with the land we live on.

Being connected to the land is an old idea that was not, in the past, specific to the Amish. However, as we’ve progressed and changed the way we live, the Amish have maintained the practice of respecting the land and working it with their hands. Farming for them is not only a way to make a living, it is a way of life...a spiritual practice of being a steward of God’s creation. “A plain life is a simple one, close to nature. The Amish see the work of God in the soil, in the weather, in plants and animals, in the cycle of life” (Walbert, 2002, 32).

The Amish seem to understand the importance and sacred nature of the soil that they toil in. They, along with other Lancaster County farmers, seem to respect the land as more than just a means of producing crops. It is more than a factor of production. It is not something that they have created. Instead, it is a fundamental thing that they are responsible for managing and caring for.

Before everything else, they [the land] are ends-in-themselves; they are meta-economic, and it is therefore rationally justifiable to say, as a statement of fact, that they are in a certain sense sacred. Man has not made them, and it is irrational for him to treat things that he has not made and cannot make and cannot recreate once he has spoilt them, in the same manner and spirit as he is entitled to treat things of his own making (Schumacher, 1973, 113).

The Amish way of farming is one example of how the County’s land in particular is valuable for cultural reasons. Another important aspect of the County’s agricultural land that makes it significant is the beauty of it that we can all enjoy.
Farmland Amenities

Even though we can’t all actively farm the land, we can enjoy it. As residents or visitors to the County, we all get to enjoy the scenery of patterned fields, towering silos, colorful crops, tractors, and horse drawn plows and buggies. We get to appreciate the work of Lancaster County’s farmers by enjoying the land’s beauty.

Lancaster County farms provide what are referred to as “farmland amenities” by economic literature. Farmland amenities are things such as the beauty of patchwork fields and the cultural value of farming as a way of life (Irwin, Nickerson, Libby, 2003). They are the benefits that we get from the land being actively farmed.¹

The interviews that I will describe later are evidence of the importance of this aspect of the County’s farmland. More than anything else...more than the fundamental importance of producing food to eat...Lancaster County residents spoke of enjoying what they see. They enjoy more than anything else seeing the fields being plowed, the crops growing and observing the farming cycle. This is their connection to the land.

This goes to show that the importance and value of Lancaster County farms goes beyond how many million of dollars they produce in crops and agricultural products. Lancaster County farmland is valued for more than a food machine. It is valued for its scenery, way of life, open space, culture, and stewardship of the soil that allows us to live.

¹ Farmland also provides “rural amenities” such as open space, wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, etc. These benefits are not specific to farms, but are provided by actively farmed land.
2 Fatal Attraction

If you’re a Lancaster County resident, or someone who visits every now and then, you know that the County’s population is growing. New people are moving into the area because of employment or to retire, and younger generations of Lancaster County natives are choosing to stay. Between 1990 and 2000, population increased from 422,822 to over 470,000; and the County projection for 2010 is almost 510,000.

This population increase is not surprising. Lancaster County has a reputation as a great place; a great place to live and a great place to raise a family. The schools are great, the cost of living is reasonable, and family is a priority. It’s also a beautiful place. Why not live in a place where you can enjoy modern conveniences while enjoying what looks like a painted landscape outside your window? You can live a rural setting and have major east coast cities within easy reach. It’s not hard to see why people are drawn to Lancaster County. “Given its proximity to Philadelphia, its natural beauty, and its rolling fertile farmlands, Lancaster County has continued to retain native residents and attract urban refugees” (Daniels, 2000, 172).

This draw, however, is what threatens the very thing people are drawn to. The County, like other rural places in the Country, is facing a Catch 22. The draw of the place is resulting in it losing the very aspects that make it special. Eric Freyfogle (2001) explains, “Suburbanization is an impulse that destroys the very rural character it seeks” (198). Here, the rural character is specifically agrarian, and it is disappearing as more people move in.

Since more people are moving into the County, additional housing is needed. Since most of the land in the County is in agricultural use, the need for housing places tremendous development pressure on the County’s farms. Even though Lancaster County agriculture is thriving and breaking records, it is not as stable as it may seem. In December 2006, the Lancaster New Era addressed the issue while reporting on the County’s agricultural report card from the Pennsylvania Agricultural Statistics’ annual report.

Coupled with ever-increasing land values and development pressure, the cycles when farmers break even or lose money can force some out of business, especially younger farmers with a lot of debt.

“The last five to eight years, prices have been a lot more volatile and that makes it dangerous for guys starting out or already on the brink,” said Jeff Stoltzfus, adult agriculture instructor with the Eastern Lancaster County School District.

When faced with losses, farmers have to sell. And it’s not so likely that other farmers will be well off enough to buy them out. Developers can offer a lot more cash. Because of this, farms are being sold and developed into winding streets of single-family homes. According to the County’s growth tracking report, a total of 11,100 acres were developed in the County between 1994 and 2002, of which 3,921 acres were farmland (LCPC, 2004).^2

The Blue Ribbon Commission Report describes the rate at which farm acres are disappearing in Lancaster County as “startling,”

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^2 The County reported a rate of development of 3.4 acres per day between 1994 and 2002.
Farms are not being nibbled by development, here and there. They are being swallowed whole, year after year. Despite the efforts of agriculture preservation programs, Urban Growth Boundaries and agricultural protection zoning, the brakes have not been applied to loss of farmland (Blue Ribbon Commission, 2006, 5).

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture’s census abstract for 2003-2004, there were 610 fewer farms in Lancaster County in 2003 than in 1998. The number of farms went down from 5,915 to 5,305, an average loss of 101 farms a year. Farm acreage dropped from 418,000 in 1998 to 409,500 in 2003--a decrease of 8,500 acres; an average of 1,416 acres per year.

Not only is the rate of farm loss “startling,” the way in which the prime agricultural soil is being developed is equally as disturbing. One would hope that if farms are being lost to development, it would be worth the loss. But it turns out that the land is being covered in low density single family homes in a way that would make one think that land is not a limited resource.

Of the 6,617 acres developed outside Growth Areas between 1994-2002, 5,161 acres were used for 4,212 residential units or 24% of the County-wide total of 17,869. These 5,161 acres located outside Growth Areas accounted for 63% of all the acreage developed for residential use in the County during this time period. Therefore, 63% of the total land developed for residential use was used to accommodate only 24% of all dwellings built in Lancaster County – outside Growth Areas (LCPC, 2004, 8).

The amount, rate and style of development in the County is not going unnoticed by County residents. The County’s Growth Management Plan, Balance, reported the results of a survey of County residents in which a majority of residents believe that the County is a good place to live but it is getting worse because of development.

Most citizens believe Lancaster County is an excellent (36%) or good (51%) place to live, although more residents believe the County is “getting worse” (35%) than “getting better” (22%) as a place to reside. Lancaster County residents believe problems associated with growth, including over-development (24%), traffic (16%), and increasing taxes (7%), have the greatest negative effect on the County’s quality of life. In fact, among those who believe the County is “getting worse” as a place to live, development is the single most important quality of life issue. Put simply, most of those who think quality of life in the County is declining cite development as the reason (LCPC, Balance, 2-22).

The concern for the loss of Lancaster County farms is not only local. In 1999, The National Trust for Historic Preservation included the County on its annual list of the 11 most endangered places in the country. The National Trust listed the County as an endangered place because the “rural beauty” of the County is threatened by “relentless suburban sprawl” (www.nationaltrust.org).
Famed as a center of "Pennsylvania Dutch" culture because of its population of Amish, Mennonites and other plain religious sects, Lancaster County is a place where farming is still a way of life, where small-town America still thrives, and where residents cherish a strong sense of community. Long known as the "Garden Spot of America" for its lushly productive farmland, the county also boasts a stable industrial base and a strong traditional character largely defined by the early settlers, predominantly of German, Scots-Irish and Welsh ancestry, who flocked here in the 18th and 19th centuries. But on the threshold of a new century, Lancaster County is besieged by the forces of sprawl. With its population mushrooming, the region is experiencing explosive suburban growth, the arrival of a phalanx of big-box superstores and retail "power centers," the decline of existing town centers and the threat of a new superhighway.

The current trends of development and resulting loss of farmland is concerning to both County residents and the nation as a whole.

If Lancaster County farming is so important, why is it being developed?
The Inconsistency

From an outside perspective, Lancaster County is exhibiting contradictory desires and actions. The County’s farmland is very important to its residents, but development continues.

County residents have been expressing the importance of their agricultural land in both daily conversation and public forums. They are acknowledging its importance as a large part of the County’s economy, but they are not stopping there. It is important to them as a culture; a way of life. The Blue Ribbon Commission (2006) conveyed the message they have heard from the public: “We heard person after person say that Lancaster County’s culture, predicated to a great extent on the wholesomeness of agriculture and farm life, must not be destroyed.” County-wide surveys affirm this statement. The results put agricultural landscapes at the top of the list of heritage resources that should be preserved for future generations (LCPC, Heritage, 2006).

The media, both locally and nationally have been attentive to the conflict. Local newspapers are constantly reporting and celebrating farmland preservation efforts and accomplishments. On a national level, the New York Times recently published an article related to the County’s efforts to encourage denser housing development in order to preserve farmland.

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3 The County’s Agricultural Preserve Board has a program of purchasing conservation easements from farmers with public money has been widely supported by residents (LCPC, Balance, 2006).³ They have been making progress on this front. The Lancaster Intelligencer Journal reported that as of
December 2006, the County had “preserved 663 farms covering just over 66,000 acres since its farmland preservation program began in the late 1980s” (Reilly, 2006).

In addition to the government’s effort to preserve farmland, private efforts contribute to the cause. The Lancaster Farmland Trust, a private, nonprofit, local organization founded in 1988, has preserved 247 farms covering over 15,000 acres in Lancaster County (Reilly, 2006). The Trust was founded by local citizens who are concerned with preserving agriculture and protecting the land. Like the County, they purchase conservation easements from farmers, which prohibit development of the land. The fact that the organization is private is important in preserving farms owned by the Amish, who do not involve themselves in government.

Clearly, farming is important to Lancaster County residents. They do not want development to continue to consume farmland and with it the County’s character. Surveys conducted for the County’s Heritage Plan (2006) cite suburban sprawl and unmanaged growth as the greatest threats to Lancaster County’s community character (46). When asked whether “recent growth trends continue into the future,” 79% of respondents to a county wide survey said, “No.” (LCPC, Balance, 2006, 2-23). So, why does development continue to threaten the County’s farmland?

Why Does Development Continue?
Why does development continue when Lancaster County residents agree that the preservation of farmland and agricultural heritage are crucial in maintaining the County’s character?

While residents express the importance of preserving farmland, they also in the same breath speak highly of progress (or growth). The idea of progress has been a part of Lancaster County from the beginning. Since the settlement of Lancaster County by the Swiss German farmers and others, the County has been a place of hard work and progress. That tradition continues today. The place is thriving, with more and more residents moving into the area because of employment. The County’s government and residents all agree that growth is good for the County.

The County Growth Management Plan speaks of growth as a positive force: “This growth and prosperity will continue to bring many positive changes to the County including increased educational and employment opportunities, social and cultural amenities, and recreational and entertainment choices” (LCPC, Balance, 2006, 2-22). The County acknowledges that growth can threaten the County’s agricultural land, and states that they must carefully manage it. Wanting the best of both worlds, the County is looking for a way to “foster economic growth” but at the same time “preserve its rural character” (Burke, 2006).

In order to make sense of this, it’s tempting to think that there are just two different groups of people in Lancaster County; one that wants to preserve farmland and one that wants the benefits of growth. You may answer the “why is development still happening?” question by explaining that there are simply two different interests in a conflict. Some land is developed and some land is preserved.

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4 The terms “progress” and “growth” are used interchangeable here, just as was done by the residents that I interviewed. To them, development is thought of as growth and progress.
But it’s not that simple. Certainly, there is an industry that survives and prospers because of development. But even those developers will tout the importance of agriculture in Lancaster County, and actively support preservation efforts. The inconsistency goes all the way down to the individual level. Residents recognize that they have opposing desires, competing preferences, but they still want both.

The following conversation with Senator Noah Wenger, who recently retired from the state senate, illustrates the personal conflict that Lancaster County residents face on the issue of farmland preservation and growth.

A Conversation with Senator Noah Wenger
No one is more familiar with the inconsistencies in Lancaster County than retired state senator, Noah Wenger. A farmer and a statesman for thirty years, he is known as the father of farmland preservation in the County due to his role in creating a preservation system in Pennsylvania.

Senator Wenger’s farm is preserved with a conservation easement because it was important to him to know that his farm will not be developed. However, he can also understand when farmers have to sell their farms in order to take care of themselves financially. That is why he strongly believes that the preservation program must be voluntary. Personal freedoms to make decisions about land need to be maintained, but one of those freedoms includes the opportunity to preserve the land. And so far, the system has been working well, according to the Senator. They are seeing more farms preserved every year. If they had more funding, they would be preserving even more farms, as the number of applications for conservation easements exceeds the amount of funding.

I asked Senator Wenger about what in my mind is an example of the conflict that is paramount in the County: the failed attempt to build a highway (a new route 23) from Lancaster to the eastern side of the county. To keep a long, complicated saga short, I’ll just say that in the 1960s, the State started building a highway through Amish country and suddenly stopped. They covered the roadbed with soil, planted grass and abandoned it. It is now being used by grazing cows, horses, and goats; thus its name: the goat path.

The Senator explained that the construction of the road was halted because the State ran out of money. Years later when the State got enough money to continue, the philosophy about farmland had changed. When they started construction of the road in the 60s, the
fact that the road would be built on prime soils in the heart of Amish country was not as outrageous as it seems now.

Today, there are rumors of construction beginning again. The topic has people talking and disagreeing about what to do. The existing route 23, a two-lane fairly narrow road, which the new road would bypass, is certainly busy. During peak hours, it is very slow. And on that stretch of route 23 is what used to be New Holland Ford⁵ (now Fiat), which employs a substantial number of County residents. Senator Wenger explained the dilemma. The new road would cut through Amish farms and possibly draw additional development to the agricultural area. At the same time, a local business with an international demand needs better access to transportation. What happens if Fiat decides to close the New Holland plant because of its lack of access to transportation, and local residents lose their jobs? The Senator did not offer an easy answer as to what to do. But he and I did agree that a new road may not really solve the transportation problem.

*Personal Inconsistency*

The conversation I had with the Senator is not unique due to his political position. He is not the only one in the County who faces difficult choices because of conflicting desires. Residents want to preserve farmland, but they want growth. Even though individuals may find themselves on one end of the spectrum more than the other, you would be hard pressed to find someone in Lancaster County who does not personally deal with this contradiction within himself.

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⁵ This is the same New Holland company that produced the popular brand of farm machinery.
I recently witnessed an example of the inconsistency when my grandparents who both grew up on Lancaster County farms, moved into a new subdivision, Clearview Gardens, that had been built on farmland. Their move made complete sense and was necessary in a lot of ways. I know that they don’t want to see the County’s farmland and their heritage disappear. So, I knew that the problem facing current and potential Lancaster County residents is more complex than it may appear.

How do residents deal with the inconsistency of wanting the County to remain a farming County, but then take actions that are involved with its demise? How do they navigate this paradox? How do they view themselves in the conflict?

Perhaps the conflict is alive and well within them. Perhaps they are ambivalent, wanting two contradictory things.
4 Methodology

This work is the result of conducting thirty personal interviews in two locations in Lancaster County. These locations met certain criteria; one of the most important being that they are residential developments that have been built on what was active farmland. Interviewees were solicited through flyers and phone calls to take part in 20 minute personal interviews.

Choosing the Two Cases
Development of Lancaster County farmland is not specific to a certain area of the County. It is happening all over the County. In an attempt to tell a more general story about what is happening, I chose not to focus on a specific development. To broaden the story as much as possible given my constraints, I decided to conduct interviews in two different locations in Lancaster County; both of which were farms that were recently developed into single-family homes.

Conducting interviews in two different locations would provide more of a county-wide view of the issue (a larger sample). However, I realize that two cases does not necessarily mean that I can make generalizations about the County as a whole because of the results of this research. Ideally, I would have liked to study more than two cases, but given my limited time and resources, two cases was a manageable task.

Clearview Gardens was an obvious choice as a case study, it being the impetus of my research. It was built on what was active farmland, and it was just the right size having about 70 homes at the time. It was certainly recent enough, as the first residents had been there less than two years and some parts of it were still under construction.

The search ensued for another, similar development to use as the second case study. The development had to meet the following criteria:

1. It had been built on what was active farmland prior to development;
2. It was approximately the same size as Clearview;
3. It was built fairly recently so that the people living in the homes were the first owners and they could remember moving in;
4. The land was not the last piece in a sea of development...there was farmland touching at least one edge of the development;
5. The former owner of the farmland is available to interview;

And, lastly, I wanted the second case to have been built/developed by a different company than the one that built Clearview Gardens. My thought here was to account for differences in residents’ experiences with the builders. If the residents’ choices about the land they lived on had anything to do with the builders, I wanted to account for that and get a sample of interviews that went beyond taste in builders.

After establishing the criteria, I researched local builders’ websites to see what projects they were working on currently or had recently completed. This initial research produced two potentially appropriate cases to work with: Kolbacre Ridge (near Leola) and Cheltenham (Blue Ball). A site visit to each of the developments resulted in discarding Cheltenham as a case study. It was too recent, with only about twenty homes occupied and therefore causing problems with getting a satisfactory number of residents to interview.

Kolbacre Ridge, on the other hand, fit my criteria and became my second case study.
Why Interview?
In order to do this research, I knew that I had to make personal connections with people and get them to talk honestly about a potentially touchy subject. Face to face personal interviews were chosen as the method of research specifically for this reason. Since I was looking to expose inner conflict and opposing desires that these individuals may hold, I used a method that is most likely to produce the depth of information that I was looking for. Rather than taking a more controlled, scientific approach by using a survey, I chose to sacrifice statistical, categorical answers for a more complex, deeper understanding of the individuals and their feelings. Personal interviews would enable this deeper discussion.

Through personal interviews, we can learn about people’s interior experiences. Interviews enable us to “learn how events affected their thoughts and feelings...we can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves” (Weiss, 1994, 1). Qualitative interviews are best suited to get to the internal conflicts of individuals. By using a qualitative approach, I gain “coherence, depth, and density” in information and therefore a more informed understanding of the individual’s experience (Weiss, 1994, 3).

Recruiting Interviewees
Residents
To get people from these two locations to sit down for an interview, I canvassed both of the neighborhoods with a flyer (shown below) explaining who I am and what I was doing.

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE of TECHNOLOGY
PLANNING STUDY

“Where you Live and Development Choices in Lancaster County”

about me:
I am a graduate student and Lancaster County native researching the decisions people make about development in Lancaster County.

how you can help:
You can take part in a 30 minute interview during the month of January, and tell me the story of how & why you chose to live here.

please contact me:
Valerie Gingrich
valerleg@mit.edu
978.578.5951
The day I distributed the flyers at Clearview Gardens was an unseasonably warm Saturday in January. I went door to door, rang doorbells, introduced myself as a Lancaster County native (and the granddaughter of their neighbors), and explained that I was a graduate student at MIT, studying development choices in the County. I informed them that I will be conducting brief interviews, asked them to contact me if they are interested, and handed them a flyer. If the residents did not answer the door, I left the flyer at the door. Ringing doorbells, as terrifying as it was, worked in my favor, with two couples offering to do interviews on the spot.

On the day I canvassed Kolbacre Ridge, the weather was not as cooperative. I needed to distribute the flyers across the neighborhood as quickly as possible, so I used the “stick it in the door and go” tactic.

I canvassed each of the neighborhoods in one day each. I distributed approximately 55 flyers in each of the neighborhoods...a total of 110 in two days. The results of which were a little disheartening; I received only a few phone calls in response. So, I followed up with phone calls. With the resident’s addresses, I found phone numbers using whitepages.com and made over sixty calls to set up interviews.

There was no method or system for whom to interview. As a matter of fact, I didn’t choose who to interview, they chose me. I interviewed everyone who volunteered. The problem with this method of taking whoever you can get, or “convenience sampling”, is that it is not a random method (Weiss, 1994). “A problem with all samples selected only because they are conveniently obtained is that we may not have good bases for generalization” (Weiss, 1994, 26). Because the sample of interviewees was not chosen randomly, I cannot claim that it is necessarily representative of the entire population of residents. Because of this, generalizations about the group from the results of the nonrandom sample must be qualified as such.

**Farm Owners/Developers**

The individuals who owned and developed the farmland were contacted directly for interviews.

**The Interviews**

The interviews were conducted in person, usually at the resident’s home. It was important to me to conduct personal interviews rather than phone interviews. First of all, a personal conversation about feelings and thoughts should be done in person. Doing the interviews face to face helped me to develop rapport with the residents. Instead of being a voice over the phone line, I could shake their hand and thank them for their time. I wanted them to feel comfortable talking about their experience and sharing their feelings honestly. In person, I could look them in the eye and use my body language to assure them that I am interested in what they have to say, which cannot be done over the phone. Additionally, I wanted to not only observe and record the words they said, but also their gestures and facial expressions. These non-verbal ways of communicating helped me to understand their feelings and the level of intensity of those feelings.

The interviews were structured as approximately twenty minute open-ended, semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were not restricted in choosing how to answer a question, allowing for any type of reaction to the questions. Even though I had a list of questions in front of me to guide the interview, I didn’t always use all of the questions or follow the ordering of the questions as written. Instead, I used my discretion as to which questions to skip and when to probe deeper into an answer with an unscripted question.
The freedom allowed me to get to the real meaning of what the residents were saying when it wasn’t explicit.

The questions that I drafted to guide the discussion were constructed in such a way to build up to the conflict between farmland preservation and development. Not all of the questions were directly related to the issue, but were more for getting a comprehensive story of their experience and building rapport.

Sample questions:

**Background**
- How old are you?
- Where are you from (where did you grow up)?
- What was the neighborhood like? (Scale, density, income, diversity)
- Where did you live before you moved here?
- How long did you live there?
- What was your neighborhood like? (Scale, density, income, diversity)
- Why did you decide to move?

**Choosing to live in Lancaster County**
- What made you look for housing in Lancaster County?
- Did you consider other locations outside of L.C.?
- What are the 3 most important characteristics were you looking for in a place?
- How would you describe Lancaster County to an outsider?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate the importance of farming in L.C.?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate the importance of preserving farmland in the County?

**Choosing to live in this Community**
- When did you move to this home?
- Did you consider any other locations? Which ones?
- What do you like about this location?
- Was the decision process hard?

**The Inconsistency**
- Some people criticize developments like these because they are built on farmland. How do you react to that?
- Did you have any reservation about moving to a home that was built on what was once farmland?
- How do you view yourself in the context of growth and farmland preservation in the County?

To many researchers, this style of interview cannot be trusted to produce scientific results. The freedom given in this type of interview to get to a deeper understanding of what a respondent says also creates inconsistencies that can alter the results of the interview. No two interviews are alike; they are not controlled. So, the results of an interview will likely be effected by the specifics of what happened in the interview. “Circumstances do alter cases” (Wildavsky, 1993, 58). Depending on which words are used or in what order the questions are asked, the answers given may change. This inherent characteristic makes the results of the interviews hard to compare, contrast, and detract from.

Another criticism of qualitative interviews is that the results do not produce statistics or data that can be used in statistical models. Because of this,

> Economists and others who are committed to the development of statistical models sometimes disparage the reports produced by qualitative interview studies. They may characterize these results as anecdotal, because they rely on accounts provided by
a relatively small sample of respondents, or as impressionistic, implying not only that they are imprecise but also that they are more a product of art than of objective scientific method (Weiss, 1994, 12).

However, as Weiss (1994) explains, “The disparagement is unwarranted. Much of the important work in the social sciences, work that has contributed in fundamental ways to our understanding of our society and ourselves, has been based on qualitative interview studies” (12).

Even though this study is based on a non random sample of qualitative interviews, it is potentially a valuable contribution to our knowledge in this area. Life isn’t a perfectly controlled experiment, so its important problems most likely shouldn’t be addressed as such. The interviews, however unscientific they are, shed light on the complexity of the inconsistencies in the County; and more importantly how to address them.
5 Two Cases

In order to get to the bottom of the issue, to see how residents deal with personal inconsistencies, I looked at the following two cases in Lancaster County: Clearview Gardens and Kolbacre Ridge. Both are single-family developments that were built on what had been farmland.

**Clearview Gardens**

*Context*

Clearview Gardens is a residential development that is being built on a piece of farmland in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. The 70 acre parcel is located five miles from downtown Ephrata, just off of Route 322, along Clay School Road in the village of Clay.
If you travel northwest on Route 322, a two lane road, for about twenty minutes, you will arrive in Lebanon County which provides access to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. If you drive two miles towards Ephrata on Route 322, you will find a small restaurant/ice cream shop and a new strip mall with a Subway, gas station, pharmacy, bookstore, discount grocery, and several banks. Ephrata provides additional services: restaurants, shopping, hospitals, and Wal-mart.

Driving is the mode of transportation when leaving the confines of Clearview Gardens. To reach the services along Route 322, you have to travel in a car. The road is a two lane road with wide shoulders, but no sidewalks. The speed limit along Route 322 varies, but in the stretch between Clearview Gardens and the services located towards Ephrata, cars are permitted to travel at 55 miles per hour.

The historic linear pattern of development along major transportation routes has continued into the 21st century with new development located along Route 322. Whereas ten years ago, the scenery bordering this stretch of Route 322 was dominated by fields of crops, today there are only a few places where if you look closely, you can see fields from the roadway.

Farmland surrounds the small village of Clay, which boasts a pizza shop, used car lot, an elementary school, and two trailer parks. Bordering Clearview Gardens is Clay Elementary School, a small community park (Snyder Park) adjacent to the school, a Church (Ephrata Community Church), and the farm to which the developed land once belonged.
The Development
As of January 2007, local builders, Garman Homes and Landmark Builders, built 69 of the 117 total homes that will complete Clearview Gardens. This cluster of homes is laid out on a road network which is roughly a figure eight with sidewalks and underground utilities.
The rear section of the development is reserved for residents who are over 55 years old (the green and brown sections of above plan). Smaller single-story homes are located in this section, while the unrestricted portion has a majority of two-story homes with some one-story homes mixed in. House lots range in size from 7,000 square feet to 19,000 square feet, with only a few of them over 10,000 square feet. Homes can be customized to a certain extent, with choices of colors, finishes, cathedral ceilings, exterior materials, etc. for each style of home.

The neighborhood is a mix of young families and retired couples. The retired residents are not confined to the over 55 portion of the development, and in fact are scattered throughout. Neighbors get to know each other while strolling on the sidewalk or while picking up their mail at the development wide mailbox.
Kolbacre Ridge

Context
Kolbacre Ridge is a single-family residential development built on a piece of farmland in Upper Leacock Township, 6 miles east of Lancaster City. The development sits between Pine Drive and Horning Road, off of Route 23, near the town of Leola.

If you continue east on Route 23, you will go through Leola, New Holland and Morgantown, where you can access the Pennsylvania Turnpike (to Philadelphia and Harrisburg). If you travel west a few miles on Route 23, towards Lancaster, you can access Route 30 which runs west to York and east to Philadelphia. Route 30 provides access to Route 222 which runs northeast to Reading.

Kolbacre Ridge residents have easy, quick access to the major commercial centers in the County. Lancaster City provides big box chain stores, outlet shopping, and quaint downtown boutiques and galleries. Even closer to Kolbacre Ridge is the town of Leola, a small linear town along Route 23 a few miles east of Kolbacre. A new commercial center provides a café/bakery, flower shop, bank, pharmacy and discount grocery to compliment the existing supermarket and handful of restaurants and businesses in Leola.

Like Clearview Gardens, getting around means driving. Route 23 is a two-lane road with wide shoulders, but no sidewalks. Speeds along the road vary. At busy times, traffic moves slower, but when there are fewer cars on the road, speeds increase substantially.
Kolbacre Ridge is surrounded on three sides by older residential neighborhoods, built in the 1960s and 1970s. Several new developments are being constructed nearby and another is proposed to be built behind the Elementary School across from Kolbacre Ridge. It is rumored that there are development plans for the field adjacent to Kolbacre, the only side that has not been developed.

The Development
Kolbacre Ridge is comprised of 55 two-story “expansive” single-family homes, built by a local developer/builder, Charter Homes on 1+ acre lots. The streets have sidewalks, underground public utilities, mailboxes, and form a network with two access points.

A curious aspect to the development is the Amish farm that is neatly tucked into the western side of the development. The farm is about ten acres of fenced in pasture with a small pond. The pasture holds goats, sheep and horses. According to the residents, the
Amish children are humorous pranksters and their father does various landscaping projects for the residents.

The design of the neighborhood, sprawling and private with the large lots and private mailboxes, does not lend itself to creating a community feel. But surprisingly, there is a sense of community in the development. Kids play and walk to school together, and mothers carpool. People referred to their neighbors as “friends”. There is also a sense of security, as evidenced by what happened when I wasn’t able to find the right house. I pulled over to check my notes and a woman came outside to see what I was doing. I asked her where I could find the family I was looking for. She directed me, but then followed up with a phone call to her neighbor to make sure that I was expected.
6 The Interviews

The residents who agreed to interviews were a group of mixed ages, ranging from 30s to 70s; and backgrounds, some having been born in Lancaster County and some from surrounding states or as far away as other countries.

The following describes the interviews that took place in January 2007.

Clearview Gardens

Former Farm Owner—Glenn Wissler

Glenn Wissler has lived in Lancaster County all of his life. He was the owner of the farmland that is now known as the Clearview Gardens development.

Farming has been in Mr. Wissler’s family for generations. He grew up on a farm, and his grandfather, father, and most of his brothers have made it their life’s work to toil in Lancaster County’s soils. In 1959, Glenn’s father gave him a start in farming by buying him his own 140 acre farm (which is located beside Clearview Gardens). Mr. Wissler says that he inherited the profession from his father, and has enjoyed life as a farmer.

In 1978, Glenn purchased the 70 acre farm adjacent to his, with the thought that he and his son would farm the two pieces of land together. He had been renting the land anyway and farming both pieces together before he purchased it. Soon after the purchase, Glenn’s son realized that his life would not be one of a farmer, but of a full time minister in his church. This left Glenn with two farms instead of just one. Glenn was supportive of his son’s decision not to farm and in fact sold part of the newly purchased farm’s land for the construction of a new church.

The cost to get the necessary infrastructure to the church site was prohibitive. Since the land was zoned for residential use, Glenn made the decision to develop what would have been Glenn’s son’s farm as a single-family residential development in order to offset the cost of providing infrastructure to the new church. According to Glenn, this was the only way to build the church; otherwise, it would have been cost prohibitive.

Glenn, being a farmer and a lifelong resident, knows the importance of farming in Lancaster County. He spoke of the County’s reputable prime soils that farmers and residents alike
boast of. In his view, the importance of farming in the County gets what he called very high marks...it has been the backbone of the county; so it gets a nine or a ten out of ten. He fondly remembered his years farming the land just outside the window for all of his adult years. According to Glenn, agriculture will always be a big part of Lancaster County.

He voiced serious concern about the family farms in Lancaster County. The price of land and competition with big corporate farms are pricing family farms out of the business. It may not be happening as fast here as in other parts of the country, but it is slowly happening.

So, how could he do what he did?

I asked Glenn about the decision to develop his land...whether it was hard for him. He said that it was a hard decision. It was hard for him to see a big beautiful field cut in two. He talked about it as if it was something that he didn't necessarily want to do, but did it in order to make building the church a reality. His attitude was one of a partially conflicted man. He wasn't out to make a fortune on developing the land; he wanted to support the church and his son. Looking back on the decision he made, he wouldn't say that he is happy with it, and instead said that he isn't unhappy with the decision. For Glenn, it wasn't the easiest thing to do having lived and worked the land his whole life.

It hasn't been easy being the farmer who developed his land. He’s gotten some slack from other farmers. Glenn explained that people are always opposed to change, and his decision is bringing in more people who are not familiar with the nature of agriculture. People see the pretty landscapes, but they don’t realize that those landscapes produce dust and really bad smells.

Glenn spoke of the issue as a struggle between two forces. He didn’t give any resolution to the struggle, indicating a personal struggle with the issue. He knows the importance of the land, but he also knows that people who are drawn here need a place to live. He doesn’t believe that he’s done something wrong by developing the land. According to Glenn, he is merely carrying out what the township slated for the land when zoning it for residential use. But he does recognize that actions such as his bring change, which is, according to him, something that we all have to accept.

Glenn thought it was important that the land was zoned for residential use and he stressed the importance of how the land was developed. He proudly spoke of saving farmland with this development. Clearview Gardens, to him (and a lot of other County residents) is a compact development with small lots. This means that more people are being housed on this land than would be if the lots were large. Making the development compact, according to Glenn, saves other farmland from being developed to house these people.

Glenn is retiring from farming. He will be building a new home next to my grandparents’ house in Clearview Gardens. His son will inherit the 140 acre farm that Glenn has farmed since 1959. The farm is zoned for agricultural use, but the future of the farm is not entirely clear. There is a common misconception among the residents of Clearview Gardens, that Glenn’s farm has been preserved as agricultural land with a conservation easement. When I asked Glenn about this, he said that when approached by the County Agriculture Preserve Board years ago, he declined putting a conservation easement on the farm. He doesn’t know what the future holds and he doesn’t know what the future needs for the land might be, so he doesn't want to permanently restrict the land. He will leave the decisions about the future use of the land up to future generations to decide.
Residents
The sixteen residents that I interviewed from Clearview Gardens are a group of mixed ages and backgrounds. I anticipated a range of ages since the development has an age-restricted (55+) portion and larger two-story homes conducive to families with children. I found that retirees living in Clearview Gardens did not confine themselves to the age-restricted portion of the development, or to a certain housing style, living in two-story homes as well as single-story homes. Ages ranged from people in their thirties to retirees in their sixties and seventies: (4) in their thirties; (1) in their forties; (2) in their fifties; (9) in their sixties/seventies.

The residents came from within Pennsylvania (6) and Lancaster County specifically (4) in addition to other nearby states (NJ:3; NY:2; VA:1) and international locations (Canada:2; Phillipines:1). When the residents explained their reason for moving to Lancaster County, they had to do with; employment, retirement or family, or a combination of those things.

Descriptions of Lancaster County
When asked how they would describe Lancaster County to someone who does not live here, answers ranged from a description of the scenery to a description of the people and culture that makes up the County. Residents unanimously described the County as “beautiful” because of its “picturesque” “beautiful countryside”. The County was described as “heaven on earth” where you can get a glimpse of “the old world and new” with the horses and buggies. Lancaster County, according to one interviewee is a “slower paced” place that exhibits a simplicity that the modern world no longer has.

Those interviewed described County residents as “friendly” and “nice” and raved about how wonderful the County is for raising a family. It is simply a “nice place to live”. At the same time, those residents of Clearview Gardens, who were not from Lancaster County, described another aspect of the County’s native population. Lancaster County was described as “resistant to change” and inwardly focused. Non-natives to the County expressed that it is very difficult to “break into circles” within the County. “Everyone knows everyone else…it’s hard to break through the culture of locals...locals stay within themselves...didn’t have a need for outsiders. We’re still outsider even though we’ve been here fifteen years...not that people aren’t friendly...it’s that they don’t have a need for people from the outside.”

The Importance of Farming and its Preservation
Fifteen of sixteen residents spoke passionately about Lancaster County farming as very important. I asked them to rank the importance of farming on a scale from one to ten with ten being most important. The replies ranged from eights to tens. Even though they assigned a range of numbers to the importance, they all used the same language when they spoke of farming’s importance. Lancaster County farming is “known all over the world” and it is “extremely important.” Residents “love to see all of the farms” for reasons not only having to do with beautiful picturesque landscapes; it has to do with a way of life. Its importance is “not just for the beauty...everything is so fast paced in the world...this kind of slows you down. Makes you appreciate who you are and where you live.”

When asked the same question in regards to preserving farmland, those fifteen residents stated that it is also “very important” and gave similar rankings ranging from eights to tens. Some of the residents said that preserving farmland ranks even higher than the importance of farming in the County. They had a certain kind of urgency in their voices when they spoke of the importance of preserving farmland, “I would like to see what we have remain.” One resident told of her changed attitude towards preservation: “At one time I didn’t think it was very important, but now when I see farmland with ‘for sale’ signs on it, I feel very sad.”
The exception to the group was a woman who ranked the importance of farming and the preservation of it as fives. She did not appear to have any emotional attachment to the County’s farmland and its potential disappearance.

**Personal Inconsistency**

While talking about the importance of farming in the County, five of the sixteen residents pointed out their personal inconsistencies before I asked the questions meant to tease them out. These residents laughed out loud at themselves in an ironic way admitting their action to purchase their home went against what they just finished saying. One resident expressed a strong desire for farmland to remain and then caught herself, “that said, what did I do? I bought a home on what used to be a farm.”

The question that I used to draw out personal inconsistencies was, “some people would criticize developments like this one because it was built on what was farmland...how would you respond?” Some of the residents reacted to the question in a way that showed that they understand and appreciate the criticism. Seven of the sixteen, reacted this way, usually shaking their heads in agreement and expressing a belief in the validity of the criticism. “It is unfortunate.” “I think there has to be some kind of control on it.” These responses drew out the complicated nature of the issue: “Just about every house in the nation is built on farmland. If the house wasn’t there, you could farm it. This is prime farmland and I understand that. There is some validity to the criticism. I hate to see land disappearing as much as anyone. But people need places to live.”

The other nine residents did not vocally validate the criticism, were less sympathetic, and more defensive. These reactions were based on their belief in an individual’s right to make decisions about his or her land: “If the farmer decides to sell his property...it’s his decision.”

“Somebody decided it was ok to build. That’s their prerogative.”

“If those people have a problem with it, they should have bought the land and farmed it.”

**View of Self**

When faced with the inconsistency of their actions, they always pointed out the obvious fact that the development was already in the works when they entered the picture. In their minds, their decision to purchase (and in some cases to custom build) a home in this location had not brought about the demise of farmland. “We didn’t encourage it.” The development was going to be built irrespective of who lived in it, “Whether we bought it or someone else bought it, it was being sold.”

Two of the residents stressed the importance of individual decision in regards to land. To them, individuals have the right to decide how to use their land, and this includes farmland, “it’s really up to them.” One of the residents stated simply and honestly, “I feel kinda bad but at the same time I think that while farming is important...it’s a buyer’s market...the economy drives it.”

A retired couple from Canada spoke of the land around them as foreign and not belonging to them. They spoke as if they did not and could not have an emotional attachment to farmland. They framed the conflict between new development and farmland preservation as a problem that they were not responsible for, and instead stated that “they” need to figure out a balance. Even though the couple spoke about the land in a detached way, they clearly pointed out the issue: “I think they probably resent all these houses going up. And
yet they are tempted like all other people to make a profit on their land. So it’s probably a mixed bag for them...probably some confliction within themselves.”

The vast majority (fourteen of the sixteen) of residents responded to the conflict between preservation and development by describing a “balance”. The term was used countless times in the interviews in different contexts.

One of the balances mentioned had to do with the common misconception among the interviewees that the remaining farmland that the Wisslers own was preserved as part of the requirement for the development of Clearview Gardens. Believing that the adjacent farmland had been preserved, gave some of the interviewees a higher level of comfort about their actions. Their inconsistencies were offset, in their minds, by the preservation of the farm. “It is unfortunate, but if people are wanting to develop some of it...in this case the person who developed it did preserve some of his land. That makes me feel a little better. He was looking to sell off some but he wasn’t going to sell it all. And hopefully it will remain preserved.” The solution to develop some and preserve some was to some residents a balance that would be acceptable.

Another aspect of achieving a balance, according to the residents interviewed, is good planning. If farmland is going to be developed, it should be done in a thoughtful, well-planned out way. Some residents commended the developer for the way Clearview Gardens was designed, with small lots, public utilities and proximity to existing development. They explained that small lots do not consume as much farmland, and this denser development can achieve the “best of both worlds” by building homes in a denser fashion to preserve farmland. “I can justify it because we’re sitting on quarter acre lots...if it’s thought out development, I don’t have a problem with it.” To them, a balance means thinking about how and where development occurs, “I would like to see the growth happen around villages and towns that are existing rather than taking a farm right out in the middle of two dozen farms and developing that.”

“Balance” was spoken of as the answer to two desirable but conflicting things. Residents want the farmland to remain, but they also want to prosper: “Even though you’re giving up the farmland, there’s more income coming into the farmland. I guess it’s a trade.” They “want it [the farmland] to remain” but at the same time, “want to advance.”

There was a sense of inevitability in the voices I heard. “I wouldn’t want to drive down Clay School Road and see all that farmland eaten up, although I’m sure that in another ten or twenty years it is probably gonna be that way.”

“The county is growing. So unless you put up a roadblock and say no one else can move into Lancaster, what are you going to do?”

“What county can say ‘no we don’t want you to move in’?”

**Kolbacre Ridge**

*Former Farm Owners/Developers*

The man who owned and developed the farm that is now Kolbacre Ridge has since then passed away. His wife and son, who both now live in the development, were involved in the process and agreed to an interview.
The man, who owned the farm and developed it, grew up in a family of farmers and developers. His family farmed Lancaster County’s fertile soil, but they also bought farms with the sole intention of developing them into housing. In fact, he grew up on what used to be a farm next to Kolbacre Ridge. The farm was eventually developed into a residential subdivision by his father. That’s what the family did; they were farmers, but they also bought farms to develop; sold house lots; and then bought more farms with the profits.

The owner of Kolbacre Ridge, like his father, was both a farmer and a developer. He farmed a piece of land a few miles from Kolbacre Ridge, located in the direct path of the proposed Route 23 bypass mentioned earlier. While farming that land, he purchased the Kolbacre Ridge farm as an investment in 1990. For a few years, he rented the fields to farmers looking for land, and to an Amish family who lives in the original house and barn.

Eventually, as planned, the 58 acres were subdivided into single-family house lots for a local builder, Charter Homes, to build homes. The house lots were larger than the ones in the older subdivisions that bordered the land partially due to the developer’s taste and partially to the constraints of two pipelines running through the land. The decision was made to keep the farmhouse and barn and allot about ten acres for a pasture. The Amish family, who had farmed part of the land, continues to live in the house (which they rent) and use the pasture for their animals.

Many of the residents of Kolbacre see the Amish farm as an attempt to preserve the farming aspect of the land. When I asked the former farm owners, they agreed that both farming and the preservation of farming is very important in the County, rating both tens on a scale from one to ten. After all, they quipped, it is some of the most productive land in the country...maybe even the world.

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6 The state took eleven acres of the farm for the road that has not been completed. According to the interviewees, their family is partially responsible for the road’s nickname, the “goat path.” They put their cows out on the land that the state wasn’t using and their neighbors put their goats out on it...thus it’s called the goat path. Now, everyone puts their livestock out on it to graze.)
Their insistence that farming in Lancaster County is very important made the inconsistency clearly stand out. When I asked about the developer’s feelings about developing farmland, his family stated that he may have felt a little conflict about it, but he didn’t farm this farm and developing was in his blood. They explained that this farm was already surrounded on three sides by development; public utilities were available; the land was zoned residential; and the farm building would have needed substantial upgrades to support a profitable farming operation on this land. Considering all of these things, to them, it was the right farm to develop.

The developer’s son pointed out the Catch-22 that Lancaster County is facing. He commented that people like farms and that’s part of what brings them here...but their arrival also most likely means that a farm has been developed in order to house them.

When asked about the rumored development of the open field (and farm) next to their homes, they expressed a somewhat solemn aversion to the thought of development happening next to them. They admitted that they could not tell the guy next door not to develop his farm when that’s what they did. Instead, they just shrug and resign themselves to sadly accept the inevitable fact that development will happen.

Residents
The fourteen residents of Kolbacre Ridge that I interviewed are a group of mixed ages and backgrounds. I anticipated that Kolbacre Ridge, with its larger homes, would be home to larger families that would take advantage of the 4+ bedroom floorplans. Generally, my suspicion was correct; a clear majority of the residents in Kolbacre were larger, young families. However, there were exceptions to this. Families without children and retired residents in their seventies choose to make Kolbacre Ridge their home as well. Ages ranged from people in their thirties to retirees in their sixties and seventies: (3) in their thirties; (8) in their forties; (1) in their fifties; (2) in their sixties/seventies.

The residents came from within Pennsylvania (5) and Lancaster County specifically (4) in addition to other nearby states (NJ: 1; NY: 2; MD: 1; CT: 2; OH: 2) and international locations (Puerto Rico: 1). When explaining their reason for moving to Lancaster County, they all expressed reasons relating to employment.

Descriptions of Lancaster County
I asked each of the interviewees how they would describe Lancaster County to someone who does not live here. Their answers ranged from a description of the scenery to a description of the people and culture that make up the County.

Lancaster County’s landscape was described as “beautiful”, “peaceful” and “serene”. The residents expressed a sense of going “back in time” in Lancaster County. The horse-drawn buggies and simplistic farming methods of the plain sects give you a sense that you are in a time gone by.

Residents described the County as “family oriented” and “value-based”. Lancaster County residents were described as “nice, friendly” people, but at the same time, “closed” and “hard to get to know”. To be considered a “local”, you have to have been here all your life, and sometime even that doesn’t give you the designation; your parents and even their parents have to have been here all their lives. One gentleman explained that the County is “historically not an open community. You have to be here a long time. It’s not an open community.”
The Importance of Farming and its Preservation

Even though residents assigned different numbers to the importance of farming in the County, they all agreed that it is “very important” and “huge”. I asked them to rank the importance of farming on a scale from one to ten with ten being most important. The replies ranged from sevens to off the chart 10.5s. Farming, to these residents, is what makes Lancaster County, and the County would be “nothing without it”. “Lancaster County” by default, conjures up images of farming; “When I think of Lancaster County, I think of farming.” Farming was described as an integral part of the landscape in the County, and its “agricultural and Amish roots make this a special place.”

The importance of preserving farmland received similar responses, all agreeing that it is also very important. They rated the importance of farmland preservation from six to ten and one half. Most residents expressed the same matter of fact views about preserving farmland as they did about its general importance. “I wouldn’t want to lose it. It would change the whole place.” The question got some very serious, stern reactions from several of the residents who believe the County does not need more development, and who are actively involved in making sure farmland is preserved. One woman is a member of a local preservation group; she donates money; and attends public meetings to support preservation in the face of development. Another gentleman is a member of a local preservation group; was at one-time a member of the County Planning Commission; and was involved in drafting the Blue Ribbon Commission Report on Agriculture. This man stressed agriculture’s importance in Lancaster County; the special nature of it; and stated that they are currently attempting to preserve that heritage through preserving the land.

Other reactions were not as strong. Residents admitted that preservation is important, but alluding to a more complicated view. They followed up their statements regarding the importance of farmland preservation with comments about growth not always being a bad thing. For these residents, preservation and growth are both important, and they need to be balanced.

Personal Inconsistency

While talking about the importance of farming in the County, eight of the fourteen residents pointed out their personal inconsistencies before I asked the questions meant to tease them out. These residents laughed out loud at themselves in an ironic way, admitting their action to purchase their home went against what they just finished saying. One such resident spoke of the importance of preservation: “[It’s] way up there. It has to be. It’s the nature of the area. But we wouldn’t have a house if someone hadn’t sold their farmland. So, it sounds somewhat paradoxical but I think it has to be preserved...Without a question.”

The question that I used to draw out personal inconsistencies was, “some people would criticize developments like this one because it was built on what was farmland...how would you respond?” Some of the residents reacted to the question in a way that showed that they understand and appreciate the criticism. Twelve of the fourteen residents reacted this way, usually shaking their heads in agreement and expressing a belief in the validity of the criticism. They said that they agree with, appreciate, and understand the criticism. When asked about the criticism, one woman stated, “I understand it...perfectly.” They commented that the criticism is “true” and that the question was a “hard” one but a “good” one. There was agreement with the criticism: “I tend to agree with the criticism. I hate to see the farmland go. It will change the place.”

The other two residents (a married couple) didn’t necessarily invalidate the criticism, but they answered the question in a defensive way. The gentleman asked, “What wasn’t farmland?” He is very involved in farmland preservation efforts and has faced the criticism
before in a personal way. He explained that his decision to live on a half-acre lot on land that was farmland is frowned upon, especially considering his role in preservation efforts. But he says that he has to face this criticism and “someone was going to live here” so it may as well be him. According to him, it is better that he lives there than someone who does not understand the County’s culture.

**View of Self**
When faced with the inconsistency of their actions, residents pointed out that the development was already planned, approved, and in construction when they found it. Many, if not all the residents mentioned this fact and stated simply that “the house was already here” or “the battle is before the development happens.” One of the men I interviewed said honestly, “From a selfish perspective, if the development is already here, I’m not going to not buy as a boycott...once the farmland is turned into development, it’s fair game.” Another honest interviewee explained that when buying his house, he recognized where the land came from, but it wasn’t an inhibiting factor. He wouldn’t want to break ground on farmland, but this house was already built.

A married couple living in Kolbacre Ridge joked about having a Not-In-My-Back-Yard (NIMBY) type of attitude towards growth in the County. They explained that they had been somewhat naive when looking for a home to buy, marveling at how much tree clearing the developer had done to start construction. They finally realized that the land had been farmland and hadn’t been cleared at all: “Now I feel guilty living on farmland. I didn’t know it at the time. So, now we’re those people who don’t want anyone else to come in.” The other added, “We joke about ‘we’re here now and no one else can get in’ but we can’t do that even though we’d like to.”

One of the couples that I interviewed spoke of their decision to buy their home as a last resort in a time crunch. They spoke of making decisions about where they live differently in the future and they were not comfortable with knowing that they were living on what was a farm. “It sounds hypocritical to live in a home on what was farmland. We ended up here because I couldn’t find anything else. But going forward I would want to see places like this preserved. If that means you have to live somewhere else, you have to live somewhere else.”

A majority of residents responded to the conflict between preservation and development by describing a “balance”. The term was used countless times in the interviews in different contexts. Some of the residents mentioned the Amish farm as an example of balance. One of the residents believed that the developers of Kolbacre Ridge had maintained a balance by keeping the farmhouse and barn that went with the land. By doing that, they had “preserved the integrity of the land.”

Some residents focused on what they do to support agriculture in the County. They buy produce from local farms, give money to local preservation efforts, and attend public meetings. One resident expressed a desire to see more revitalization in downtown Lancaster in order to offset the development of farmland.

Most of the residents spoke of the situation as a difficult balancing act between two good things: growth and farmland preservation. They explained that as long as there has been good planning, the County should be able to balance the two. One resident of Kolbacre Ridge expressed the complicated nature of the issue: It’s “tough” because he’s a mortgage banker and therefore facilitates growth in the County. But he recognizes that agriculture is what makes the place special. “I hate to give that up. It’s very important that a plan is in place to preserve a significant amount of agriculture...It would be hypocritical of me to say
that I support it [preservation] because I purchased a home where it was formally farmland...But as long as there is a plan to preserve a significant portion, what is being developed should be acceptable.”

In response to the conflict, one of the residents sat back in his chair, took a deep breath and explained the two conflicting sides of his own thoughts, “part of me is the capitalist...I wouldn’t want to take the opportunity away from people...I wouldn’t want people to tell me I can’t sell it for my benefit. On the flip side, I think there should be planning...a thoughtful process. When looking at a development, you’re not thinking about planning. I hope there is some kind of conscious planning effort when doing this.”

“It’s hard...we have to build houses...but I would hate to lose it.”

“What can we say? We live on what used to be agricultural land five years ago. But I hate to see it being swallowed up by development and lose this rural nature.”

“Life is about balance. We can’t develop it all. But we can’t limit growth...There must be a balance between the two.”
A range of ages and backgrounds were represented by the residents that were interviewed, but the selection of cases and interviewees were not done in a statistically random way. So, the results of the interviews must be seen in light of this qualification. Generalizations from the interviews are not based on a statistically appropriate sample. The results of the interviews done in each location are not necessarily the views of the entire population of residents in each development. Additionally, the results of the two case studies are not necessarily reflective of the views of Lancaster County residents as a population. They are however, results and views of some Lancaster County residents and therefore worth talking about. Keeping in mind these qualifications, I will make some observations about what came from the interviews.

The Farmers/Developers
In the first case, Clearview Gardens, the land owner developed the farmland as a means to an end; it being the way to make the construction of a new church feasible. In the second case, Kolbacre Ridge, the land owners always intended to develop the farmland to make a profit. They were simply following the American tradition of speculating on land and exercising their property rights.

Both land owners spoke very highly of agriculture in the County and of the County’s efforts to preserve farmland. Even though neither of the two land owners explicitly stated that they “support” the preservation program, they spoke of it as “good” and seemed supportive. To these landowners, they were not necessarily by developing the land doing anything to hinder preservation efforts. Both stressed the fact that their land was zoned for residential development and they were merely playing their part in the balance of farmland preservation and development. In their minds, the owners were merely doing what the local government meant for the land. In fact, according to Mr. Wissler, he was not only providing housing as part of the balance, he was helping the preservation effort by building a denser development. He “did it right” by creating small lots so as to not take up more farmland. He “got more people on the land” which will in his mind save other farmland from development.

These land owners put a lot of stock in the fact that the land was zoned for development. For them, it was permission to do so. This makes perfect sense if the locality has carefully planned out a “balance” of development and preserving farmland like these land owners assume they have. The land owners do not have to feel so conflicted about their decision to develop farmland because they know that it was slated for development. If they hadn’t done it, some other guy would have. It’s part of the plan...part of the balance because it is zoned as such. Believing this, the land owners can happily support preservation efforts in the County. They can talk about the importance of agriculture, and advocate a “balance” between these two opposing forces. It just so happened that their pieces of farmland were zoned for development.

Going back to my original question of how these individuals deal with the inconsistencies that they face, my suspicion was correct. They continue to simultaneously hold two conflicting views. They are ambivalent. They justify their action of developing farmland by taking their discretion out of the picture. They assume that someone (the local political body) is keeping track of the balance that they seek, so they do not have to think about their role in the balance.
Residents
The first thing to take away from the resident interviews is that none of them thought about their action of buying a home as having something to do with farmland. There are so many other things going on in the minds of people who are in the process of looking for and purchasing a home that it doesn’t occur to them to think of their decision in reference to larger goals and desires. I was told that “you just aren’t thinking about the comprehensive plan when you’re looking for a home.” None of the residents that I interviewed from both locations had any reservations about moving to a home that was built on what was farmland prior to development. They simply did not think about it. They needed a place to live (some on very short notice) and they found a place to live.

Some of the residents, especially those from Kolbacre Ridge, expressed that they were ignorant of the severity of the conflict prior to moving to the area. As I described above, one man had marveled at how many trees they must have cut down to clear the land, only later to realize that it having been farmland, no trees were cut down.

From the interviews, it is evident that the residents are ambivalent; holding simultaneous contradictory desires/beliefs. They may have purchased a home on what was farmland prior to development and think somewhat favorably about growth, but they also want to see the County’s farmland and agricultural way of life preserved. The two opposing forces, as some called them, are alive and well within individuals.

The single-family homeowner hopes to procure a small piece of nature’s beneficence and to attain financial security. The conservationist hopes to preserve enough of larger nature’s beneficence for everyone to share. And, of course, the single-family homeowner and conservationist are often one and the same person (Mackin, 194).

All of the thirty residents that I interviewed (with the exception of maybe 2 or 3) spoke of a necessary “balance” between the two conflicting desires of growth and farmland preservation. This balance, which most likely looks different to each individual, is seen as somewhere on a scale that has supreme property rights on one end and farmland as a public good on the other. The two extreme ends illustrate two opposite views of what land is. On the development/property rights side, land is viewed as private property which can be used by the owner in whatever way he wishes (and is allowed by law to do). On the other end of the spectrum, land is viewed as a common resource, a common heritage that is a public good that should be provided for everyone.⁷ The “balance” that the interviewees spoke of is also informed by different views of growth. The balance that these people talk about depends on whether growth is viewed as a good thing that is desired, a bad thing to be avoided, or simply inevitable and unstoppable.

Even though they advocate a balance between development and preservation, they still made the choice to either develop farmland as a land owner, or purchase a home that was built on the farmland as a resident. The interviews show that even when people want to preserve/maintain/conserve something of great importance, they will not do so when faced with individual decisions about land. Actions will not necessarily (and in this case did not) follow beliefs when beliefs are complicated and contradictory.

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⁷ Public goods are non-excludable (you can’t keep people from consuming them freely) and non-rival (other people’s consumption of the good does not decrease its availability to others). An example of farmland as a public good is the scenery that it provides.
The individual’s approach to land, according to planner and writer, Anne Mackin, does not encompass the larger picture. An individual, when looking for a home, is not thinking about the land as a portion of the common resources that we all must share. Therefore, “there are limitations of the individual’s hallowed relationship with the land” (Mackin, 2006, 194). And even when the individual does think about and acknowledges the larger picture, he or she will do what is in his or her self-interest even if it means harming others in society.

This is a classic case of what economists call “tragedy of the commons.” The assumption in our market-based society is that “decisions reached individually will be the best decisions for an entire society” (Hardin, 1964, 8). However, this assumption is not always correct. With common land, self-interested, individual decisions bring its ruin. Garrett Hardin in his classic writing, “Tragedy of the Commons,” asks us to imagine a pasture that is open to all. Individuals using the pasture will in order to get the maximum gain, put out the most cattle possible, even to the point of over grazing. “Each man is locked in a system that compels each of them to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited. “Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all” (Hardin, 1964, 8).

Even though Lancaster County is not truly a “common” in the economic sense, it is thought of as a common. It is for many reasons, a cherished place that transcends local importance. It is a place of national history, culture and natural resources. In being such, it is a sort of common. Tom Daniels labels Lancaster County farmland as “private property with public good aspects”. Left to the market, farmland as a public good will be under-produced due to the fact that its true full value cannot be correctly assessed by the market. Daniels explains, “You can charge for the produce, but not for the scenery.” With a public good, we also run into the “free rider problem” which is the “reluctance of individuals to contribute voluntarily to the support of public goods” (Stiglitz, 2000, 131). Basically, everyone takes advantage of others’ actions; individuals will not voluntarily contribute because they expect someone else to do it. An example in the case of farmland preservation is that the development of farmland is carried out by individuals who expect another guy to preserve his farmland. Individuals make decisions based on their interests and expect someone else to do what is best for society.

Landowners are trapped in a tragedy not of their own making, but one in which their efforts to maximize individual self-interest do not further society’s interest…Individuals thus make land use management decisions that take account neither the broader public interest nor a more expansive economic calculus (Jacobs, 1999, 144).

Small individual decisions about property add up to larger changes. This is what is happening in Lancaster County. Individual decisions and actions about the County’s land as private property are adding up to larger, more tragic changes to the County’s common heritage. This is exactly what is meant by a “tragedy of the commons”. “Tragedy” is used in the dramatic sense: “The essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things” (Hardin, 1964, 9).

Property rights, which are supposed to avert the tragedy of the commons, are paradoxically, in this case leading to its demise. This is the problem that was expressed by residents of Clearview Gardens and Kolbacre Ridge, whether they realized it or not. They talked about one side of them being pro property rights—not wanting to take those rights away from land
owners, but at the same time lamenting the possible loss of the common farming heritage and culture. Their answer, as stated before, is a “balance.”

“Balance” is a good way to justify the action of buying the home and still supporting preservation. This may solve the dissonance in their minds. They can use “balance” to justify, support or oppose both efforts. Whichever is in their interest at the time. At Kolbacre, they bought houses (were a part of the growth) and now oppose development nearby (part of the preservation effort).

The residents that were interviewed not only talked about a needed balance, but spoke about the balance as if it has been clearly defined by someone somewhere and they are taking care of its realization. The County was mentioned many times in reference to this. Residents made a big assumption that government at some level is taking care of things.
Informing the Balance: A Role for the County

The way in which residents spoke of a "balance" assumed that there is someone somewhere making sure that a balance is being achieved. The "someone" in this assumption almost always was alluded to as being the County government. Because the County recently completed a county-wide growth management plan, residents assume that the County is implementing the balance that the plan prescribes.\(^8\)

What the residents do not acknowledge is that the County admittedly does not have the authority to implement the growth management plan. Instead, it is relying on each of the local governments to "buy in" to the County plan and implement it locally.

> Successful implementation will depend on effective action at the municipal and county levels, which in turn will depend on understanding and buy-in by municipal officials, citizens, property owners, developers, and others involved in decision-making processes (LCPC, Balance, 2006, 3-8).

Zoning, the primary tool to direct and control new development (and achieve a balance) is controlled by each township, city or borough and is not subject to coordination with its neighboring municipalities. The County can and does make suggestions to localities as to what the zoning should look like, but it cannot force implementation. This is not to say that the County isn’t doing anything about the issue. The County’s Agricultural Preserve Board is contributing to the effort by purchasing conservation easements from Lancaster County farmers in order to prevent development of the farms.

Additionally, the County is leading the necessary planning effort to envision the County’s future, by taking on a community process to create a county-wide growth management plan. Essentially, the County is providing information to local governments to use to implement their piece of the County’s purported balance. This role of providing information should not be overlooked and underestimated. In fact, since the County is limited in its use of typical government tools such as regulation and incentives, it should earnestly take on the role of providing information as a critical government tool.

Information as a Tool of Government

Information is essential to the effectiveness of government in whatever they are trying to achieve. The public must be informed of laws, programs and initiatives in order for government to function properly. In order to regulate effectively, the public needs to know the laws. In order for incentives to be effective, the public must know they are available. But information is not merely “an oil that helps other tools do their jobs more smoothly,” but a tool in itself (Schuster, 1997, 101).

According to J. Mark Schuster, Professor of Urban Cultural Policy at MIT, this “often underestimated and underappreciated” tool of information can be used as a separate tool of intervention to achieve three objectives (Schuster, 1997, 100):

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\(^8\) The County growth management plan, “Balance” lays out a plan to concentrate new development in existing developed areas called “growth areas”. The new growth would be concentrated around existing cities, towns and villages that have public infrastructure to support medium density development. These areas are looked as growth boundaries outside of which agricultural land is to be kept agricultural.
1. Inform the public of laws and tools available to meet goals
2. Give significance: Inform the public of existence and importance
3. Spur others to action and guide them in action

The first objective is the role that is commonly thought of regarding the provision of information. The other two, which are given less attention, assume an active role of information as a tool. The Blue Ribbon Commission Report (2006) alludes to all three roles that information can play in achieving the County’s goals:

Improved communication between producers, government and the general public will lead to a better understanding of the issues affecting Lancaster County agriculture and consensus on its future direction. Despite Lancaster’s agricultural heritage, the farming industry and its importance to the county’s economy are foreign to many of its residents. This lack of awareness and understanding leads to disagreement, lack of support and sometimes, the enactment of poorly conceived ordinances and regulations. Progress would be possible if producers had the means to share their stories with their non-farm neighbors and display the positive attributes of farming (11).

While interviewing Lancaster County residents, three distinct themes emerged from the discussions. There was a misunderstanding about the authority of the County in implementing the county-wide initiatives toward balance. There was a lament in the voices of newcomers; they were not aware of the importance of the agricultural land until after they got here. The final theme that emerged was feelings toward the market. Residents either looked at the market’s version of balance as inevitable or even satisfactory. These themes emerged from discussion with only thirty residents of the County, but they cannot be exclusive to this group. Even though the group interviewed is not statistically representative of the County population, the themes were unmistakable and seem to accurately represent the County’s residents. Should the County choose information as a tool of intervention, County residents, along with all of us, will have a better understanding of what a balance of preservation and growth can look like, and how to achieve it. The following are ways in which I believe the County can provide the opportunity for a better informed public and therefore a better informed balance.

**Political System**
First, the county needs to be upfront about its lack of authority in implementing its growth management plan. They haven’t been deceptive about it. They’ve stated clearly that the county plan will require coordination from each locality. But, what I witnessed in the interviews suggests that people aren’t fully aware of the mechanics of what this means; what it requires. Residents do not necessarily know that it means they need to make sure their township or borough is taking action to comply with county-wide goals. Residents do not necessarily know that the County doesn’t have the political authority to force compliance with the plan.

The County can provide information to residents about their political system. The County can inform residents of not only what needs to be achieved to comply with larger goals, but also how to implement them. If residents don’t understand their political system, they are not going to understand how to address the problem.
A Public Service Announcement
During the interviews, countless residents expressed an honest ignorance of the issue at the time they were moving to the County. Having grown up in other parts of the Country, the conflict was not evident to them. These newcomers had heard that Lancaster County is a “great place to live” and took that advice when relocating, usually because of a job change. All they knew was that they needed a house to live in.

The real estate industry isn’t going to advertise the fact that they are destroying farmland. So, it’s not hard to understand how newcomers may be unaware of their role in the balance of preservation and development. Here is another example of how the County could provide information in a way that will help people make better informed decisions. The County can provide information to potential incoming residents about how their choices affect the goals of Lancaster County, and the goals of society. A public service announcement could be provided to avoid the type of statements I heard from newcomers:

“You’re not thinking about a comprehensive plan when buying a house.”
“We didn’t know the urgency…the importance.”
“I didn’t know it’s a problem till I got here.”

Those looking to move to Lancaster County may think that it is a place where they will be able to enjoy a suburban lifestyle. They should be warned that Lancaster County does not aspire to be suburban; its efforts are to avoid this. Instead, new development will be more dense, and compact in order to preserve the rural, agricultural land that is critically important to its residents and society as a whole.

Having this kind of warning will prepare future residents for the style of housing that will be available to them and will inform their expectations of what life will be like in Lancaster County. People looking for a suburban lifestyle can heed the warning and make a better choice of where to live.

Lancaster County has shown after just a few short years of implementing their urban-growth boundary that the density of five dwellings per acre cannot be achieved without serious attitudinal adjustments of residents or through strict density requirements. New residents would have to change their living habits and expectations of the "American Dream" in order to accommodate the County’s expected density requirements. Ironically, this would require people moving into the region to adopt a lifestyle that directly contradicts their reasons for moving to Lancaster County. New residents looking for a rural lifestyle would have to adopt an urban/high-density suburban lifestyle (Staley, Edgens, Mildner, 1999).

Although additional research is needed to ascertain exactly how this message could be effectively conveyed, the county level seems to be the most logical level to broadcast this warning. The County is in the position to coordinate with industries, individuals, and local governments to create a joint effort.

The Limits of the Market
Possibly the most important way that the County can carry out the goal of balance is to educate and inform the public about the relationship between agriculture and the market.
Some of the people that I interviewed spoke of the balance being “up to the market” in a solemn evitable way, and most of the others alluded to it in some way. A few of them (less than 5) added that the balance of preserving farmland and developing farmland should be left to the market. But others used language and expressions that implied that it’s just the way it is, no matter if we like it or not. It’s inevitable and we just have to accept it, even if we don’t want to. There are some things that residents should know about the market and agricultural land before they accept what they see as inevitable. The market is seen as a force of nature.

The first thing they need to know is the significance of agriculture (and this particular type of agriculture) and the fact that the market does not fully value the land. So, the market is going to leave less farmland than what society would deem optimal. The County can take on a role of informing the public about the full importance of Lancaster County agriculture; not only the importance of agriculture as economic/food production, but also importance of this small scale way of farming in soil management, energy consumption, heritage, sustainability, nutrition, and ultimately health.

I doubt that the general public wants to preserve agriculture primarily for economic reasons, even though these reasons are important. Agricultural land is not just a food machine. It’s more fundamental and valuable than a mere input in the production of a commodity. As I explained before, because farmland provides priceless benefits, the market is not capable of valuing farmland properly. For instance, farmers are not compensated for their excellent stewardship of the soil. In fact, they have every incentive not to be sustainable, take advantage of the land, and produce waste instead of a closed circuit system.

Lancaster County’s small scale family farms (especially the Amish farms) have a strong tradition of respecting the soil and caring for it as more than a means to an end. These small farms are being cared for in ways that keeps the soil’s reputation as some of the most fertile soil in the world. That’s due to centuries of stewardship; caring for the land.

However, we don’t put an economic value on this. Instead, the market favors large scale corporate farms that are producing enormous amounts of waste in the process of producing large quantities of food. The soil is used and not properly cared for. It’s just input to use to make money. These farms may produce a lot of food, but they are not producing a lot of nutritious food due to mismanagement of the soil. Lancaster County farms, on the other hand, are examples of how farming can be done in a more sustainable way that has survived from the beginning of the Europeans’ arrival on the land. They are examples of closed circle processes that produce little waste and use a lot less energy and pollutants.

The value of the land as such is underappreciated in the market. “In the market for farmland, the private market price of farmland is generally lower than the social price. The private price does not include the public good aspect of farmland, those environmental services such as open space that society values but may not pay for” (Daniels, 1999, Cautionary Response for Farmland Preservation).

But if residents have a better understanding of how the market values, or in this case doesn’t value, things, they will have a deeper understanding of the land’s importance. They will understand the reason for special actions and interventions to preserve the land (including government action). They will understand the importance of buying their food locally, not only to support farmers financially, but to improve their own health and well-being. It is possible that they will see that the development of farmland is not inevitable.
Education can counteract the natural tendency to do the wrong thing, but the inexorable succession of generations requires that the basis for this knowledge be constantly refreshed (Garrett, 1964, 10).

Information can and does change behavior. At the very least, it provides individuals and communities the opportunity to make better informed choices about their future.

It is my recommendation that the County government specifically take on the provision of information as its primary tool of intervention. I’m not advocating information as the tool that the County should use; they should continue to purchase conservation easements to preserve farmland. But let’s not underestimate the power of information; and the power of continually providing it.

Although additional research is necessary to prescribe how the County should provide the information, I have some thoughts on what might be effective ways of doing it. A picture is worth a thousand words. Information should be conveyed visually. Show them what you’re saying by using mediums such as pictures and film. I think aerial photos of the County are especially important as many Lancaster County natives are unaware of what their land looks like. It’s very hard to see the effects of gradual growth. If you drive past the same scenery everyday, you will be hard-pressed to notice (or be outraged by) small changes. Another way of showing residents the issue is to recognize farms that have been preserved with physical markers not unlike historic preservation plaques. Visual markers of this kind will distinguish farms that are protected from development from those that are not. Thus informing residents of their surroundings and possibly instigating action. Also, the importance of narratives should not be overlooked. Stories are very effective ways of making a personal connection.
9 Conclusion

What I found in my research is that residents deal with the inconsistency that they face by being ambivalent towards the issue. They want a “balance” of new development and farmland preservation. However, a balance is a tricky thing that requires as much information as possible in order to assign the correct values to each side. It would be tragic to undervalue one side or another and down the road realize that our balance is terribly off.

Using information to make the public aware of the complex situation that the future of Lancaster County’s farmland is facing will enable all of us to realize the full value of the land. When people realize the full importance of the land and its value (the value that the market doesn’t reflect), the “balance” may shift. The balance may change when we realize that the kind of farms that produce nutritious food are not the ones that produce the greatest quantity of food, but the ones that manage and care for their soil in a sustainable way.

Education and information can help us start to think of our land as the common, fundamental, irreplaceable substance that it is. The land and the soil that sustain us are more important than the exercise of property rights by individuals. We have to challenge and rethink the way we have treated land: as a commodity that belongs to individuals. “For solutions to work, there will need to be dramatic changes in the attitude of Americans toward land, community, and the regions in which they live. Land is not only an asset in a portfolio; it is a piece of a community” (Daniels, 1999, When City and Country Collide, 266).

In order to make decisions and act appropriately, people need to know the full value of Lancaster County’s farmland. They need to know that the market will not adequately value it. They need to know that the County is limited in its ability to implement its comprehensive growth management plan. They need to know that local governments will ultimately decide what the County’s landscape will look like. Information is necessary as a catalyst to achieve a balance of farmland preservation and growth.

Part of this effort—the part that will change behavior and raise political awareness to demand reforms—will be an educational campaign to restore our understanding of our part in the natural world and the natural systems that sustain us as well as the man-made systems that apportion it (Mackin, 2006, 211).

Information is crucial to achieving the balance of preservation and development that Lancaster County’s residents are calling for. But because of the system we live in, information alone will not assure that the balance is achieved. We live in a system of property rights that incentivize individual actions over actions that are best for society as a whole. We live in a laissez faire society that assumes that “decisions reached individually will be the best decisions for an entire society” (Hardin, 1964, 8). However, as Hardin (1964) states, “If the assumption is wrong, individual freedoms need to be reexamined to see which are defensible” (8).

This is a basic reason why governments exist; to put a check on individual rights so that they do not trample on societal rights. Government’s role is to look out for the public good. In Lancaster County’s case, authority to regulate land use is at the local level. Action on this level is necessary if we wish to keep Lancaster County’s farming landscape and tradition while continuing to grow.
Local Responsibilities

Zoning is quite possibly the most important tool local governments have to direct and balance development and preservation in Lancaster County. Considering how the farm owners/developers and residents that I interviewed saw zoning as a signal as to whether development was appropriate or not, zoning is very important. The people I interviewed assumed that parcels have been designated for development or agriculture resulting from careful planning which reflects the county-wide goal of balance. This may or may not be the case.

Some local governments have adopted the zoning necessary to comply with the County’s growth management plan, while others have not. The plan calls for local governments to zone the land in designated growth areas surrounding towns and villages for additional development; directing growth to these already developed areas. Land outside the designated growth areas is to be zoned for agricultural use, continuing the farming tradition in Lancaster County. The County’s plan for growth management depends on local action. Zoning is done locally. So, the local governments are the ones who will implement the County wide plan; it depends on them.

In addition to zoning land for appropriate use, local governments need to zone the land for appropriate density in designated growth areas. You can think of it as taking the development potential of all the agricultural land outside the growth areas and fitting it inside the growth areas; transferring development from farmland to existing towns and villages. This can be done with zoning and/or a system of transfer of development rights (TDR). Considering the current land use climate, a system of TDR may be more palatable to landowners outside of growth areas. Additional research is necessary to determine whether local government should use TDR or simply zone the land to comply with the County’s growth management plan.

Some of the County’s local governments have already adopted zoning to reflect the goal of balancing development and farmland preservation; others have not. It should not be assumed that because a parcel is zoned for residential use (or any other use) that it has been designated as such with larger county-wide goals in mind. Implementation of a balance in Lancaster County depends on local government action; zoning to direct development away from farmland.

So far, development is still taking place in areas intending to remain agricultural. Lancaster County residents need to pressure their local governments to act in order to change this occurrence. Local governments often operate with the assumption that they need development, and the taxes that come with it, in order to survive. This logic is questionable. At lower densities, residential development has been shown to cost more to local governments (schools, utilities, etc.) than the taxes they bring in. And, if you’re merely transferring development from one area to another by zoning for higher densities in growth areas, you aren’t losing any tax revenues by keeping farmland from being developed.

Directing development away from farmland and concentrating it around already developed areas may look and feel out of character at first. Lancaster County is not accustomed to denser development, but that’s the problem. A “balance” is possible only if local governments commit to appropriately zoning land for use and density. If they do not, current trends will continue. Homes will continue to be built on large plots, eating up the farmland in areas not designated for growth.
## Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>To appropriately value the County’s agricultural land. People are able to make better informed decisions and know what actions to take.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDR</td>
<td>Alternative for farmers who need to sell their land. The conservation easements purchased prohibit development in perpetuity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>A way to identify the balance. Provides a framework to guide local action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zoning/TDR</td>
<td>Local power to direct and control development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDR</td>
<td>Local government can join the County in purchasing conservation easements from farmers to preserve the land.¹⁰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Program</td>
<td>To compliment the Clean and Green tax program that reduces taxes for farmers, development could be taxed at higher rates to fund farmland preservation efforts. A preservation fee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### The Ever Elusive "Balance"

I have thrown the term "balance" around in this document, just as was done by Lancaster County residents in the interviews I conducted. It has not been defined. I don’t know that I can define it. I don’t know that any of my interviewees could define it.

It’s an idea. But it’s not a clear picture. What does it mean?

Everyone has something different in mind when they talk about a balance of farmland preservation and growth. And even in those individuals’ minds, the balance looks different at different scales.

Some residents saw preserving the Amish house and barn at Kolbacre Ridge as a balance. Most of the land was developed but the “integrity” and “history” of the land was kept by setting aside ten acres for the farm. Residents saw a balance in Mr. Wissler’s decision to develop part of his farm and keeping the rest agricultural. However, I doubt that the balance that these residents have in mind is one with a few token farms scattered here and there. I think they would agree that the balance includes keeping the landscaping overwhelmingly agricultural.

¹⁰ Some townships are already doing this; they have purchased conservation easements from farmers with public money. There seems to be support for this. Many of the residents that I interviewed said that they would support the cause financially. Townships and boroughs may want to consider adding an optional tax contribution on income tax forms to support a local program.
On the county level, designated growth areas, which serve as informal growth boundaries, can be seen as a balance. Development is allowed inside the designated areas, but not outside. However, when it comes down to it, everyone wants to live in a house surrounded by beautiful farmland. Residents are wary of modestly dense development even in growth areas, where it is appropriate. They are wary because they want a balance of farmland and development around them. They are living in the development and therefore should be surrounded by farmland. They want to be the last one in, and they want to shut the door. These residents also oppose development in growth areas because they are not seeing the intended results. The way it is supposed work is that building denser in growth areas will help keep development from eating up the farmland. However, since not all communities have adopted the necessary zoning, development continues to happen outside of growth areas. These residents are being asked to accept more density but are not getting the promised benefit of saving farmland.

Balance looks different at the individual level than it does at a county-wide level. A county-wide balance requires development to be concentrated, taking away individual balance. If you zoom out to an even larger view of balance, it changes once more. When I think about Lancaster County’s farmland and the importance of it both as a natural resource and a cultural resource, in the context of the nation, “balance” seems to be an inappropriate term. Viewing the County at this level suggests that when developing its soil, we are using the wrong land. Perhaps “balance” in Lancaster County’s case doesn’t include any development.

If “balance” is what Lancaster County residents want, they need to identify what the balance looks like and who it is for. “Balance” can be used to justify actions that are not appropriate in the larger view of the County. “Balance” can be used as a way to talk about inconsistent actions such as the ones exhibited in the preceding interviews. It can be talked about until everyone is blue in the face and still not be defined for productive action.

In order to define the balance, the County must seriously take on a role of providing information. They need to inform residents of their political system as a catalyst for action; they need to inform potential residents of the County’s situation; and most importantly, they need to identify the value of the land that the market doesn’t recognize. These things will help us reach an informed balance.

A balance of development and preservation depends on local governments using their regulatory powers to direct growth to appropriate locations. It depends on localities zoning their land for appropriate use and density. Local governments have the power and opportunity to shape the County’s landscape; they just need to make the effort.

If “balance” is what is appropriate for the County’s farmland, clear lines must be drawn. If they are not, the story’s ending will be a tragic one. It will be a tragedy in the dramatic sense; the eventual workings out of things. And we won’t be able to go back.

“Land is unique. Land is a fixed, non-producible resource.” –Harvey Jacobs

“We must live on our land as if we wanted to stay forever.” –Anne Mackin
List of Interviewees

Senator Noah Wenger
Glenn Wissler
Annette Hoefner
Amy Philbrick
Helena Holbritter
Elizabeth Groff
Andrew Garman
Julie Garman
David Roberts
Mary Ann Roberts
Allen Ramsey
Betty Lou Ramsey
K. Ruth Eberly
Leon Eberly
Paulette Parker
Wayne Parker
Germinia Friborg
Donald Robinson
Roxanne Edwards
John Edwards
Catherine Geitner
Sonia Cutillo
Andrew Cardina
Lizza Slingluss
And ten other individuals who wish to remain anonymous.
References


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Charter Homes. www.charterhomes.com


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Landmark Builders Inc. www.landmarkbuildersinc.com


National Trust for Historic Preservation. www.nationaltrust.org


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