



To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

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Michael McGrath, DDA Chief of Planning is retiring on June 30th **His 28 years at the helm of land use, planning and preservation celebrated.**



*Jack Tarburton, Delaware/Maryland State Director
USDA Rural Development, Michael McGrath, Ed Kee,
Delaware Secretary of Agriculture*

On Thursday, June 16, 2011 Delaware Secretary of Agriculture, Ed Kee, welcomed family, friends and colleagues of Michael (Mike) McGrath, Chief of Planning of the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), who gathered to salute McGrath as he retires from DDA. The event, at the Agricultural Museum and Village, was held to celebrate Mike's illustrious service to the state and its citizens, and his outstanding stewardship of its farmland. During the event, tributes and letters were presented from the American Farmland Trust, Governor Jack Markell, the Delaware General Assembly, New Castle County, Kent County, and Congressman John Carney.

On McGrath's watch of more than twenty-eight years he managed the work of the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation and the Planning Section in DDA and led the Department's efforts in statewide land use planning and agricultural development. During this period Delaware and the Foundation developed and implemented a nationally recognized farmland preservation program that:

- Leads the region in the percentage of the state's land area permanently preserved
- Has preserved nearly one-third of Delaware's farmland
- Leads all states per capita spending to preserve farmland.
- Preserved 1,090 farms and more than 155,000 acres of farmland in Preservation Districts.
- Permanently preserved 639 of those farms and more than 100,000 of those acres
- Has another 60,000 acres of development rights waiting to be acquired.

Through his commitment and stewardship Mike led the way to safeguarding our agricultural heritage by maintaining a suitable land base for sustaining and growing our industry and our way of life for future generations. Also, his endeavors have enhanced our quality of life by facilitating the preservation of open space for us and valuable habitat for wildlife.

Deborah Bowers, *Farmland Preservation Report*, said, "No other state farmland preservation program in the United States has been led by one individual for so long, and no other program has been led as efficiently and successfully as the program in Delaware. Delaware has been very fortunate to have had Mike McGrath's leadership."

In his remarks, Ed Kee said: "Mike has managed a very complex and challenging program from its inception. This required a high level of intellectual ability to not only understand the program, but to convey to a sometimes skeptical public of its potential and the good it could do. Mike communicated all of that before, during and after the program's birth. Necessarily, and fortunately for Delaware's Agriculture, he has always demonstrated the highest levels of integrity, which along with his complete openness and transparency, generated the people's trust in the program. Michael McGrath, your skill and commitment has made a real difference for Delaware and agriculture in our great state."

Governor Markell said: "Mike has made a lasting contribution to preserving our farmland. Whether they know it or not, this contribution has been felt by Delawareans and visitors across the state. Our agricultural heritage is an important element of the high quality of life that Delawareans enjoy, and that is critical to our economic future. Congratulations to Mike on his retirement - I hope he realizes that the work he had done will continue to make a difference for a very long time."

Bob Garey, current chairman of the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation said: "Mike McGrath, I believe is a cornerstone of the Ag Lands Preservation Foundation. He has been with us from the beginning and we will always treasure his efforts."

McGrath has been active in land use planning throughout his career in public service. In 1974 he began working for New Castle County and led county efforts in farmland assessment and economic development. He was lead planner for the county in downtown revitalization efforts in Middletown and projects to bring affordable housing to the area."

Senator Chris Coons said, "Throughout his career in planning, Mike's sound judgment at every level of government has had an indelible impact on Delaware's landscape. And today, our state boasts a Farmland Preservation Program that's second to none and much of its success is due to Mike's thoughtful and steady leadership for so many years. I thank Mike for his service, congratulate him on his terrific career and wish him the best as he embarks on this wonderful new adventure."

In closing remarks, Mike McGrath said: "The future of Delaware's high quality of life is still at risk from uncontrolled development. With this hiatus in development pressure we have a chance, going forward, of preserving even more farmland by preservation efforts and better growth planning. Our efforts in preservation have laid a solid basis for the future. . . . it's been a joy to see Delaware's landowners fulfill their dream of permanently protecting their land."

He concluded with a poignant comment about advice from his late father, Harold, "My father told me as a young man, 'Try to do something in your work which you would do, even if you wouldn't be paid for doing it!' I've been blessed in my career to be able to do exactly that for the last 28 years."

Additional biographic information:

- Mike was born on a small vegetable farm in Southern New Castle County where his mother and father grew greenhouse crops and sold produce at the King Street Farmers' Market in Wilmington. Michael operated the family greenhouse business for five years, marketing vegetable plants and ornamentals to retail outlets the length of the Delmarva Peninsula.
- McGrath is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). He speaks extensively nationally on farmland preservation and the use of advanced geographic information systems in land

use planning and modeling. In the past, he presented a paper before the American Planning Association's National Planning Conference. He has served as president of the *Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture*, the nation's oldest agricultural organization (1785), and is now a member of its Executive Committee.

- Mike has been a member of the Boy Scouts of America since 1957, serving both as a local scoutmaster and regional training leader.
- Mike served on the Smyrna School Board, and has been a member of his volunteer fire department, the Smyrna Citizens Hose Company No. 1 since 1964. He has also served on a wide array of boards and other public service committees.
- Mike and his wife, Joan, live in Smyrna, Delaware, and are the parents of three children: Joy, Assistant to the Provost, Yale University, Joshua McGrath, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Hope, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. Joy and Hope are alumnae of St. Andrew's School in Delaware.



McGrath Family

Back row: Joan McGrath, Cindy Brown, Peggy Joyce Hutchins, Brian Brown, Joy McGrath, Michael McGrath, Joshua McGrath Front row: Hope McGrath, Harriet Bradley

High resolution copies of pictures are available: anne.fitzgerald@state.de.us

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