CONSERVATION ECONOMICS

A Bright Future for an Old Farm

Executive Summary:

The Delaware Valley University (DelVal), a small, private university located in Doylestown, PA, aspired to transform the gift of an old, working farm into an educational asset that would support the mission of the University and achieve a sustainable revenue stream.

Conservation Economics (CE) was engaged to identify the opportunities available through this property, assess potential uses that could provide income consistent with the University's strategic plans, and facilitate their implementation.

Conservation Economics:

- Performed a thorough assessment of the natural resources, historical and existing infrastructure, and the University's perspectives on the project
- Made recommendations for sustainable uses that aligned with DelVal's mission, vision and values, as well as the values of the donor
- Prepared and managed Request for Proposals for vendor and investors interested in monetizing this underutilized asset.

Client Challenge:

As it grew from a small, private college in Doylestown, PA, into a more regional University, DelVal looked to the gift of a 286-acre Farm for more space, expanded programs and opportunities for generating additional revenue. The University was challenged with integrating the Farm into their academic programs and finding uses that would financially support those programs, while ensuring they were aligned with their mission.

Faculty and administrators at the University had many ideas about how best to use the Farm, and it was essential to include their input into the visioning process. There were also cost considerations related to maintaining fields, forests and infrastructure while finding capital for proposed improvements.

Conservation Economics Solution:

DelVal engaged Conservation Economics (CE) to recommend uses of the Farm and initiate contact with potential vendors and investors. Proposed uses had to be screened for environmental sustainability, economic feasibility, and mutual compatibility, as well as the mission of the University and the stipulations of the donor.

CE recommended a unique combination of land uses that could ultimately drive significant, sustainable revenue growth. Possibilities for the land included:

- solar, wind or biomass energy generation
- eco-lodging, events and recreation
- carbon sequestration
- apiary
- composting

Many of these options could serve a dual purpose of creating robust opportunities for education while generating income.

Results:

CE prepared and distributed Request for Proposals to appropriate private and public-sector businesses and organizations including renewable energy developers, conservation-based commercial developers, educational partners, agricultural developers, and financing organizations. A proposal for a native plant nursery was also being considered.

In addition, based on CE's recommendations, they are considering moving their equestrian program from the main campus to the farm.