

## Stewardship Returns Value

*‘When the land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land – when both end up better by reason of their partnership – then we have conservation’* Aldo Leopold

Designers today, whether dealing with architecture or landscape, must understand the dynamics of country life in order to appreciate the mounting issues that beset the country landowner. While the protection of architectural style and cultural artifact may remain paramount concerns, designers must also recognize the contemporary pressures from both agricultural interests and the environmental concerns.



For centuries, agriculture has been the foundation of country living. Today, however, the desire to escape from the frenetic pace of urban lifestyles has led to skyrocketing land values, selling off farmland, and shortsighted development in rural areas. What is obvious to the eye are the losses of cultural heritage, community character, and open space. Perhaps not as visually noticeable, but of paramount importance, are the far reaching silent losses, including clean air, clean water, natural flood controls, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat.



To be a responsible steward, one must make sense of the cultural, economic, and ecological pressures that come to bear on each unique situation and nurture the relationships between people and land. For persevering farmers and non-farming rural landowners, modern agricultural policy is evolving to suggest a more challenging basis for conservation and to promote new incentives to diversify farms. We see continual and accelerated emphasis on new agri-environmental strategies that put financial value on non-commodity elements such as water quality, biodiversity, conservation of heritage elements, and recreation in the countryside.

As landscape architects, we are catalysts for environmentally responsible design. By helping landowners understand and proactively address the concerns of the environmentalists, and by

making the landowners aware of programs available to them to facilitate conservation objectives, we can affect the common goal of maintaining the diversity of country living. An investment in land management strategies and implementation plans will generate recurring returns through a healthy balance of historic, economic, and natural processes.

