

# **Executive Summary**



Agriculture is a significant part of Chester County's heritage, culture, and landscape. It is also part of the county's identity and sense of place. Despite intensifying competition for land uses over the years, agriculture has continued to be vibrant and strong. It not only is a major contributor to the local economy but provides environmental and social benefits.

With the county becoming even more developed over the last decade, agriculture faces continued growth pressures and new challenges. These issues include a lack of understanding or support from the public, difficult municipal regulatory environments, lack of a ready workforce, high costs of doing business, limited access to agricultural land, and more.

At the same time, there are opportunities that can spur growth and innovation. These opportunities leverage the county's existing assets and competitive advantages to strengthen the workforce, modernize infrastructure, attract and grow new businesses, and increase access to agricultural markets.

Some of the exciting ideas include creating a culinary center that draws tourists and the public to learn about food and agriculture through experiences; developing industrial hemp products through partnerships with universities and farmers; exploring opportunities for timber and biochar; helping farms prepare for ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) mandates and enhancing their ability to sell carbon credits; and forming collaborations between farms, land trusts, and environmental groups to demonstrate agriculture's positive environmental contributions.

Whether it is mitigating concerns or making the most of opportunities, the county needs a plan to guide its agricultural economy into the future. The Chester County Agricultural Economic Development Strategic Plan (AEDSP) is that guide. It is a comprehensive plan that outlines how to sustain and grow a successful agricultural economy in the face of growth pressures, industry challenges, and limited resources.



This plan focuses on six strategic areas: Agricultural Markets, Business & Financing, Education & Outreach, Labor & Workforce, Land Access, and Zoning & Land Use. While each strategic area is distinct, there are overlaps among the 33 total recommendations. Altogether, these encompass a holistic and integrated approach that reflect what matters to farmers and agribusinesses. The strategies also align with several fundamental goals:

- Mitigate issues that limit industry growth.
- Harness opportunities that grow the agricultural economy.
- Increase employment opportunities at all skill levels.
- Remain a top agricultural-producing county in PA for years to come.
- Maximize county, local, and regional resources to support industry growth.

It is important to note that partnerships, collaborations, and leadership in addition to county government are essential for the successful implementation of the plan. Farms, private businesses, industry associations, non-governmental organizations, and research institutions all have significant roles to play.

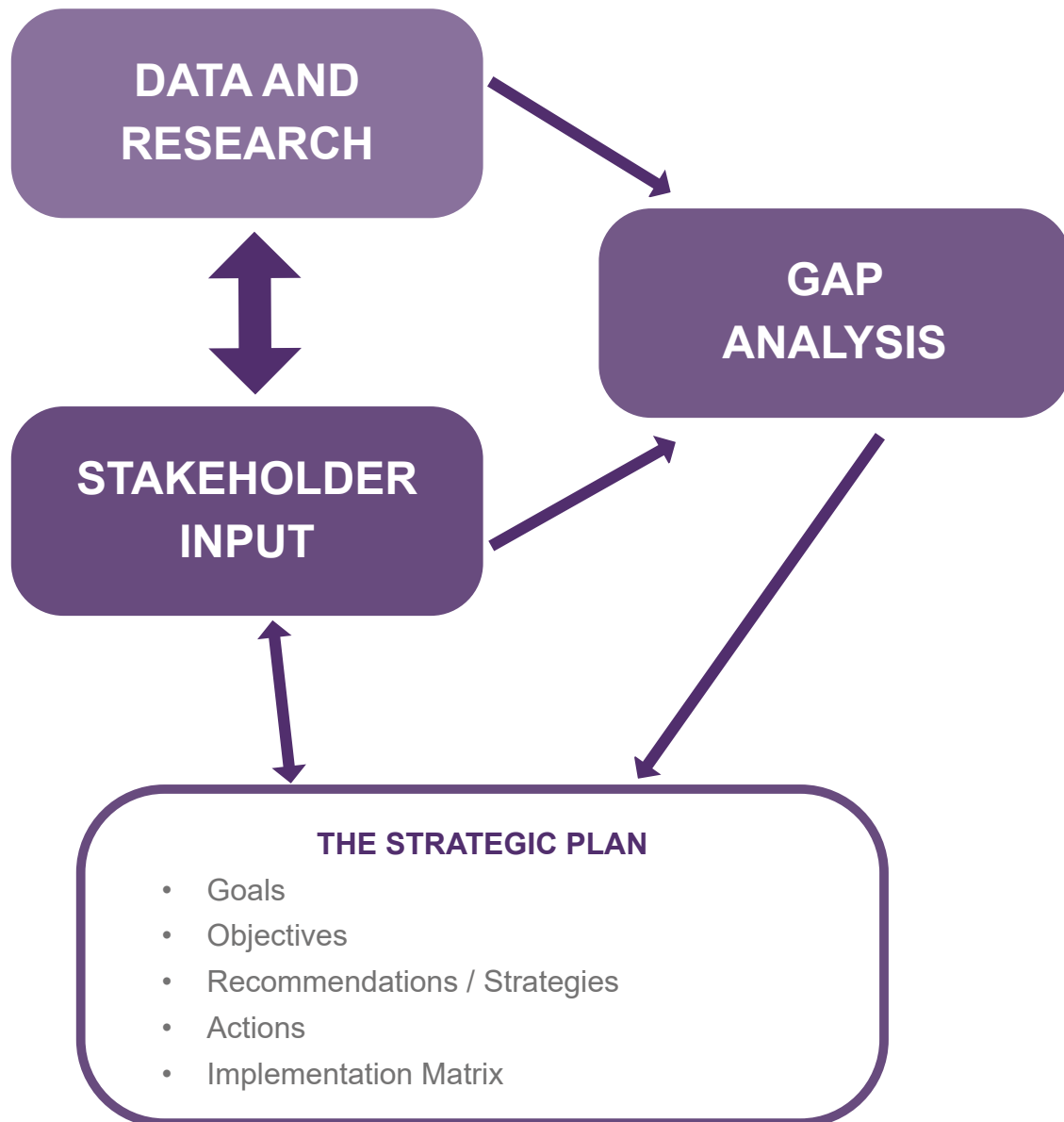
Moreover, several recommendations will create impacts that go well beyond the county's borders. As such, the plan proposes the notion of developing a new entity that will have greater flexibility to coordinate implementation.

After reading this plan, we hope the reader will better understand the issues and challenges that affect agriculture, appreciate its multifaceted contributions, and recognize why it needs to be supported. Finally, we hope the opportunities and recommendations inspire action to ensure agriculture remains a leading sector in Chester County for years to come.



# THIS PLAN

This plan is the culmination of months of research around the needs of Chester County residents and local industry sectors. This plan was designed with input from interviews, market research, surveys, and insights from county officials.



This plan was carried out in the following stages and made use of 57 interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including farmers, agritourism, service providers, members of the Plain Sect Community, and town supervisors.

### Stages of This Plan

1. Project Kickoff
2. Evaluation of Agricultural Economy
3. Other Data Analysis
4. Conducting Interviews
5. Designing Strategy Sections & Implementation Plan
6. Presentation of Final Strategic Plan