

Locals meet to preserve farmlands

FARM will hold a public meeting on the establishment of a farm preservation program at 7 p.m. Monday at South Middle School. Info: Barbara Evans Fleischauer, FARM co-chair, at 296-7035.

BY GARY GRAY

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A group of Monongalia County farmers hope to further their goal of preserving farmland Monday at a meeting designed to inform the public about the USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.

The group Farmers and Resi-

dents for saving Monongalia County Farms wants the county to implement the program to save diminishing acres of farmland.

Additional tax on property transfers would be used to fund a county board. That board would purchase development rights to properties. Only those purchasing property would pay.

The program also is an option for farmers, not a rule. Farmers would maintain ownership of the land, but it would be restricted to agricultural use only.

"We are losing farms at an alarming rate," said Barbara Evans Fleis-

chauer, the group's co-chair. "This voluntary program for farmers has been adopted in 14 other counties. Revenue from an increase in the transfer tax, combined with matching federal money, would allow us to save one to two farms per year."

So far, two of the three commissioners have remained tentative about initiating the program.

"There have been a whole lot more people expressing interest in the program," said J.R. Wolfe, USDA district conservationist in Morgantown and FARM adviser. "There also are people involved with land use that will attend the meeting."