

## **Dutchess County Agricultural Advisory Committee Forum**

August 22, 2019, 8:00 A.M.

Livestock Show Arena, Dutchess County Fairgrounds

### **MINUTES**

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Members Present:** Mark Adams, Mark Condon, John Lekic, Gregg Pulver, Stephanie Radin, Matthew Sabellico, Brian Scoralick, Rebecca Thornton, and Leon Vehaba.

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Advisors Present:** Harry Baldwin, Jennifer Fimbel, Shelby Frangk, and Eoin Wrafter.

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro welcomed everyone to the fifth Dutchess County Agricultural Advisory Committee Forum and the 174<sup>th</sup> Dutchess County Fair. County Executive Molinaro invited everyone to join in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, which was led by two members of the Pine Plains Chapter of the FFA. He extended his gratitude to the Dutchess County Agricultural Society, in particular to Andy and Vicki Imperati, and the Village of Rhinebeck for once again hosting this year's forum. He announced that Dutchess County has been fortunate to have had many leaders in agriculture over its history, but sadly we have lost three of them this year – Jack Pulver, Verne Jackson, and Don Adams dedicated their lives to the land, Dutchess County agriculture, and their respective communities, and they will continue to be revered and missed.

County Executive Molinaro invited Agricultural Advisory Committee members and elected officials seated at the tables and in the stands to introduce themselves. Dutchess County Legislature Chair Gregg Pulver began the introductions. Firstly, he thanked everyone for coming to support agriculture this year. Chair Pulver announced that the County Legislature unanimously passed the Dutchess County Right-to-Farm Law in early August, and County Executive Molinaro will ceremoniously sign this law later today. Chair Pulver explained that this law is one more tool in the toolbelt for agriculture in Dutchess County and will, in part, serve as a framework for local arbitration if farming-related issues arise between farmers and neighbors.

Senator Sue Serino and Assemblymember Didi Barrett introduced themselves and thanked everyone for attending the forum this morning. They each explained the influence that Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses have in our region. Both announced that they are helping to pass legislation at the State level to combat tick disease prevalence in our area.

County Executive Molinaro explained that one of the initiatives identified in the 2015 Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan was the creation of an Agricultural Advisory Committee which reports to and advises the County Executive on issues and policies regarding agriculture and agri-business; this annual forum is the culminating event to discuss these efforts. He underlined the importance of both agriculture and agri-tourism as an industry, contributing almost \$50 million in agricultural products to the economy on an annual basis. He also mentioned that the Partnership for Manageable Growth program just had one of its most successful periods in the programs' history – over the past 24 months, five projects were closed, resulting in the preservation of over 620 acres of farmland. It is expected that two additional projects will be closed on this year and three more will take place in future years, preserving an additional 835 acres of farmland in Dutchess County.

#### **Presentation – Carolyn Grossman Meagher, Director of Regional Planning – NYC Dept. of City Planning**

Carolyn discussed the city's economic connection to the Hudson Valley and agricultural community, and current city programs to support access to local food. She explained that NYC is a consumer of Hudson Valley farm products and the Hudson Valley acts as a "bread basket" for NYC. Carolyn explained that, in our Hudson Valley region, there are 23 million people, 10 million jobs, and a robust \$2 trillion gross national product (GDP). This is paired with 11,000 farms, which represent 20,000 jobs and a \$1 billion industry in the region.

She further explained that, in 2015, the City of New York recognized that more attention should be paid to the regionalism of food, which provided the genesis of [OneNYC 2050](#), a multi-pronged planning document with the goal to create a prosperous, sustainable, and equitable New York City. Out of this plan was the development of the [NYC Office of Food Policy](#), which was tasked with increasing food security in NYC, promoting access to and awareness of healthy food to local residents, and supporting economic opportunity and environmental sustainability in the food system. One of the programs that is helping to create local food security is [Greenmarkets](#), which was founded in 1976 and helps to promote regional agriculture by providing farms the ability to sell locally grown products directly to consumers. Currently, there are 140 Greenmarkets in NYC. Carolyn also explained that a program called [Fresh](#) is trying to expand the physical footprint of grocery stores offering fresh and local foods, including offering tax and zoning incentives for these facilities to be developed. They are also working to strengthen their local buying power and animal welfare procurement strategies. Finally, Carolyn noted that the City of New York is trying to investigate ways to diversify its transportation methods, including using other means of travel such as rail or marine freight.

#### **Presentation – Darrel Aubertine, Special Assistant for External Affairs – NYS Comptroller's Office**

Darrel discussed his office's [annual report on agriculture](#), as well as the current state of agriculture in New York State. He explained that the USDA Census of Agriculture data was recently released, and the data showed that NYS lost 2,100 farms from 2012 through 2017, which is more than a farm a day. Darrel asked the group to ponder how long we can sustain losing a farm a day in our community and what we can do to stem the tides on this trend.

#### **Agricultural Advisory Committee Update**

Chair of the [Agriculture Advisory Committee](#), Matt Sabellico from Sabellico Greenhouses, described his beginnings as committee chair and the influence that this group and position has had on him. He noted that Dutchess County agriculture is fortunate to have such widespread and unwavering support from so many local entities, including the County and the Ag Advisory Committee; the connection with these kinds of groups and their accompanying resources have helped to create more opportunities for farmers in Dutchess County. Matt explained that our area is undergoing an agricultural renaissance – farmers of all walks of life with vastly diverse operations are choosing to place roots in Dutchess County. He added that Dutchess County agriculture is not only surviving, but thriving.

#### **Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan Implementation Update**

Jennifer Fimbel, Dutchess County Agricultural Navigator, discussed some of the agricultural partnerships that forward farming in Dutchess County and what has been done over the past year to forward the goals of the [Dutchess County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan](#). She highlighted:

- **Dutchess County Planning and Development:** Staff at DC Planning and Development have developed a [county-wide farm-friendly audit](#), which examined all 30 Dutchess County municipalities' comprehensive plans and zoning codes for farm-friendliness. A training class was held this past year to highlight this effort. Also, the [Partnership for Manageable Growth program](#), which provides a locally funded match for land preservation purchase, has helped to protect over 5,000 acres of farmland and open space in Dutchess County. Staff at DC Planning and Development have also updated the [Agricultural Inventory of Resources](#), which is now available online as a pdf document.
- **Agriculture in Local Schools:** Jen described that there are now three FFA programs in the county in Pine Plains, DC BOCES, and Wappinger at John Jay High School. Additionally, the DC Ag Society hired an Agricultural Educator, Cassie Rainbolt, to highlight agriculture in local schools and Dutchess Community College is working to add an agricultural curriculum for its students. CCE Dutchess continues to enrich the lives of young people interested in agriculture through 4-H and the Green Teen program.
- **Dutchess Tourism, Inc.:** Jen explained that Dutchess Tourism, Inc. is an important partner in not only the promotion of local agri-tourism efforts, but in hosting important food and beverage events to our worldwide guests who visit Dutchess County.
- **Relationships with Municipal Officials:** As the Agricultural Navigator, Jen's role includes being a liaison between local municipalities and farmers to enhance understanding and cooperation. Often, this is achieved through site visits to farms, or phone discussions or in-person meetings about local laws or comprehensive plans among other things.

Jen added that partnerships are really what this Agricultural Navigator program is all about – it's about mutual accomplishments through partnerships, connections, relationships, and collaborations. She thanked County Executive Molinaro for his unwavering support of the Agricultural Navigator program and agriculture, in general.

Eoin Wrafter, Commissioner of Dutchess County Department of Planning & Development, announced that the next round of applications for the Partnership for Manageable Growth program will be released in September. Eoin noted that it has been an exceptionally busy two years in the PMG program, as there are eight PMG projects that are going to be going before the DC Legislature over the next eight months. In reference to farm-friendly regulation, Eoin also mentioned that a tech memo will be released soon to give local communities a toolkit to evaluate their municipal land use documents for farm-friendliness. As always, DC Planning and Development is available and willing to work with local municipalities to implement these tools and practices. Additionally, as Jen noted, the [Agricultural Inventory of Resources document](#) was recently updated, but will soon be a searchable online database for farmers, residents, and government entities, alike; this database will be searchable by agriculture topic for ease of use.

### **Census Complete Count Update**

John Penney noted that Dutchess County has established a [2020 Census "Complete Count Committee"](#) to increase awareness and motivate residents to respond to the 2020 census; he is the chair of this committee. Some of the reasons why the Census is so important is because these figures determine how more than \$675 billion in federal funds get distributed annually, how state and county legislative districts will get redrawn during redistricting, and how federal, state, and local governments will plan and implement programs, services, and emergency response. Invitations to fill out the Census (either by mail, phone, or online) go out to communities in March; responses to census questions are anonymous, confidential, and not tied to government citizenship. County Executive Molinaro added that, statistically, the agricultural community has been undercounted in the past and represent a widespread and diverse labor force. He underscored the importance of these individuals being counted.

### **Roundtable Discussion/Questions**

The County Executive moderated a roundtable discussion on the topics presented by Carolyn Grossman Meagher, Darrel Aubertine, the members of the Agricultural Advisory Committee, and farming, in general. There was a comment from the audience regarding dairy farms and the need for these farmers to be paid more for their products; it was discussed that this is a federal issue, not a local one. Also, a variety of audience members agreed that students involved in agriculture should be more involved in the work that is being done at the local and County levels; this will help to forward the future of agriculture in Dutchess County.

### **Right-to-Farm Law Signing**

DC Legislature Chairperson Pulver gave a brief summary of the [Dutchess County Right-to-Farm law](#), and then surrounded by members of the DC Agricultural Advisory Committee and local leaders, County Executive signed the Dutchess County Right-to-Farm law.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m. After the close of the meeting, a group photo took place then attendees of the event were invited to take a tour of the agricultural barns and 4-H buildings by members of local FFA groups and Dutchess County 4-H.

Respectfully submitted:

Shelby Frangk, Planner

Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development