

## **Dutchess County Agricultural Advisory Committee**

May 28, 2020, 10:00 A.M.

Virtual Teams Meeting

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Mark Adams, Matthew Cady, Mark Condon, Todd Erling, Deanna Mancuso, Gregg Pulver, Stephanie Radin, Brian Scoralick, Becky Thornton, Jennifer Fimbel, Harry Baldwin, Eoin Wrafter, and Shelby Frangk.

**Not Present:** Isaac Coon, Doug Giles, and Matthew Sabellico.

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

As Chair Sabellico was unable to attend this meeting, Vice Chair, Becky Thornton opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m. As we have a few new members this year, Matthew Cady from G.E. Masten Feeds and Deanna Mancuso from Lucky Orphans Horse Rescue, she requested that everyone introduce themselves.

The February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes were reviewed and accepted by the committee.

#### **Agricultural Navigator Updates**

Jen noted some of the tasks that she has been working on since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlights during this time period included:

- Discussing local horse boarding issues with NYS Agriculture & Markets;
- Serving in an advisory role to the John Jay FFA Board and other FFA groups around the county;
- Creating a list of active farm stores in Dutchess County in response to the pandemic;
- Discussing what dairy farmers can do if they have to “dump” milk;
- Attending a variety of Zoom meetings, including Congressman Delgado’s Ag Advisory group twice a month and statewide livestock educators’ meetings twice a month;
- Collaborating with DC Chamber of Commerce, Dutchess Tourism, Ron Hicks (DC Assistant County Executive), CCEDC staff, and Dutchess Delivers to create #FarmStandFriday, a promotion to drive business to our farm stores, similar to the social media promotion of restaurants with Take Out Tuesday;
- Starting hand sanitizer distribution days for all farms (NYS Ag and Markers provided the hand sanitizer and DCDPW helped to unload the materials);
- Hosting a meeting with farm store managers to discuss #FarmStandFriday, financial sustainability, federal programs for farms, and creating store videos for social media; and
- Continuing to update the “Dutchess County Agriculture...It’s a Growing Thing!” Facebook page, the Dutchess County Agriculture Instagram page, and conducting the Farm and Ag Report on two stations every morning 5 days/week (both AM and FM radio (WKIP and WRWD, respectively)).

Jen also underlined the importance of the development of a local slaughterhouse in our area. She knows two operators who are potentially interested. She mentioned that this type of facility is sorely needed and anything the committee could do to facilitate progress on this topic would be welcome, especially as federal and State legislation, respectively, is influencing the existence and viability of concentrated animals feeding operations (CAFOs) and live-animal markets (which includes some slaughterhouses) around the region.

### **Education Sub-Committee**

Mark Condon explained that he, Jen Fimbel, and Rebecca Cossa, a BOCES ag educator, had a conversation after the last Ag Forum where they discussed the idea of a sub-committee of the Ag Advisory Committee with an ag education focus. At some point, the hope was that ag students could be on the committee as well. They have had some subsequent discussions regarding this, but have had to put some this idea on hold due to COVID. Mark noted that he will touch base with Eoin, Jen, and Rebecca to further discuss this topic and report back to the committee electronically.

### **Food Vulnerability/Needs and COVID-19**

Eoin introduced this topic and presented the group with an issue brief that Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress released called “Vulnerability Revealed, COVID-19 and the Hudson Valley Food System.” Related to this topic, he noted that the Dutchess County Planning Department is operating a food connection hotline (via Dutchess Responds) that was instituted in response to the pandemic – this hotline operates as both a call center and an electronic form submittal – both of which help to supplement Dutchess County residents’ food needs during the pandemic. The hotline was instituted in partnership with Community Action Partnership and Dutchess Outreach, and has delivered 12,000 meals thus far. He added that based on what he has seen with the call center and in reading this document, there is obviously a food shortage in our area, including in traditional settings such as a grocery store. This also relates to Jen’s work with #FarmStandFriday and the resurgence of farm stands and markets as a local alternative to grocery stores, partially as a result of the pandemic. Eoin underlined Jen’s comment about a need for a slaughterhouse/processing facility, especially as the pandemic highlighted issues relying on national food systems – he is interested in how we can help make this type of facility happen in our area. All these comments are interconnected to the economic development goals of the Ag Advisory Committee and enhancing farm viability in Dutchess County through a variety of measures.

Todd commented that he appreciated the Pattern for Progress brief, but that more could have been said related to the FeedHV program (and other efforts like it), which is a matching program between farmers and food retailers/wholesalers. This program aids in trying to meet the demand and donation sides of food vulnerability issues. In Todd’s mind, he believes we are going to continue to see the demand for food outstripping donation efforts, and so additional measures will need to be taken to bridge that gap; some local, regional, and federal organizations have already begun work in this vein. Eoin agreed that the brief did not capture all needs, issues, and opportunities related to food vulnerability, but thought that the 10,000-foot view presented in the document was worthy of consideration by the group.

The group agreed that the federal and State legislation that Jen discussed earlier in the meeting could have unintended consequences on the ability of local farmers to produce and slaughter their products. It could also influence food prices, which would disproportionately affect those individuals whom are already food insecure.

Harry noted that, in his mind, the pandemic highlighted how concentrated the national retail food system is – he underscored the importance of diversifying the market and increasing public support for local agriculture. Todd agreed with Harry, and underlined the importance of educating the public on these systems.

Todd noted that thus far there have been no instances of COVID-19 transmitted through food to humans, and that the main concern is the worker-to-worker transfer that could take place.

### **Ag Forum**

The committee agreed to continue plans for the August Ag Forum, but noted that it depends on how the pandemic progresses over the next few months and whether the fair will take place. Eoin asked that the group keep thinking about a speaker for the forum. An idea for a potential speaker could be GrowNYC.

**Open Discussion**

Todd highlighted the importance of connecting with local representatives to demonstrate that the farming community in the Northeast is strong and vibrant, and needs to be better represented by federal agencies and federal programs.

Jen noted that discussions with local municipalities and their respective municipal boards regarding zoning for homesteading, backyard chickens, backyard gardening, and urban agriculture will be important in the months to come as COVID-19 continues and as the effects of the pandemic become clearer. Stephanie and Mark Adams confirmed that they have had many people inquire about backyard gardening during the pandemic. Mark said that they are selling so many food plants that their supply is practically depleted.

Eoin mentioned that in the planning world, planners are keeping their eyes out for what has been termed as an “urban exodus” where individuals living in more dense cities could move to less dense areas, seeking more space and larger homes, because of the pandemic. If this trend does come to fruition, traditional subdivisions may become popular again and farms may experience development pressure as a result.

Deanna noted that the horse industry is not eligible for federal loans because even though they are domestic livestock agriculture, they are not treated as such in the eyes of the federal government. She emphasized the disparities that exist for the horse industry that were highlighted by the pandemic and, as such, horse operations are greatly struggling right now.

**Next Meeting**

The committee agreed to continue plans for the August Ag Forum, but noted that it depends on how the pandemic progresses over the next few months. The group agreed that another meeting before the ag forum would be helpful, likely around mid-July.

Meeting adjourned at 11:34 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Shelby Frangk, Planner  
Dutchess County Planning and Development