

Dutchess County Agricultural Advisory Committee Forum

August 23, 2018, 8:00 A.M.

Livestock Show Arena, Dutchess County Fairgrounds

MINUTES

Agricultural Advisory Committee Members Present: Mark Adams, Harry Baldwin, Mark Condon, Isaac Coon, Todd Erling, Jennifer Fimbel, Shelby Frangk, John Lekic, Gregg Pulver, Stephanie Radin, Matthew Sabellico, Brian Scoralick, Rebecca Thornton, Leon Vehaba, and Eoin Wrafter.

Welcome and Introductions

Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro welcomed everyone to the fourth Dutchess County Agricultural Advisory Committee Forum. He 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. The County Executive 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. In total, this program has preserved 3,477 acres of farmland on 20 farms. 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.

County Executive Molinaro introduced Dutchess County Legislature Chair Gregg Pulver. Chair Pulver thanked everyone for coming to support agriculture and also thanked the Dutchess County Agricultural Society/Dutchess County Fairgrounds for agreeing to host the forum again this year. Chair Pulver introduced the farmers from the Harlem Valley Farm & Food Alliance and explained that they will be discussing the farms that make up their Alliance, the reasons why they started the Alliance, their collective farm days, and the ways in which the agricultural community can help support/bolster the Alliance.

Presentation – Harlem Valley Farm & Food Alliance

Jennifer Soukup (Soukup Farms) thanked Chair Pulver and the Agricultural Advisory Committee for asking the group to present their story at this event. She explained that her farm, along with four other founding members – Brookby Farm, Hoofprint Cheese Company, JSK Cattle Company, and Locust Hill Farm – compose the Harlem Valley Farm & Food Alliance. Jennifer asked each member to briefly explain their farm operation:

- Katelyn Foley (Hoofprint Cheese Company) explained that the Vincent family was unable to attend the forum, but Brookby Farm is the last remaining dairy farm in the Town of Dover and it has been family owned and operated by the Vincent family for six generations. Katelyn Foley further explained that, in 2015, her and her husband Brandyn established Hoofprint Cheese Company – a grade “A” raw milk goat dairy and creamery, producing products such as artisanal cheeses and yogurt, as well as milk.
- Heather Kading (JSK Cattle Company) explained that her and her husband Jason have a 100% grass fed beef (black angus) and pasture raised/corn fed beef farm operation, as well as their own pasture raised pork, chicken, turkey, and eggs. They feel strongly that the community should know where their food is coming from and part of their operation's mission is to educate the public in this vein. Since 2015, they have owned and operated a farm market. Heather noted that members of the public have commented that it is challenging to find the store and more signage may be necessary, but they are not quite sure where to start.
- Amanda Skuza (Locust Hill Market) described her and her husband's farm operation in Millbrook. They are a family run, seasonal farm market, offering farm-grown fruits and vegetables, local beef, and other specialty products.

- Jennifer Soukup (Soukup Farms) added that Soukup Farms is a third-generation family farm, producing and selling pure New York maple syrup, hay, and seasonal pumpkins and gourds. She noted that her farm has had great success with coordinating public events at the farm, such as their Maple Weekend, Touch-A-Tractor event, and Harvest Festival.

Further, Jennifer Soukup described the roots of the Harlem Valley Farm & Food Alliance. She noted that the group began in 2017 as a way to enhance cooperation among local farmers. As young, family farmers, they realized that they could pool their resources and share ideas (as well as struggles) to create an agricultural network, support system, and collective voice for farmers/farming within the Harlem Valley. The Alliance allows its members to cooperatively promote each other's local food through farmer's markets, events, and social media. The group also described its success with advertising on social media – the costs associated with this type of media are low, but its influence is far-reaching.

The Alliance has also had great success with cross-promotional efforts through its "Farm Days." The group explained that these events are great educational events, as they allow the farms to be opened to the public for a number of different activities such as tours, milking demonstrations, food/drink sampling, hay rides, scavenger hunts, and corn mazes. Another innovative element of these farm days is a stamp system that catalogs the farms (in the Alliance) that a consumer has visited on the Farm Day. If all five farms are visited, then the consumer receives a free tote. So far, they have cooperatively held two events (spring/autumn) at the farms and they were very well-received by the community; another fall event is scheduled for this October. The Harlem Valley Farm & Food Alliance received the "Family Fun Award of Distinction" from Dutchess Tourism, Inc. for these events.

Finally, the group discussed the ways in which the agricultural community can help support and bolster the Alliance. The main request was for more information on securing off-site signage for farm stands. Many of their farm stands are not visible from the road and directional, off-site signs are necessary to direct the public to their market. They also requested more information about grant opportunities for signage.

Agriculture Advisory Committee Update

Agricultural Advisory Committee Chair Matthew Sabellico described a few of the efforts that the Committee has undertaken since last year's forum:

- The Committee has supported events like the Hudson Valley Assessors Training on agriculture (in conjunction with the NYS Dept. of Agriculture & Markets, NYS Real Property Tax, Dutchess County Real Property Tax, and the Dutchess County Soil & Water Conservation District), where 60 assessors from 9 counties attended the training, and the Dutchess County Planning Federation's training for planning and zoning board members (also 60 people in attendance), focusing on what specific farm activities are and are not protected under Agricultural Districts Law, and how both farmers and local entities can navigate the state statute.
- The Committee has also been working with Dutchess Tourism, Inc. and Th!nk Dutchess to continue the promotion of agri-tourism through social media, advertising, and special events.
- Looking towards the future, the Committee is looking into ways to tie all the existing and proposed educational opportunities/programs together, so that there is an outline for students to follow when pursuing the various tracks of agriculture.

State of Agriculture in Dutchess County

A variety of members from the Agricultural Advisory Committee proceeded to present information related to the State of Agriculture in Dutchess County:

- Jennifer Fimbel, Agricultural Navigator: Jen discussed her work this year as Agricultural Navigator. Highlights include:
 - Jen noted that there are two FFA programs in the county again (Pine Plains and BOCES), with a third on the way in the Wappingers Falls Central School District (John Jay).

- Jen added that Legislature Chair Pulver appointed an Agri-Tourism task force, composed of Legislators Deirdre Houston and Nick Page; they were charged with looking into the impacts of our agri-tourism industry.
- Jen also mentioned that as the Dutchess County Agricultural Navigator, she continues to work with municipal officials whenever a clarification or resolution over an agricultural concern/issue is needed.
- Jen noted that a number of agriculturally oriented events are coming up, including the inaugural Hudson Valley Chefs' Challenge, where Hudson Valley lamb will be featured.
- Eoin Wrafter and Shelby Frangk, DC Department of Planning and Development: Eoin and Shelby discussed their work related to agriculture at the Planning Department. Highlights include:
 - Eoin announced that the Agricultural Inventory of Resources, an appendix in the 2015 Ag Plan has been updated and will be available as an interactive, searchable tool in 2019.
 - Eoin also mentioned that the Department conducted a review of all thirty Dutchess County municipalities' comprehensive plans and zoning codes to gauge the level of support given to agriculture, and to identify areas where these documents could be strengthened to promote farming. Shelby described the "farm friendly" audit in a little more detail, noting the commonalities/trends identified from the audit, including:
 - Agriculture or ag-related uses are not allowed by right in every district or are not included in the regulation, thereby prohibiting them in most municipalities.
 - Also, many zoning codes require special use permits or site plan review for ag-related uses in any district. This includes requiring farm stands or other non-traditional or retail-based farm businesses to acquire site plan approval or a special use permit before operating.
 - A majority of Dutchess County zoning codes regulate farms by acreage or the number of animals.
 - Finally, zoning codes do not allow personal wind mills or solar panels as a permitted use by right for farms.
 - Also, we found that in many Dutchess County municipal comprehensive plans do not reference or recognize the County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan, and NYS Agricultural Districts.
 - As a follow-up from the audit, Eoin noted that on Tuesday, October 16th at 6pm at the Dutchess County Farm & Home Center, the Dutchess County Planning Federation will be hosting a training on Making Your Community More Farm Friendly through Planning and Zoning; this session will include an overview of the audit results, local examples of farm friendliness, and a variety of model ordinances/language. A tech memo will also be prepared to give more detail on the audit and will be released after the training session.
- Becky Thornton, Dutchess Land Conservancy: Becky discussed farmland preservation in Dutchess County and the work that Dutchess Land Conservancy is doing to forward this mission. Highlights include:
 - Becky described the history of the PDR program in Dutchess County and the success of the program over the years.
 - Becky explained that the work of Dutchess Land Conservancy allows agricultural land to be preserved in perpetuity, providing a public service as an economic generator, scenic vista, wildlife habitat, and also local character. Since their founding in 1985, DLC has helped to protect over 41,000 acres of important farmland in Dutchess County.
 - Becky underscored the importance of this work, noting that protecting 100,000 acres of NY farmland could provide 1,000 meals per year. She added that farmland soils are essentially a non-renewable resource – it only takes 1 day to destroy 1 acre of farmland soils, but it takes 100 years to create it.
- Todd Erling, Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation: Todd explained the work that the Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation has undergone over the past year. Highlights include:

- Todd briefly explained the Incubator Without Walls program, which provides agricultural businesses tangible skills to help their businesses thrive.
 - He also announced that they are currently accepting applications for the Farm & Food Funding Accelerator program, where participants can engage in expert instruction, one-on-one counseling/technical assistance, industry networking events to learn how to build their sales in anticipation of speaking with investors, discover new market opportunities, and pitch to potential funders; Soukup Farms was one of the successful participants from this program in 2016/2017.
 - Finally, Todd mentioned that Feed HV is a regional food rescue and gleaning network dedicated to meeting the needs of neighbors while mitigating the impacts of food waste. He added that HVADC is currently working with agricultural businesses/farmers to expand this program.
- Gregg Pulver, Dutchess County Legislature: Gregg discussed the work that is being done by the Dutchess County Legislature to forward agriculture in our community. Highlights include:
 - Gregg encouraged attendees to communicate with their local municipalities/legislators to help identify how public agencies can best serve agriculture/farmers in our county.
 - He noted that the average age of a farmer is 68 years old, and local and County governments need to put protections in place for young farmers/start-up operations so that they can continue to thrive; these kinds of efforts will help to ensure a future for agriculture in Dutchess County.
 - Ruth Moore, Cornell Cooperative Extension: Ruth encouraged all forum attendees to attend the Dutchess County Fair after the event. She highlighted the immense work that has been done by 4-H students in preparation for the fair.
 - Mark Adams, Farm Bureau: Mark announced that a variety of agricultural stakeholders will be attending a meeting with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, later this afternoon to discuss labor/farm issues and ways to promote farming in New York State and nationally.
 - John Faso, U.S. Congress: Congressman Faso underlined the importance of agriculture in New York State. He announced his intent to help stabilize the status of agricultural laborers across the state, get whole milk back into schools, limit the nomenclature used for milk to animal-produced milk (vs. almond or soy milk), and increasing funding for agri-tourism and agricultural retail-based businesses.
 - Marcus Molinaro, Dutchess County: Dutchess County Executive Molinaro added that Dutchess County is looking into a County Right-to-Farm Law. He noted that more information is being sought on this subject before a policy is crafted/instituted.

Roundtable Discussion/Questions

The County Executive moderated a roundtable discussion on the topics presented by the Harlem Valley Farm & Food Alliance, the members of the Agricultural Advisory Committee, and farming, in general.

Tara Langworthy (T/Beekman resident) expressed her desire for more specific definitions/guidance on the process of agricultural district inclusion.

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 Dutchess County 4-H.

Respectfully submitted:

Shelby Frangk, Planner
Dutchess County Planning and Development