

## FARMLAND PROTECTION SURVEY for AGRI-SERVICES

Agriculture is the #1 year-round business in Sullivan County. Because it is so important, several Sullivan County towns have partnered to develop agricultural enhancement plans. Callicoon together with Delaware, and Bethel together with Liberty have received funding from New York State to support development of these plans and have formed committees to start work. This survey is our first step toward a complete understanding of the many issues, concerns and opportunities related to agriculture. The committees will use this information and other public input to establish goals for the future of agriculture, so that the final plans can help towns better enhance and promote this valuable industry. You have been identified as a person involved with agriculture because your business provides goods or services to farmers. We need your input in order to make this planning effort a success. **This survey is completely anonymous.** We hope you will take 15 minutes to complete it and return it to the Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management in the postage paid envelope by **November 18, 2008**. If you are no longer offering goods or services to agriculture in any way, please answer any questions that are relevant to you, especially the last page, and return. **Thank you!**

**1. What type of business do you operate?** (please check all that apply.) SEE NOTE

- |  |                            |                     |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <u>1</u> Feed  | <u>0</u> Produce           | <u>4</u> Insurance  |
| <u>0</u> Seed Dealer   | <u>0</u> Compost           | <u>2</u> Legal      |
| <u>5</u> Machinery Sales and Repair                          | <u>0</u> Agri-Chemical     | <u>3</u> Financial  |
| <u>2</u> Equipment   | <u>0</u> Fertilizer Dealer | <u>3</u> Veterinary |
| <u>4</u> Direct sale of farm products, please explain: _____ |                            |                     |
| <u>5</u> Other, please explain: _____                        |                            |                     |

**2. How many years have you operated your business?** 36.5

**3. What attracted you to operate your business in Sullivan County?**

SEE NOTES

**4. How many workers (including family) does your business employ?**

	Seasonal	Year-Round
Full-Time Workers	<u>26</u>	<u>332</u>
Part-time Workers	<u>45</u>	<u>42</u>

**5. What were your gross annual sales last year from your business?**

- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <u>1</u> \$1- \$9,999        | <u>1</u> \$50,000 – \$99,999   |
| <u>0</u> \$10,000 – \$24,999 | <u>6</u> \$100,000 – \$199,999 |
| <u>1</u> \$25,000 – \$49,999 | <u>3</u> \$200,000 – \$499,999 |
|                              | <u>15</u> \$500,000 +          |

**6. What percentage of your client base is from the Sullivan County agricultural community?**

- |                         |                 |                 |                  |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <u>17</u> Less than 25% | <u>3</u> 25-49% | <u>5</u> 50-74% | <u>3</u> 75-100% |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|

**7. Has this increased or decreased in the past 5 years?**

- |                    |                     |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <u>6</u> Increased | <u>10</u> Decreased | <u>12</u> Stayed the same |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|

**8. Please rate your level of support for the following farmland protection strategies on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being STRONGLY SUPPORT and 4 being STRONGLY OPPOSE (circle the appropriate number).**

	STRONGLY SUPPORT			STRONGLY OPPOSE
<b>A. Conservation Easements</b> <i>A legal document that restricts the use of land to farming, open space, or wildlife habitat. A landowner may voluntarily sell, lease, or donate an easement to a government agency or private land trust and as a result may be eligible for federal tax and NY property tax benefits.</i>	<u>1</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>
<b>B. Purchase of Development Rights</b> <i>The voluntary sale of the rights to develop a piece of property by the landowner to a government agency or land trust. The sale price is determined by an appraisal. The land is permanently restricted to farming or open space.</i>	<u>13</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>C. Transfer of Development Rights</b> <i>Property rights that are not used on the land from which they come. These may be sold to be used on another designated site in a growth area in order to allow the farm or open space to remain undeveloped. It allows landowners to receive the full equity of the property.</i>	<u>7</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>D. Lease of Development Rights</b> <i>When the development rights of a property are leased to a municipality through a contractual agreement for a specified period of time in return for tax benefits or other monetary transaction. This results in land being restricted to farming or open space for that specified time period.</i>	<u>7</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>E. Farm Friendly Zoning</b> <i>Local regulations that do not restrict agricultural activities. Zoning laws that are farm friendly allow agriculture in more than one zoning district, simplify regulations and standards for farms and agricultural businesses, and allow flexibility in agriculture related businesses on the farm.</i>	<u>21</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>F. Conservation Subdivisions</b> <i>A development design technique that concentrates buildings on a portion of the site to allow the remaining land to be used for recreation, open space, or farming.</i>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>G. Loan Programs</b> <i>Dedicated funding stream to disburse loan funds to farms and agricultural businesses to start new businesses, expand operations and/or diversify.</i>	<u>15</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>H. Differential Assessments</b> <i>When land is assessed for tax purposes as farmland, it is based on its use-value for farming rather than on its "highest and best" use for potential development. New York State offers an agricultural exemption program which lowers the assessment of lands devoted to farming.</i>	<u>17</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>I. Growing New Farmers</b> <i>Promotes and encourages new farmers to locate in the town by offering information, incentives and programs to help them get started.</i>	<u>16</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>J. Ag-Enterprise Zones</b> <i>Designated areas that satisfy income or employment criteria that benefit businesses. For example: 100% exemption from the General Excise Tax (GET), income tax credits, and exemptions from the GET for licensed contractors.</i>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>
<b>K. Overlay Zoning District</b> <i>An area where certain additional requirements are superimposed upon a base zoning district or underlying district and where the requirements of the base or underlying district may or may not be altered.</i>	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>
<b>L. Exclusive Agricultural Zones</b> <i>Zoning districts that only allow agricultural uses and prohibit any other uses unless they are related to farm use.</i>	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>
<b>M. Sullivan County Agriculture &amp; Farmland Protection Plan</b> <i>A plan created in 1999 to specifically address the development and preservation of farmland in Sullivan County.</i>	<u>16</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>N. Town Comprehensive Plan</b> <i>A plan created at the town level that summarizes the current condition of the community, projects future needs, and develops general policy goals and objectives. The comprehensive plan is the legal basis for zoning and other land use laws.</i>	<u>10</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
<b>O. Other</b> please explain: _____	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

**9. Please list your top 3 strategies, either from the above list or others, that you feel the town should pursue to help keep farming viable.**

**Top Strategies, (Number of times picked)**

E (7), G (5), B (4), H (3), I (3), L (2), N (2), A (1), F (1), M (1), O (1)

10. Please rate the following challenges on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being **VERY CHALLENGING** and 4 being **NOT CHALLENGING AT ALL** to the future success of your business (circle the appropriate number).

	VERY CHALLENGING		NOT CHALLENGING AT ALL		NOT APPLICABLE
A. Availability of skilled labor	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
B. Property taxes	<u>13</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
C. Rental costs	<u>4</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>
D. Fuel cost	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
E. Access to adequate financing	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
F. Access to marketing or business support	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>
G. Lack of local consumers/ clients	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
H. Machinery costs	<u>4</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
I. Production costs	<u>5</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>
J. Other: _____	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
K. Other: _____	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>

11. Of the above challenges, what are the top three greatest challenges facing you as a businessperson?

- a (6), b (5), g (2), i (2), d (1), e (1)
- b (4), a (2), f (2), d (1), e (1), g (1), i (1)
- h (4), i (3), a (2), b (1), g (1)

12. Please identify which of the following you plan to do, and within which timeframe (please check all that apply).

	Within 1 year	... 5 years	... 10 years or more
Begin a new agri-service operation	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
Increase your agri-service operation	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
Decrease your agri-service operation	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Stay the same	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Transfer the business to a family member	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Increase agricultural sales	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
Decrease agricultural sales	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Eliminate agricultural sales	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
Sign a gas lease	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Other, please explain: _____	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>

- 13. What trends do you see in agriculture in Sullivan County?** (Please check all that apply.)
- 14 A smaller number of large farms       12 Movement of farms out of Sullivan County  
 13 Farm diversification       2 No significant change  
 11 A larger number of small operations       3 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- 14. How concerned are you about the loss of farmland in your town?**
- 14 Very concerned     11 Somewhat concerned     3 Not very concerned     0 Not concerned at all
- Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

- 15. Do you feel there is a negative relationship between local farms and non-farm neighbors?**
- 11 Yes     15 No    **Why or why not?** \_\_\_\_\_

- 16. What can be done to improve/strengthen the relationship between local farms and non-farm neighbors?**
- \_\_\_\_\_

- 17. Do you think natural gas drilling will help or impede agriculture in your town?**
- 13 Help     7 Impede     9 No opinion
- Explain.** \_\_\_\_\_

- 18. How old are you?**
- |                                     |                                    |  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 Under 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 45 - 54 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 65 - 74     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 25 - 34  | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 55 - 59 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 75 or older |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 35 - 44  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 60 - 64 |  |

- 19. How long have you lived in Sullivan County?**
- 0 5 years or less       2 6-10 years       1 11-20 years     21 more than 20 years

- 20. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**
- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 Less than 9th grade           | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Some college, no degree | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Masters Degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 9th to 12th grade, no diploma | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 Associates degree       | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Ph.D.          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 High school graduate or GED   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Bachelors degree        |   |

- 21. Please provide any additional comments on preserving local farms and farmlands, either below or on a separate sheet of paper. If you have comments specific to a particular town, please be sure to indicate the town's name.**

# Summary of Agri-Business Survey

- Q1. Businesses who participated in the survey included one feed dealer, five machinery sales and repair businesses, two equipment, four direct sales, four insurance, two legal, three financial, and three vets. Five “others” also participated and these included roadside sales, livestock dealer, farm market, accounting, education, work clothing and pet feeds, garden center, beef/dairy semen services.
- Q2. The average age of businesses was 36.5 years.
- Q3. Family ties, born in the area, beauty, and rural nature of the area, demand for business, and opportunities were all reasons given for what attracted people to have businesses here.
- Q4. 71 seasonal workers (26 full time and 45 part time), and 374 year round (332 full time and 42 part time) are employed by these businesses.
- Q5. One business earned less than \$25,000 in gross annual sales. One earned between \$25,000 and \$49,999. All others earned over \$50,000 and 56% earned over \$500,000.
- Q6. 61% have less than 25% of their client base from Sullivan County. Three have greater than 75% of their business coming from within the County.
- Q7. Ten, or 21%, indicated that the contribution of Sullivan County farmers have increased over the past 5 years while 36% say it has decreased, and 43% indicated no change.
- Q8 - 9. This question explored the agri-businesses attitudes towards a variety of different farmland protection strategies. Overall, there was general support for most of the strategies. Only overlay zoning districts and exclusive agricultural zones had more opposition. Top methods included farm friendly zoning, differential assessments, growing new farmers, town comprehensive plan, purchase of development rights, conservation easements, loan programs, conservation subdivisions, lease of development rights, and the Sullivan County Ag and Farmland Protection Plan. The Top methods businesses felt the towns should pursue were (in order) farm friendly zoning, purchase of development rights, loan programs, differential assessments, growing new farmers, and exclusive agricultural zones.
- Q10. Fuel costs, availability of skilled labor and property taxes were the biggest challenges to these businesses. Access to adequate financing was not a problem to most businesses. Many also had no real challenges related to access to marketing or business support.
- Q11. The greatest challenges (in order) were availability of skilled labor, property taxes, and production costs.
- Q12. Most businesses planned on staying at the same level or increasing their agricultural sales over the next few years (most of those were within 1 year). Nine were planning to increase agri-service operations and three hoped to begin new agri-service operations. Only three indicated they would be decreasing their agri-service operations, and one would eliminate ag sales. Six planned on signing gas leases –

mostly within the next year.

- Q13. There was a wide range of opinions as to what the trends related to farming will be in the area. Smaller numbers of larger farms, movement out of the area, farm diversification and a larger number of small operations all were considered potential trends.
- Q14. Fifty percent were very concerned about loss of farmland and another 39% were somewhat concerned. Three were not very concerned and nobody said they were not concerned at all.
- Q15. Slightly more businesses felt that there were not negative relationships between farms and non-farmers while 38% did feel there were problems. Most of the reasons for negative relationships revolved around nuisances and lack of awareness and understanding about farm operations on the part of non-farmers.
- Q16. Ways to help negative relationships included more education, more opportunities for non-farmers to see and learn about farms, and for farmers to be good neighbors.
- Q17. About 45% said they feel gas drilling will help area farmers, and 24% feel it will impede farmers. Nine had no opinion. Reasons for positive benefits were oriented to the economic benefits for farmers and the negatives were related to the potential negative environmental impact of gas drilling.
- Q18. All participants were over 35 years of age. Most were between 35 and 59 years. 22% were older than 60 years of age.
- Q19. Most business participants have lived in Sullivan County for more than 20 years. Two have been here 6 to 10 years and one between 11 and 20 years. There were no new residents (less than 5 years).
- Q20. 89% of business participants have at least some college: 74% have a college degree with two of those with Master's Degrees and four with PhD's. One has no high school diploma and two have high school degrees.

## What the Survey Tells Us

- There was a wide variety of businesses represented in the survey. However, of the 29 responses, 31% were insurance, legal, and financial businesses – those that do not cater exclusively to farmers.
- These businesses are well established.
- They contribute greatly to the economy of the area by employing 445 people in the area.
- Although a few of the businesses have relatively small incomes, most had gross sales over \$50,000 and over half were quite profitable earning over \$500,000. The agri-business incomes were much higher than those of the farmers.
- Only three of the 29 businesses rely a lot on Sullivan County farms for their business. Most have less than 25% of their business from within the county.
- Overlay zoning would probably not be supported by the agri-business community, but like the farmers, supported farm friendly zoning, PDR programs, loan and tax programs, growing new farmers, and exclusive agricultural zones as methods to protect farmland.
- Like farmers, fuel costs, production costs, and property taxes are big challenges. Agri-businesses had more issues related to finding skilled labor than farmers indicated.
- Like farmers, there seemed to be a degree of optimism about agri-businesses in the future. Most planned on staying the same, or increasing their agri-business services. Only a few planned to decrease their operations in this area.
- Agri-businesses had more opinions on the trends facing agriculture in the area than did farmers. There was not a clear consensus and equal numbers felt that there would be loss of farms out of the area, loss of farms to larger farms, diversification, and an increase in the number of small farms.
- Loss of farmland was a concern to most of the businesses.
- They have an impression that there are negative relationships between farms and non-farmers and like farm owners, feel that lack of education is a primary contributor to that problem.
- More businesses felt that gas drilling can help farmers due to the extra income. Some felt it would impede farming due to negative environmental impacts.
- Some agri-business owners have moved to the area 6 to 10 years ago, but most have been in the County for a long time. They tend to be slightly younger than the farm community.