

Present:

Marueen Barber	Robert Blais
Denise Frangipane	Paul Hahn
Melinda Ketcham	Jennifer Mall
Don Meltz	Susan Runnels
Peter Stettner	Dan Sturm
Joe Walsh	Jill Weyer

### 1) Defining Agriculture

Important to Ag & Markets-- and helps us understand what we want to protect.

Many parcels with ag assessments are not classified as "farms," so we need to decide if we want to include these in the plan. As of ten years ago, roughly 40% of farmland in Sullivan County was not farmer-owned. So these non-"farm" parcels are important to agriculture.

Ag & Markets defines a "farm operation" as "...the land and on-farm buildings, equipment, manure processing and handling facilities, and practices which contribute to the production, preparation and marketing of crops, livestock and livestock products as a commercial enterprise, including a 'commercial horse boarding operation' as defined in subdivision thirteen of this section and 'timber processing' as defined in subdivision fourteen of this section. Such farm operation may consist of one or more parcels of owned or rented land, which parcels may be contiguous or noncontiguous to each other."

Is a tree farm open space? Is it agriculture? Yes, under Ag & Mkts Law.

Firewood selling operations? These are only considered farming if the wood is harvested from your property. The Ag Exemption allows \$2,000 in firewood products.

So is the Ag & Mkts definition too loose? Is it being abused? Something to think about as we create our own definition.

### 2) Discussion of the Draft Vision Statement

Niche and alternative farms: the term "alternative" is problematic-- it assumes that there is a mainstream type of farming, and everything else is alternative. In reality, farming is farming, whether it's dairy cows or alpacas. Instead, we could say, "niche, horticulture and traditional dairy and livestock operations."

Agritourism: is it farmers' responsibility to promote agritourism? Who else could help? We should add this in.

Overall, are we focusing on preserving open space, or returning idle farmland to production? The Bethel and Liberty survey and workshop results showed a lot of interest in maintaining the open space, but committee members express a preference for returning it to production.

### 3) Discussion of Goals

#1: We should add the term "diversity" to viability and profitability.

#1: What do we mean by the phrase "enhance agriculture"? Encourage it like we encourage commercial enterprises. Also add to it, and facilitate its success through the Ag Light Industrial Park and other projects.

#2: Add the term "awareness" to "community support." But is that strong enough? Maybe add "instill an appreciation."

#3: Add "create and implement policies"? Is it enough to promote policies? "Implement" is a stronger term.

#4: We want to focus not just on preservation, but also promotion and revitalization. Returning idle land to production is extremely expensive-- how to accomplish this will be part of the strategies (for example, reduced rents for new farmers, tax forgiveness, grants, etc.) Innovative ideas are needed.

#4: Maybe returning idle land to production should be a separate goal. If this is a goal, we should identify these parcels on the map. We have the "300" property class, which is vacant land. Important to note that these vacant parcels don't qualify for purchase of development rights programs, which is how the Draft

LESA is set up. So we'll need to adjust the LESA if we want to target dormant parcels for preservation/revitalization.

#4: Add "quality of life" to "rural character and scenic beauty."

#### 4) Other concerns

Land in agriculture is being subdivided and developed. How can the Planning and Zoning Boards support the farms?

There is too much pressure on farmers from outside.

Ag assessments on small parcels with development-- is this right? (Discussion of how ag exemptions work-- they only apply to that portion of a parcel that's in ag use.)

Do the vision statement and goals address this concern, about developers using the system to get ag assessments? Assessments must be filed each year, and the assessor needs to check and see that the farmer is grossing \$10,000 (not from that particular parcel, but from his/ her entire farming operation). So maybe abuse of the system isn't as widespread as it seems? Maybe we could advocate for some additional verification that the ag assessment is being used properly?

It's important to address the misperceptions that farmers have an unfair advantage because they get so many tax exemptions. The strategies we develop in support of Goal #2, regarding education and awareness, must address this misperception.

Ag Districts:

Only individual landowners can change the Ag District boundaries-- by opting in or out each year. And the Ag Districts are comprehensively reviewed every 8 years.

If a parcel is developed, the Farmland Protection Board's prerogative to take that parcel out of the Ag District.

Bethel has created a buffer along 17B in the Ag District-- but the Ag District hasn't been changed; there are just overlay zones here (Gateway zones).

#### 5) Identifying Farms and Farmland (The Draft LESA)

We should identify parcels with ag exemptions as well.

Don is still looking at the aeriels and driving around, so more parcels will probably be added.

Don can generate a list of parcels that have been identified as farms, but which are not in the Ag District-- the 30-day window for entry into the Ag District is happening right now, so the committee could contact these landowners to let them know they can opt in. You don't need to be actively farming to get in; vacant parcels that were previously farmed can opt in.

For the County's PDR program, you must be in an Ag District. It's the first layer of protection for your property, and it's easy to get in, so the County requires it.

Prime soils, soils of statewide significance: this is hard for us because most of our soils are not prime soils. Soil scientists are quite generous in determining whether soils are of statewide significance.

Crop yields: Sullivan County put this into their PDR ranking because we don't have many prime soils. So it's a way for farms to get points. You can't measure it for livestock, though.

Soils highly suitable for development: soils that can accommodate basements, septic, etc. Development and agriculture compete, so as this percentage of soils goes up, perhaps the score goes up as well.

Road frontage: generally, the score goes up as the amount of road frontage goes up. We should change the range, though, since only one parcel in Bethel & Liberty has more than 2000 feet of state road frontage. So we can decrease the numbers. For Liberty and Bethel, it seems like preserving farms along major roadways is critical, because these farms are visible to locals and visitors.

Proximity to water and sewer: we should look at this one again, because Bethel is extending its district—so those farms between Route 55 and somewhere near Hurd Road will now face increasing development pressure. About 10 B&L farms are in a water or sewer district. But this doesn't mean that the line reaches them currently.

Distance to hamlet or village: how close to a village do you want to preserve farms? Also, maybe consider commercial districts as another criterion. Maybe proximity to a commercial area would earn a farm more points.

Conflict: Do you develop your corridor, or protect the visible rural character along the corridor? While commercial development brings quick income to a municipality, ag saves in the long run because you don't have to pay to provide so many services. And how close to your villages do you want to preserve farms?

Significant natural resources: Two major watersheds are the Delaware River (includes Callicoon Creek and Mongaup River) and Neversink River. Maybe add other natural resources, like Lake Superior Park?

Proximity to protected lands: this includes Century Farms, lands with easements on them. We could add any farm that is over 100 years old, and 50 to 100 years old (even if they're not registered as Century Farms).

Proximity to viable agricultural lands: almost every farm has more than 10 within three miles. Maybe we can shorten the radius.

Parcel size: There is 1 parcel in these 2 towns that is over 400 acres, while 153 parcels are 25 acres or smaller. So we could change the scale.

Gross sales: should we add a criterion that addresses economic productivity? This ties into the goals.

Contributions to local restaurants? Again, something we encourage in the vision statement and goals. But it's hard to quantify (and very few farms do sell to local restaurants).

For all committee members: Looking at the map, are the parcels you think are most important ranking high? And how do you suggest we change the rankings and criteria?

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 28, 7:00 pm.**