

Callicoon & Delaware Farmland Protection Plan Committee Meeting, 8-20-09

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**Discussion of Draft Strategies**

- a. These strategies are generic for all towns as a starting point, with some differences noted for each town. Other strategies can be added and some can be removed if the committees don't feel they're important.
- b. The foundation actions are intended to set up the structure and leadership to implement the plan. In the end, each town's elected leaders are the key to the plans' success.
- c. The county and state initiatives are also important, for two reasons:
  - i. They recognize that broader economic development goals require the involvement of the county and state
  - ii. The state (Ag & Markets) reads the plans carefully and they want to know what you think they should be doing with regard to agriculture. So they'll look for this information in deciding whether to approve your plan.

**Town Initiatives**

*(Discussion of all strategies listed in the "Strategies Draft August 2009—Recommended Actions" document. See the document for full details. Noted below are highlights from our discussion.*

**1. Foundation Actions**

B: formal inter-municipal agreement—should this agreement be between all four towns? Discussion of the differences between Callicoon & Delaware, and Bethel & Liberty, with respect to ag priorities. For the purposes of getting grant money, a larger collaborative effort is preferable. Maybe our towns could partner with other towns, Fremont or Cochection, for example. Their priorities might be more like ours. The idea behind this agreement is to set up the support structure necessary for farmers to take advantage of the resources that already exist.

C: ag implementation committee—we already have the foundation for this, with our committee

D: staff person—this would likely be a grant funded position, rather than someone new to add to the towns' payrolls. Nan: most successful plans have some kind of staff support. You can do a lot with volunteers, but there is a point at which you need a paid employee who dedicates a set amount of time to this plan.

\*General agreement that we want to implement B, C and D.

E: advocating implementation of the County Farmland Protection Plan—this must be a priority for the towns, as a means to exert influences on the County. The County FPP has a lot of great information and ideas, but not many specifics. Our towns' farmland protection plans should demonstrate that we expect the County to implement their own plan.

G: Funding sources—discussion of the IDA and its ability to help. There is a sense that IDA can only make loans, which is not always the kind of help farmers want. However, legislators have expressed an understanding that the IDA needs to do more for agriculture. So, some of our strategies must focus on the legislature, because they seem to have the political will to pressure the IDA, if we can give them some direction. Nan: in some counties, the IDA is much more ag-focused. See Jefferson County as an example.

More on the IDA: lots of state aid for projects depends on the number of jobs those projects will create. Our plan can ask the IDA to put pressure on the State, to change that criterion, because many ag

projects don't generate a lot of jobs (although they have a significant positive impact on the County's economy). Some crucial projects, however, would create many jobs (for example, a milk processing plant). So they're prime for IDA help.

I: organizations that assist farmers and farmland owners—suggestion that SASD be added to this list. They are successful grant writers working to help farmers through alternative energy projects.

## **2. Strategic Actions**

### **A. Economic Development**

(1): there are many programs offering tax relief at the town level—we should look into these for ideas

(5): Partnership for Economic Development—costs \$300 to join, so farmers are unlikely to get involved. Discussion of the Partnership: the County and IDA give them money for agriculture—how do they use it? The Partnership is a valuable resource—they already have a structure to help businesses; we just need to build on it to help agriculture businesses.

(6): Ag-Revolving Loan Fund—maybe the definition of eligible agri-businesses needs to be broadened.

(7): Clearinghouse for information—CCE would be an ideal entity to host this. There are a multitude of resources for farmers, but one can only find them by digging through countless websites. Someone needs to do this work, and put the relevant information in one comprehensive website, so that farmers can easily find the resources they need.

(8): Local branding—discussion of an ag-focused local brand. “Made in the SC Catskills” isn't ag-focused. “Pure Catskills” is, but lacks brand recognition. Either “Pure Catskills” needs much more promotion, or a new brand could be developed.

(12): LDR and other financial incentives are key to getting new farmers. In this strategy, and all others, the towns need to set up an atmosphere where ag can be profitable and farms have a reasonable chance of being successful. See “Northern NY Agricultural Development” as a model.

(15): Center for Workforce Development—they have gotten a lot of stimulus money, which could be directed to creating a skilled ag workforce. Also, Sullivan West CSD has identified the creation of an FFA program as a long-term goal.

### **B. Policies and Regulations**

(1): Zoning recommendations—what other incentives, besides a tax break, could the towns give people (especially second homeowners), to let farmers use their land? See (2) under state initiatives, below.

Other policies and regulations:

\*Insurance—farmers need expensive insurance if they want to allow people to visit their farms. Is there a way to lessen this burden?

\*More on insurance: Health insurance for farmers and their families is very expensive. But the Farm Bureau offers health insurance.

### **C. Education and Communication**

(1): Education campaign—elected officials need to be educated about how ag contributes to the fiscal health of the County (not just the scenic or other quality of life benefits).

(1)a—establish an ag visitors center & working farm: we are in the process of doing this, with the Demonstration Farm in Kenoza Lake. So this plan could advocate continued support for that effort.

(1)c—school programs. Sullivan Renaissance supports gardens at schools. Also, Ag-stravaganza is an excellent event and all schools should participate.

(3): Encourage farmers to join the SC Chamber of Commerce—annual membership dues are \$125 for businesses with 1 employee, \$175 for businesses with 2-4 employees, \$225 for businesses with 5-9 employees, and up.

Other education and communication actions:

\*Maybe SCCC could be used as a resource for building websites (for individual farms selling products, or other collaborative efforts)? They probably offer classes in web design. Some concern was voiced on this topic: past negative experiences with student web designers, and centralized control of web maintenance (for example, town websites—very few people have access to them, to add or modify them).

### **E. Environmental Protection**

(2) Gas drilling—how else can we address it? The Towns are already working on regs for road maintenance and water security, but they don't have much authority beyond this. Perhaps education (the complex nature of the subject, and the alternatives that landowners have) is the best route.

Other environmental protection strategies:

\*Discussion of runoff, non-point source pollution. Farmers face constantly changing regulations. They make big investments in these areas, and within a few years the regulations change and they need to invest in different projects and devices. This plan shouldn't add to those regulations.

### **County Initiatives**

(6) IDA policies: perhaps we should replace "dairy farm initiatives" with "livestock initiatives." These operations use much of the ag land base.

### **State Initiatives**

(3) Gross sales limits: lots of support for lowering the \$50,000 gross sales requirement to be eligible for an ag assessment. This level of income is impossibly high.

(4) Farm to School: NYS has an excellent farm to school program.

(7) Penalties for removing land from ag uses: this money could be used to fund PDR programs, or to somehow compensate landowners who allow farmers to use their land (instead of giving landowners a tax break, through the ag assessment program). (see also (1) under state initiatives, re: additional incentives for landowners).

\*Other possible state initiatives: Some type of viewshed protection program. This would focus on productive farmland visible from roadways. Farmers would receive some sort of tax break or other incentive to maintain that land in production so that everyone who uses the road could take advantage of the view.

### **Next Steps**

- a. For next time, Nan will draft an implementation table with strategies, time frames, and responsible parties.
- b. Nan will turn our zoning audit into a set of bulleted recommendations. We will continue to add, remove and edit strategies.
- c. Committee: keep looking at the draft strategies and give your input.
- d. September meeting: the committee will look at the draft plan and the implementation table.
- e. October meeting: review document
- f. November: general meeting to present the plan (for both farmers and the public).
- g. November: public hearing (we will find out if the public hearing is required before the contract ends, and whether we can have one public hearing for both towns).
- h. December: give the plan to the Town Boards for their adoption.

**Next meeting: Thursday, September 17, 7:30 pm**