



Town of Meredith

Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan

September
2012



Acknowledgements

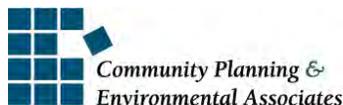
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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations Used in Plan

Ag – Agriculture
AFPB – Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board
AG LDC – Agricultural Local Development Corporation
AML – Agriculture and Markets Law
BOCES – Board of Cooperative Education Services
CAFO – Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation
CCE – Cornell Cooperative Extension
CSA – Community Supported Agriculture
FFA – Future Farmers of America
IDA – Industrial Development Agency
LDR – Lease of Development Rights
LEED – Leaders in Energy and Environmental Design
NYS DAM – New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
NYS DEC – New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
NYSERDA – New York State Energy Research and Development Agency
PDR – Purchase of Development Rights
TDR – Transfer of Development Rights
USDA – United States Department of Agriculture



Meridale Farms

Executive Summary

Agriculture in New York State has a long and rich history, and the history and development of the Town of Meredith are closely connected to agriculture. Today, farming in Meredith remains an important land use and a significant aspect of the local economy. Meredith has demonstrated this commitment by adopting a Comprehensive Plan in 2006 that identified and celebrated the role of agriculture in the Town. New York State also has a long history of planning and promotion efforts aimed at agriculture, and State law was recently amended to facilitate planning at the town-level.

The Town of Meredith sought and received a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to develop a town-level plan to protect and enhance agriculture. The grant tasked the Town to locate farm areas that should be protected, look at the value of farmland open space and the agricultural economy to the municipality, evaluate consequences of possible conversion, and describe activities, programs and strategies to promote continued agricultural use. A local committee was established to develop this Plan for Meredith.

This Plan is designed to offer the Town a toolbox of ideas and actions that can be implemented over time to improve agricultural opportunities in Meredith, preserve important farmlands, and maintain open lands as part of the landscape. Overall, this Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan will give the Town:

- policies to enhance agriculture as a critical land use in Town;
- opportunities to promote new farm operations; and
- mechanisms to help the Town to promote agriculture that produces healthy and locally available food.
- tools the Town Board and Planning Board can use during project review to protect farms to the maximum extent practical;
- a framework for the Town and interested landowners to promote farming and agri-tourism in Town;
- additional leverage and success in receiving future State aid;
- assistance to local landowners who wish to participate in State or Federal purchase of development rights programs;
- a timetable for the Town to implement recommendations;

The planning process began with the formation of the Farmland Protection

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Plan Working Group, composed of farmers, interested citizens, and Town representatives, and the hiring of a planning consultant to assist this committee. A data base of information, including maps, was developed to support the identification of farmlands, issues and trends affecting agriculture in Meredith. The Plan is informed by input from both farmers and the general public.

Public input included meetings of the committee, the development and administration of two surveys, and a public workshop. From these activities, agricultural issues, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in Meredith were identified. Public input was also critical to the development of a vision, and specific goals, objectives, and a prioritized list of actions to achieve this vision for agriculture in Meredith.

This Plan is a record of this process and outlines steps the Town of Meredith can take to support farming and agriculture. In summary, the following items are included in the Plan:

Role of Agriculture in Meredith The Plan discusses the prominent role of agriculture in Meredith's economy, open space, rural character, sense of community, and overall quality of life. Surveys of the people of Meredith show that they hold farms in high regard because agriculture contributes to the small town and rural character of the area, and shapes the working landscape they value. Farms in Meredith also provide fresh, safe, local food. This Plan also builds on the 2006 Town of Meredith Comprehensive Plan vision statement, which explicitly mentions agriculture as integral to the Town's future.

Current Status of Farming The Plan documents changes in agriculture over time and identifies key trends and pressures facing farmers today. Much of the land area in Meredith (over 60%) is valuable farmland, according to state and federal criteria. The number of small farms in the area has recently increased, but most farms are still between 50 and 1,000 acres in size. Although livestock-related production is important, many other forms of agriculture are also practiced, especially as secondary farm businesses. The following issues facing farmers in Meredith are identified and discussed: low levels of farm income, increasing production costs, lack of organization among members of the farm community, loss of farmland, persistent pressure to convert farmland to other uses, and uncertainties surrounding farm succession.

Vision and Goals The Plan establishes a long-range vision for agriculture in the Town. Elements of this vision include

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- protecting working landscapes as an integral part of life in Meredith;
- supporting a diverse set of agricultural enterprises;
- financial sustainability of farms;
- developing a new generation of farmers;
- the development of agricultural infrastructure and other supports;
and
- increasing the availability of local, affordable food.

Specific goals to support this vision are identified. They are aimed at maintaining rural land use patterns, improving cooperation and communication among agencies and farmers, and promoting environmental sustainability, community character, and economic viability.

Strategies The heart of the Plan is its comprehensive toolbox of potential actions to address the many issues facing agriculture. The strategies are focused at the town-level. But, because success is in part based on regional efforts, the Plan also includes County and State level strategies. These are intended to support local initiatives.

Among the recommendations is formation of an Agricultural Implementation Committee. This committee will help guide the implementation of the strategies identified in this Plan. It is also important to increase communication and cooperation among all people and organizations that will have a role in enhancing agriculture. The remaining town-level actions are grouped under the headings: farmland protection, ag economic development, incentives and promotion, and promoting and recruiting buyers and growers.

The Plan analyzes current land use regulations in Meredith and makes specific recommendations to make the existing subdivision law more farm-friendly and farm-sensitive. Among these is improving the subdivision law by adding detail on its existing conservation subdivision section. The Plan also recommends studying the development capacity in Town, instituting various farm-friendly design guidelines for new buildable lots, and establishing a local Right-to-Farm law.

Cooperative processing and transportation efforts, as well as various marketing strategies are outlined as key economic development mechanisms. Use of conservation easements and a “match maker” program to link landowners with farmers who need pastures are key

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recommendations designed to incentivize and promote agriculture. Other recommendations include improving local awareness of agriculture, building support for farmland protection tools, and centralizing information concerning training and funding opportunities for agribusinesses and farmers.

Implementation All recommendations are included in a table to help the Town Board implement this Plan. Each strategy has a priority, and an agency or committee assigned to help with implementation.



Spring Lake Farm

Introduction

Agricultural Planning In New York

New York State has had a long history of promoting and planning for agriculture. In 1971, the State introduced agricultural districts through Agriculture and Markets Law 25-aa. This program allows farmers to voluntarily commit land in special areas called agricultural districts that encourage and protect commercial farming. In return, agricultural districts provide farmers with protections and safeguards from outside intrusions (such as the right-to-farm). Landowners may also be eligible for agricultural assessments to reduce the tax burden on farmlands both inside and outside of agricultural districts.

In 1992, the State adopted the Agricultural Protection Act which strengthened farmers' right-to-farm. This Act placed greater scrutiny on state projects that could have a negative impact on agriculture, and authorized development of county farmland protection plans. Article 25-aaa of this act helps to sustain the farm economy and promotes local initiatives to protect agriculture and farmland in New York State. This section authorized the creation of county-level Agriculture and Farmland Protection Boards (AFPB). These boards advise their county legislatures on actions that impact farms located in county agricultural districts.

Delaware County has an AFPB that is authorized to:

- ✓ Advise their county Board of Supervisors about agricultural districts;
- ✓ Review notice of intent filings;
- ✓ Make recommendations about proposed actions involving government acquisition of farmland in agricultural districts;
- ✓ Request review of state agency regulations that affect farm operations within an agricultural district; and
- ✓ Review and endorse applications for New York Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) funding.

New York State legislation modified the agricultural protection programs (Article 25-aaa) in 2006 to authorize local towns to develop agriculture and farmland protection plans (Section 324-a). The law requires that local plans include identification of land areas proposed to be protected, analysis of those lands related to their value to the agricultural economy, open space

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value, consequences of possible conversion, level of conversion pressure, and a description of actions intended to be used by the municipality to promote continued agricultural use. The State established a funding program to assist local municipalities with the development of these plans.

Overview of the Planning Process

Planning activities in the Town of Meredith included the following steps:

1. Formation of a planning steering committee made up of representatives from the farm community, town government, planning board, and citizens;
2. Hiring a consulting firm to assist the steering committee;
3. Development and analysis of a farmer and farmland owner survey;
4. Creation of a GIS data base for maps and mapping agriculture related features;
5. Identification of lands used for farm activities using both administrative, census, and assessment data as well as field data collection;
6. Identification of issues, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities related to agriculture in Meredith;
7. Public input, including workshops and a survey of Town residents;
8. Establishment of an agricultural vision and goals;
9. Establishment of strategies and actions;
10. Prioritization of actions to be implemented;
11. Drafting of complete Plan;
12. Public input on draft Plan;
13. Submittal to the Town Board for their consideration; and
14. Town Board adoption process that includes incorporation of this Plan as an appendix of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan.

Definitions Related to Agriculture

1. **Farmland** – land currently being used and active in farming or that has the potential to be used in agricultural production, including forest products.
2. **Agricultural Support Land** – land that is part of a farm that has an agricultural assessment, but is not actively farmed itself, provided the land is part of an operating farm.
3. **Primary Farmer** – a person who earns \$10,000 in gross income from agriculture or receives an agricultural assessment for a farm operation.

4. **Secondary Farmer** – a person who owns farmland but does not operate a farm or farm the land but rents it to a primary farmer.
5. **Tertiary Farmer** – a person who uses farmland and products from the land, but is not a farmer, for example.



Picking Blueberries at Windy Knob Farm

Agriculture in Meredith

Role of Agriculture

In many ways, agriculture occupies an important position in Meredith. The economy, open space, rural character, environment, sense of community, generational sustainability, local food supply, and overall quality of life are all uniquely affected by farms, farmers, and the community they help to support.

The following list of roles grew out of the public workshop held during this planning process (See Appendix 4); it documents the many roles agriculture plays in the Town:

- Provides a working landscape
- Contributes to rural character and rural atmosphere

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- Part of the visual attractiveness of town and beauty
- Offers quality of life that people are looking for
- Offers recreation
- Offers fresh food, local food, and safe food
- Potential to create local jobs
- Keeps taxes down, doesn't cost a lot of tax dollars to service
- Protects clean water and air
- Produces strong property values
- Provides open lands which are better for scenic views and character than lands that are all wooded
- A strongly identified farm community means the Town can have more successful leverage for grants and program dollars. Meredith has, and continues to want a farm-friendly community identity to give a workable base and momentum to build on
- Farms could add to farmer's children's incomes if they leave a place for viable agriculture for these children

The Resident Survey (See Appendix 4) confirmed these roles: A sizable majority of respondents viewed agriculture as important to Meredith, citing community character, locally grown food, and economic health as well as the central and formative role of agriculture in the Town's history.

Status of Farming

Based on an analysis of the farmer/farmland owner survey, resident survey, public workshop, maps, and other data contained in this Plan, the following trends and conditions characterize agriculture in Meredith:

- a. Farming remains a significant land use in Meredith. Historically, farming, especially dairy farming, drove the local economy. Today, agricultural uses can be found on over 50% of Meredith's land area. There are over 19,200 acres of farmland on 283 parcels in Town.
- b. A sizable percentage of Meredith's land area is valued for its ability to support agriculture. According to state and federal criteria, over 60% of the Town has land suited to farming due to the presence of soils of statewide importance. Much of this land is currently used for agricultural production: Farms



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identified in this Plan contain over half of Meredith's inventory of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Significance.

- c. The number of farms in the Meredith region has recently increased. Between 1997 and 2007,¹ the number of farms in the Meredith region increased by 18%. In 2007, farms in the Meredith region accounted for 30% of all farms in Delaware County. At the same time, the number of farms in the County declined between 2002 and 2007 by 5.2%. This makes agriculture in the Meredith region a growing share of total ag production in Delaware County.
- d. Agriculture in Meredith depends on land owned by non-farmers. The Farmer Survey, which was mailed to the owners of record of identified farm parcels in Town, found that respondents were generally split between farm operators and those that rent farmland to farmers. In addition, a survey of all residents indicated that about one third are interested in renting land for farming.
- e. Farms between 50 and 1,000 acres still make up over 70% of farm operations in the area. Since 1987, the number of small farms has increased; in fact, recent growth in farm operations was all in small farms. Nonetheless, the figures cited above show that medium-sized farms remain important, and farmers surveyed reported that they farm an average of 68 acres.
- f. Despite their size, the sales of most farms are less than \$50,000 per year. Recent changes in value of agricultural products produced show increases in farms in both small and large sales categories. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of farms with less than \$50,000 farm sales increased 13%, while the number of farms with sales of over \$250,000 more than doubled, increasing from 10 to 23. Yet farms with large sales still comprise just 10% of all farms in the area.
- g. Hay, livestock, and dairy are the most prevalent farm types in Meredith. The short growing season in Meredith limits the kinds of agricultural operations that are feasible, but the Town is uniquely able to support grass and pasture oriented activities. The Farmer Survey and Ag Census data show that primary farm businesses in Meredith are generally livestock-related. There are also more beef animals in Town than in 2007—now over 900 head. Although some dairy farms have gone out of business, some have converted to hay and raising heifers.
- h. Many farms have secondary businesses, and these tend to involve an array of agricultural practices. Over half of survey respondents

¹ From the Ag Census. The Meredith region is defined as zip codes within the Town boundary. Results are shown in Appendix 1, Figure 1.

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reported secondary operations, such as hay, forestry, eggs, and wool products, among others, and Ag Census data also show modest gains in farms with sales of chickens, hogs, and sheep.

- i. By several measures, farming fuels the local economy. It is an important source of employment. According to the Farmer Survey,
- Farm employment is at least 53 persons, with an average of 1.7 and 1.5 part- and full-time employees per survey respondent, respectively;
 - Meredith farms typically support a greater proportion of year-round versus seasonal employees; and
 - Meredith farmers also tend to spend money locally: The majority of respondents indicated that they make over 75% of farm-related expenditures within 30 miles of their farm.

The presence of farms can also boost non-farm employment in the area. It has been documented that for every one farm employee, 1.59 non-farm jobs are generated.² However, according to the Farmer Survey, most farms do not have products sold at local markets.

- j. Increased production costs were identified as important issues. Fuel, equipment, and taxes appeared to be of concern to farmers. Increasing costs have also been documented as a problem facing many farmers elsewhere in Delaware County. Both transportation of local agricultural products to market and lack of access to markets have also been identified as issues facing farmers in Meredith.
- k. Farmers in Meredith are aging. Similar trends can be found throughout the County and in many rural areas across the nation. In the U.S., the average age of farm operators has increased every five years since 1978. In Meredith, many farmers are approaching, or have already reached retirement age. Lack of interest in farming among members of the next generation is an issue for Meredith farms.
- l. Many farmers must supplement their income with other work. The number of principal operators listing farming as their primary occupation has remained fairly constant. However, more farmers need off-farm income, either from secondary operations or reliance on second incomes in the household. The fact that 77% of farms earn incomes below that which would allow agriculture to provide the sole source of income for the family shows that there is a real economic issue facing Meredith farmers. Our Farmer Survey also found that

² *Green Grass, Green Jobs: Increasing Livestock Production on Underutilized Grasslands in NYS*, (n.d.), Cornell Small Farms Program, p. 7.

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farming comprised a quarter or less of net family income for many respondents.

m. Recent demographic, housing, and subdivision trends indicate moderate conversion pressure. Housing and population data show that

- Between 2000 and 2010, the population of Meredith decreased from 1,588 to 1,529, or 3.7%.
- In the same ten years, the number of households increased by 2.6%.
- Census and building permit data show an increase of between 76 and 78 housing units—growth of about 9%.
- The number of vacant units for seasonal, recreational or occasional use as a percentage of all housing units in Town increased from 19.6% in 2000 to 23.2% in 2010.

Together, these trends suggest that, in spite of relative stability in the Town's population, there is some pressure to develop and convert existing open space into housing.



Promisedland Farm

n. Development in past two decades has been scattered across the Town with implications for farmland protection. The Historic Buildout

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Analysis (Appendix 3) shows that parcels built upon in the last 10 years are distributed all across Town. This land use pattern indicates that larger farm parcels throughout the Town could be converted to non-farm use, rather than concentrating residential growth in or around existing hamlets.

- o. Limited cooperation and communication between farmers and organizations involved in agriculture is a barrier. There are already many programs that support and promote agriculture in existence. However, these may be underutilized by local farmers. Lack of knowledge of, and limited coordination between organizations and agencies mean they are not as effective as they could be to promote, market and support area farming. There is need to educate farmers, agencies, and landowners alike.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

This section identifies the many factors that affect agriculture in Meredith. The following list combines information from maps, trends, and data, committee member input, and public input. The ideas presented here are not ranked according to any specific set of criteria.

Agricultural Strengths

This list presents resources or capabilities in Meredith that help agriculture to be successful.

1. Meredith has clean water, air, and soil.
2. There is a significant amount of land already farmed in Meredith.
3. Grasslands in Town can likely support far greater levels of livestock production.
4. Low land prices have been cited as drawing farmers to the Town.
5. There appear to be many non-operators who own farmland and are willing to rent to farm operators, which keeps farm production costs down.
6. In the region, medium-sized farms (i.e. those of around 50 to 1,000 acres) make up over 70% of farm operations.
7. Conversion pressure has only reached moderate levels.
8. Productive soils can be found throughout the Town.
9. Meredith enjoys a long history of and support for farming.
10. Agriculture is an important component of the local economy.
11. People in Meredith—farmers, farmland owners, and residents not necessarily involved in farming—value agriculture for its role in community, landscape, and environmental preservation.

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12. Many farmers spend money locally, within a short distance of their farms; conversely, very few appear to make purchases outside Delaware County.

13. Agriculture can be economically viable in Meredith.

14. Even though the economy is not always favorable, many farmers that participated in the Town survey had short-term (i.e. within 1 year) plans to increase the amount of sales generated by their farms as well as size of their farm operations.

15. There is local support among farmers, farmland owners, and residents for local laws and planning relating to farming and farm viability.

16. There is interest among Meredith residents for locally produced goods.

Agricultural Weaknesses

This is a list of internal deficiencies in resources or capabilities that can hinder agriculture from being successful.

1. Difficult climate and soil conditions may combine to limit the range of potentially viable agricultural practices.
2. Farmers in Meredith are aging, and there is concern that they are not being replaced by a new generation of Meredith farmers.
3. Due to rising expenses and other factors, farm revenues alone may not provide a sustainable income source for farmers.
4. While pressure to convert farmland into other uses is modest, historical land development trends suggest continued decentralized urbanization, which, when considered cumulatively, can have negative impacts on farm operations and remove important farmland from active use.
5. There is a lack of local distribution and processing infrastructure, which hinders access to important markets and increases costs.
6. Existing regulations and review processes may have gaps in how the specific and unique needs of agriculture are addressed.
7. The number of dairy farm operations, historically important to the region, continues to decline.
8. There is a lack of organization among Town farmers, hampering the development of promotion at various levels, and effective advertising initiatives.
9. The general public may lack an understanding of the specifics of farming and agricultural practices.

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10. High property taxes increase expenses.
11. While renting or leasing land for agricultural purposes can be cost-effective, it also carries risks and potentially limits the range of possible uses of or improvements to the land.
12. Uncertainty surrounds the potential for gas drilling and associated activities in Meredith.

Agricultural Opportunities

This is a list of factors external to Meredith that can affect agriculture in a positive way.

1. There has been recent growth in small farm operations (i.e. those less than 50 acres) in the Meredith area.
2. Large metropolitan markets, in particular those in the New York metropolitan area, are close by.
3. There is an opportunity to diversify farms.
4. Development pressure, while present, is not as high as in other areas with significant agriculture.
5. Numerous grant opportunities exist, although knowledge and coordination represent hurdles to successful applications.
6. Trucking and transportation cooperatives can allow farmers to spread their costs among many operations and concomitantly increase sales.
7. Significant opportunities exist in the region for the development of enhanced promotion and marketing strategies.
8. Opportunities exist to coordinate farmland protection and agricultural promotion strategies with other area municipalities, organizations, and other stakeholders.
9. There is growing interest in locally grown food, organic items, and other niche markets as well as concern regarding food security.
10. Programs relating to the New York City watershed can benefit farmers when their land is located within its boundaries.
11. A common technique for beginning and small farms, many farmers in Delaware County are already employing direct marketing strategies, and the potential exists for online sales and other similar web-based promotion efforts.



Windy Knob Farm

Agricultural Threats

These are out-of-town (external) factors that can negatively affect agriculture.

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1. The continued decline in the number of farm operations at the County level poses various challenges, including a associated decline in agricultural support services and infrastructure.
2. Increasing fuel, production, and machinery costs may hinder the viability of farm operations.
3. The lack of a robust next generation of farmers who will replace those retiring from farming could threaten the long-term sustainability of agriculture in the area.
4. New York City land acquisition and easement programs may continue to reduce the amount of working farmland across the region.
5. While its pace and scale are uncertain, gas drilling—i.e. environmental concerns and impacts from associated support activities—may lead to additional conversion pressure and industrialization of the landscape.

Priority Farmlands

Protecting large areas of farmland is an important part of farmland protection programs, and is among the goals identified in this Plan. One step in accomplishing this is to identify this 'critical mass' of farmland. Once these important farmlands are identified, a variety of programs can be targeted over time to help protect those lands and promote farming. To understand what the priority lands in Meredith are, the following steps were taken:

1. Identify farmland in Meredith.
2. Identify all farmed parcels that receive an agricultural assessment.
3. Rank those parcels (that receive an ag assessment) according to size, with higher priority given to parcels 80 acres and larger.
4. Identify all farmed parcels that do not receive an agricultural assessment.
5. From those farm parcels (not receiving ag assessments), identify parcels greater than 80 acres that are also located within 100 feet of parcels that do receive an assessment were selected for the third group. These lands represent lands that are important to that core group.
6. Identify all other farmland parcels.

Ag assessments were used as an initial criterion because, to get one, farmland owners and operators must meet certain requirements that are likely to be related to the extent of and commitment to farming on their land. Ag assessments are applied to 63% of identified farm parcels in Meredith.

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The benefits of creating a “critical mass” of farms and protected farmland are a common feature of farmland protection programs. If the Town can maintain this critical mass, the benefits include reducing conflicts among adjacent non-farm, incompatible uses, and making local farm support infrastructure economically viable.³

While about half of all parcels are 40 acres or less, the 80-acre threshold was selected based on a) the need to protect large farm parcels; b) the fact that the distribution breaks at this point; and c) the recognition that farming will have a better chance on these larger parcels. The distribution of sizes of all identified farmland in Meredith is depicted on Figure 1.

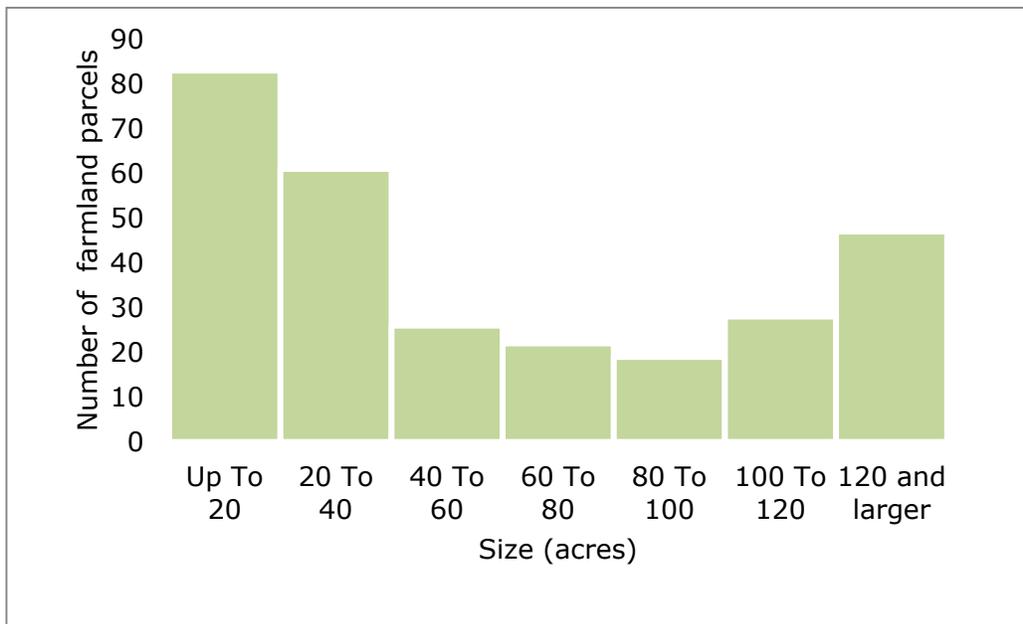


Figure 1. Frequency distribution of identified farm parcels by size.

The results of this process establishes four tiers of priority farmland. This is summarized in Table 1. Farmland is roughly evenly distributed among prioritization groups 1, 2, and 4; category 3 makes up a comparatively smaller share. The “Prioritized Farmland” map shows those lands that the Town should target in its ag promotion and farmland protection strategies as outlined in this Plan.

Table 1. Farmland prioritization framework details and distribution of identified farmland.

³ Hellerstein et al., *Farmland Protection: The Role of Public Preferences for Rural Amenities* (Agricultural Economic Report No. AER-815), 2005, p. vi.

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<i>Criteria</i>	Priority Level			
	1	2	3	4
Identified Farmland	●	●	●	●
Receiving Ag Assessment	●	●		
> 80 Acres	●		●	
Adjacent to Priority 1 Lands			●	
<i>Summary of Results</i>				
Number of Parcels	71	109	21	85
% of Farm Parcels	25%	28%	7%	30%

It is also important to note that there are two other additional features in Meredith that should come into play long-term when planning for farm and farmland protection. The first is the presence of the boundaries of the New York City Watershed. Due to several programs and policies, there is going to be more land preserved from development in this area. Of particular importance to agriculture are those lands having Watershed Agricultural Council easements. These are lands within the watershed boundary that will have a higher probability of preservation to benefit farming.

The second area of importance is those farmlands situated along Route 28. Route 28 is an important transportation corridor. It is also the location from which many residents and visitors gain a visual picture of the rural character of the Town. The Route 28 corridor also contains a large block of potential farmland and provides important access to potential farmland located to the east and west of the road, thus connecting both sides of the critical mass of farmland in town (see map).

Town of Meredith Delaware County, NY

Prioritized Farmland

-  Town Boundary
-  Surrounding Town Boundaries
-  Property Boundaries
-  Water
-  Streams
- Roads**
-  State Route
-  County Road
-  Local Road
-  Private Road

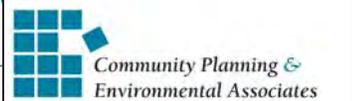
- Prioritized Farmland Parcels**
-  1 - Ag Assessment and over 80 acres
 -  2 - Ag Assessment and less than 80 acres
 -  3 - Adjacent to Ag Assessed and over 80 acres
 -  4 - All other Farmland Parcels

Identified farmland consists of tax parcels with an agricultural use classification (given by the local assessor), tax parcels receiving an agricultural assessment, and additional parcels identified by residents as being used for agricultural purposes.

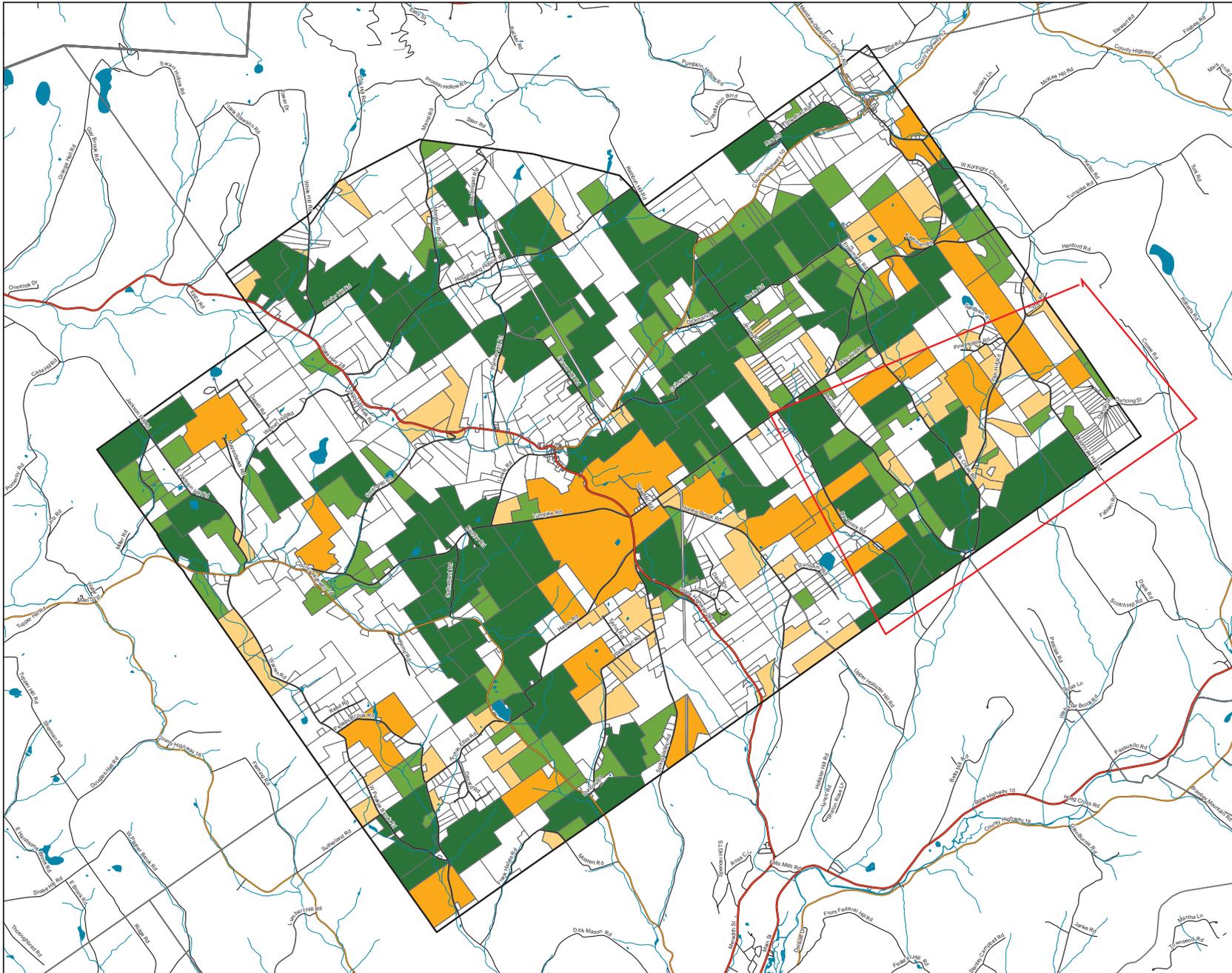
Map Date:
7-6-2012



0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 Miles



Nan Stolzenburg, AICP - www.planningbetterplaces.com
152 Stolzenburg Road, Berne, NY 12023
Don Meltz, Planning and GIS - www.donmeltz.com



Vision and Goals

Agricultural Vision Statement

Agriculture has always been at the heart of life in Meredith. The vision presents an image of what Meredith aspires to be and look like in the future. Our vision for the future is:

- That Meredith will prioritize preservation of farmland and working landscapes in its planning and future growth to ensure that agriculture remains an important part of life in Meredith;
- That there is a diversity of agricultural enterprises and we successfully take advantage of our grasslands;
- That farms are environmentally and financially sustainable and there is a future generation of farmers;
- That local agricultural infrastructure is available to support farmers and farms, from education to marketing to processing; and
- That we are successful in making affordable food available locally.

Goals and Objectives

Goals are statements that express the specific direction needed in order to attain the vision. They are guiding statements about the ideal condition of agriculture in Meredith in the future. Meredith has the following goals:

1. Increase the availability of locally-grown, affordable food.
2. Increase the financial success of farms.
3. Maintain the rural character of the Town of which open farm lands are an important component.
4. Keep farms using environmentally sustainable practices to protect water quality and open spaces.
5. Maintain the low-density residential development pattern in Town in a way that does not promote conversion of farms to non-farm uses.
6. Prevent high impact industrial activities that alter the community's rural character and that would be in conflict with further growth of our agricultural economy.
7. Increase the diversity of agricultural operations.
8. Protect critical farmlands.
9. Increase the level and extent of cooperation and organization among farmers, the Town, and regional stakeholders.

Strategies

Just as many of the goals identified above have interrelated elements, many of the following strategies overlap, interlink with, and mutually support each other. The “Action Toolbox” developed in this section was intended to be comprehensive set of objectives and policies readily adoptable at and able to be led by local government; it is designed to provide specific ways to accomplish the goals specified above as well as offer a menu of potentially applicable strategies to be combined.

In addition, Meredith recognizes that the Town alone can only address certain aspects of the issues facing agriculture. The agriculture and farmland protection toolbox must therefore include both county and state solutions. In addition to actions capable of being initiated by the Town, the final two sections provide actions to be taken by Delaware County and New York State in order to ensure that the state remains viable for agriculture.



Spring Lake Farm

Town Initiatives

Overall, the Town needs to be focus on the marketing of local foods and the organization of farmers to work together. The Town needs to be farmer friendly. Meredith also needs to help make it easier for people to buy local food, and facilitate a process to establish a central location and method for marketing, processing, and pick up of products.

General, Communication, Cooperation

Action 1. Adopt this Plan as an addendum to the adopted Town of Meredith Comprehensive Plan.

Action 2. Create an Agricultural Implementation Committee or working group for Meredith. This Committee has an important role to play in helping Meredith realize its agriculture and farmland protection goals. Formation of this committee is a high priority, initial implementation step for the Town Board. Many of the potential roles of this committee are actions that could be long-term and ongoing. This group could be responsible for:

- serving as the information clearinghouse and forum for farm-town relations,
- facilitating the technical, educational, business and regulatory assistance needed to farm and to live near farms,
- fostering a working relationship among farmers, residents and institutions,
- advocating agriculture, farmland protection, and agricultural economic development at county, state and federal levels,
- marketing, promoting, and initiating community agricultural events and awareness programs,
- assisting the Town Board in grant seeking and writing for ag programs,
- facilitate existing programs that match farmers with available land,
- seeking grants to implement these programs, and
- helping promote sustainable farming to landowners and farmers.
- use existing resources (such as the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center and the Small Scale Food Entrepreneurship program) to promote value-added farming, CSAs, niche farming and agri-tourism opportunities.

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Action 3. With assistance from Delaware County or other agencies/organizations, work with neighboring towns to explore the feasibility of establishing an inter-municipal agreement for the purpose of developing mutually beneficial ways to carry out the objectives and actions as called for in this Plan. The following steps could be taken to facilitate this:

- Identify towns and municipalities that Meredith may want to enter into agreement with.
- Establish formal agreements to be signed by each partner.
- As part of this multi-town agreement, consider having an inter-municipal agricultural Advisory Council to oversee programs.
- Consider having each member community in the agreement commit to share costs for agricultural economic development. Long-term, having a hired "circuit rider" staff person who could concentrate on implementing the actions as called for in this Plan and others could be very beneficial .
- Work with these partners to identify and prioritize projects that will be implemented.

Action 4. Seek alternative mechanisms for funding the suggested actions called for in this Plan. This is a critical action because it is a catalyst for and affects the success of many other actions. To accomplish this:

- a. *Consider preparing for and seeking grants.* The following steps can be used:
 - Identify projects that require funds.
 - For each project, develop a short profile that identifies project goals and a general scope of work.
 - Establish a general budget for each.
 - Create a ready-to-use file containing this information so the details are easily accessible as funding becomes available. This will help with the grant writing, especially if the application period is short: The Town will be ready to move on grant requests.
 - Monitor www.grants.gov and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets websites for grant announcements. In addition, the Town may want to consider use of a grant writer to do this monitoring and assist in grant applications.
- b. *Support statewide approvals for use of real estate transfer taxes.* As an additional funding alternative, the real estate transfer tax would

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impose a fee of up to two percent of the sale price of real property to fund open space and agricultural protection programs.

Currently used in several Long Island towns and several other locations, the real estate transfer tax would need to be approved by the

State legislature and then locally through a voter referendum. Past attempts to pass statewide legislation to allow for this (called the Community Preservation Act) were passed by the State legislature, but not signed into law. Advocate to the New York State legislature and Governor to re-pass a 2% real estate transfer tax so that the Town could collect additional funds for farmland protection.



Hay Field at Meridale Farms

Action 5: Support programs, organizations and agencies that assist farmers and farmland owners. These include but are not limited to Cornell Cooperative Extension, Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Natural Resource Conservation Service. These organizations may be able to help write or administer grants, or provide expertise via workshops.

Action 6: Use every opportunity to convey the importance of agriculture to Town residents and officials. Effectively use the Town website, Town Hall, town events, and newsletters (and e-newsletters) to keep agriculture in the forefront of public consciousness. Develop an e-mail list for these contacts.

Action 7: Consider establishing a town (or multi-town if an inter-municipal agreement is reached) local development corporation oriented to promoting farm and agri-business retention and expansion.

Action 8: Submit the list of County Initiatives, below, to Delaware County.

Action 9: Explore and participate in New York State agricultural economic

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development plans.

Action 10: Submit the list of State Initiatives, below, to New York State.



Windy Knob Farm

Farmland Protection

Action 1: Strengthen the existing subdivision regulations so that agriculture has a more prominent role as a resource to be considered and protected during the review process. Improvements to the local regulations should include:

- Update definitions to include ag-related terms, including the agricultural data statement (See Appendix 6).
- Update the purpose statements so that they clearly include protection of agriculture as one of the reasons to regulate subdivisions. This will enhance the role of agriculture. Further, expand the purpose statements to recognize the importance of having new development be consistent with rural character and the other goals established in the Town Comprehensive Plan.
- Clarify how the Planning Board should use the required agricultural data statement. For example, the Planning Board should use this statement to notify adjacent farmland owners of a proposed subdivision application.

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- Add agriculture as one of the resources to be evaluated during review. Proposed subdivision plats and applications should identify whether the parcel is in a NYS Agricultural District, has prime farmland or soils of statewide importance on them, and if active agricultural activities are taking place on or adjacent to the parcel. The Planning Board should evaluate the impact of the proposal on other farms in the NYS Agricultural District.
- Add agriculture as a resource to be protected (Section 501 and 511).
- Consider establishing a requirement for new subdivisions to establish buffers between new residential areas being created and existing agricultural uses. These buffers should be the responsibility of the new non-farm use.
- Promote use of the conservation subdivision technique to allow for new development and, at the same time, preservation of farmland. Meredith's existing subdivision regulations already define and authorize the Planning Board to require a conservation subdivision, if the Board determines a conservation subdivision to be appropriate. However, the subdivision regulations give no process or development standards to guide application, review and development of a conservation subdivision.

The Town should amend the subdivision regulations to add in the process, development standards, and actions needed to help both applicants and the Planning Board apply this technique. This should include a requirement that at least 50% of a parcel being subdivided be permanently preserved as open space and allowed to be used for farming. Other amendments should include a definition of open space, methods for identifying, preserving and maintaining open space, lot layout and other performance criteria, and procedures to review and approve a conservation subdivision. The conservation subdivision technique recommended in the Meredith Comprehensive Plan could be useful to protect important farmlands as illustrated below:⁴

⁴ From the Dutchess County Greenway Guide: Fitting Into the Landscape, Dutchess County Planning and Development, Poughkeepsie, NY and Randall G. Arendt, Conservation Design for Subdivisions: A Practical Guide to Creating Open Space Networks. 1996.

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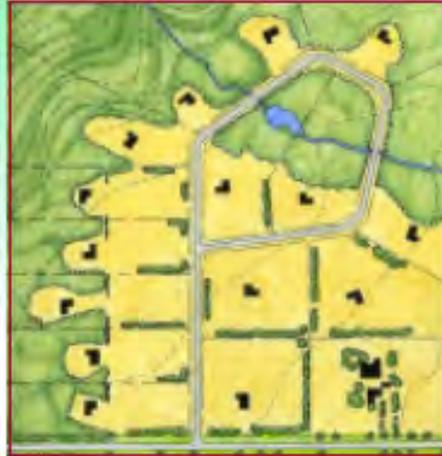
Step 1

Require a map of the open space system for the parcel and surrounding area.



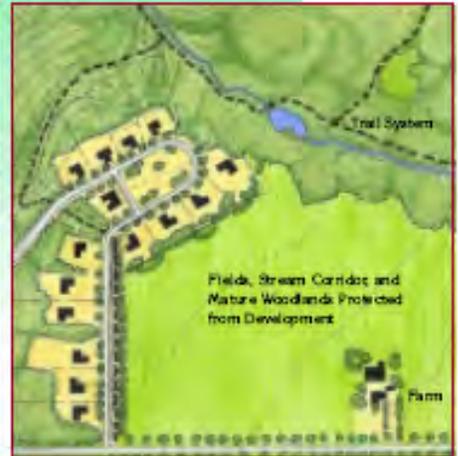
Step 2

Conventional sketch layout determines maximum lot count under existing three-acre zoning.



Step 3

The same number of houses can fit in to the landscape while preserving 80 percent of the open space.



In order to promote use of this technique, consider amending the subdivision regulations to require use of conservation subdivision designs for all proposed major subdivisions.

Action 2: Address future residential development capacity. The Town can plan for new residential development in a way that also allows farming to continue. This can be addressed through effective use of minimum lot sizes and densities.

1. Clearly state minimum lot size and road frontage requirements. Currently, subdivision regulations recommend lots to be a minimum of 2 acres in size with 150' of road frontage. The regulations are unclear about whether these dimensions are guidelines or requirements. This should be clarified. It is recommended that minimum lot dimensions be clearly established as a requirement and not a guideline. It is also recommended that these minimum lot sizes and road frontages be formalized in a new local law instead of part of the subdivision regulations.
2. When minimum lot size requirements are being considered, Meredith could allow for a smaller minimum lot size and narrower lot widths for new parcels to be created in hamlets. Smaller lot sizes and narrower widths will allow for continuation of the traditional hamlet-style development to occur in the future. Smaller lot sizes would still need to accommodate all water and septic system requirements however.

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3. When minimum lot size requirements are being considered, Meredith should also consider methods that would prevent rural sprawl from occurring outside the hamlet areas. When a small minimum lot size (2 acres of instance) is established, it can ultimately result in the town subdivided into 2-acre lots. This is not usually in the best interest of preserving lands for farming. There are alternative ways of addressing development capacity.

Use of average lot sizes and 'density' (measured as the number of dwellings per acre) can be beneficial because they put more emphasis on overall development capacity and less on forcing people to create certain sized lots. In order to promote co-existence of housing development and farming outside hamlet areas, consider allowing for the averaging of lot sizes and density instead of strict adherence to a small minimum lot size. Placing more emphasis in the Town's land planning on average lot sizes or density than on minimum lot size gives landowners more flexibility, allows for smaller, more affordable lots to be created, and can result in easier preservation of farmland. Note that all lots would need to be of such size to allow for approved well and septic systems.

When setting density or minimum lot sizes, Meredith should ensure that future development is at a capacity consistent with the Town's goals. To help determine what density of development the Town of Meredith could support, consider having a groundwater study done that would provide documented data on water capacity and recharge. These groundwater studies can provide insight into the amount of future development the land resources could handle. Seek grants to fund this study.



Promisedland Farm

Action 3: Allow for flexibility of lot size and road frontages when a subdivision is designed as a conservation subdivision. This will allow for

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clustering or strategic placement of lots in a manner that can preserve the most farmland.

Action 4: Include AML ~25-AA requirements to include the Agriculture Disclosure Notice as part of the subdivision approval process. This notice is used to let prospective and new owners of land know that they are buying land located within a New York State certified agricultural district and that agricultural activities are taking place that may produce noise, odor and other nuisances. Currently, real estate agents are required to give the agricultural disclosure notice when a sale of land is pending, but it is recommended that the Town of Meredith require this notice to be placed on all approvals and plats for new residential lots created within the agricultural district. (See Appendix 7 for model notice).

Action 5: Develop rural siting guidelines for new residential development that could be given out with all building permits for new dwellings outside the hamlets. This could be an educational tool to help site new residences in a way that is least disruptive to agricultural operations. (See Appendix 8 for model siting guidelines).

Action 6: Adopt a right-to-farm law. (See Appendix 9 for model law).

Action 7: Consider adopting a local law to establish site plan review for commercial businesses (reviews siting of structures, signs, access, etc.) so as to ensure the impacts of new commercial development in Town on agriculture are reviewed and mitigated. (See Appendix 10 for model law).

Action 8: Work with the County and other organizations to seek alternatives for funding PDR, TDR, and LDR programs (See Box 1). Funding sources include federal and state grants, foundations, land trusts, and public money donations such as through local tax levies. Frequently used funding sources include local appropriations from general or discretionary Town funds, general obligation bonds (voted on as a referendum by the general public), establishment of development review fees where the funds are dedicated to the program, Town real estate transfer taxes (must be approved by the State Legislature), Federal funding (USDA Farmland Protection Grants, Farmland Protection Programs of the Farm Bill), or State funding (NYS Farmland Protection Grants).

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For TDR programs, consider using a "TDR Bank". This is an entity officially authorized by the community to buy, hold and resell development rights. The bank can acquire these development rights from sending area landowners who cannot find private buyers. A TDR Bank can establish and stabilize land prices, facilitate transactions, market the program, create a revolving fund for buying development rights, selling them, and then using the proceeds to buy more development rights.

Box 1: Establishing PDR, LDR, and TDR Programs.

Under any of these programs, a landowner voluntarily sells (or with LDR, leases) his or her rights to develop a parcel of land to a public agency or a qualified conservation organization. The landowner retains all other ownership rights attached to the land, and a conservation easement is placed on the land and recorded on the title. The buyer (or Leaser) of the development rights essentially purchases (or leases) the right to develop the land and then extinguishes that right, thereby assuring that development will not occur on that particular property. A PDR and TDR program results in permanent protection of the land. A LDR results in temporary protections. These programs should be based on the following principles:

1. These programs will succeed in promoting agriculture only if implemented in tandem with other farmland protection strategies. Protection of the land is not the sole answer as farming still must be viable and profitable for long-term resiliency.
2. All these programs are voluntary in terms of landowner participation.
3. In order to make a PDR program a reality, the Town should establish a Board or Committee to oversee the implementation of the program and to ensure that program dollars are spent wisely to acquire properties that meet the goals and objectives of the program. Committees consisting of local governments, land trusts, and members of the public work best.
4. For a TDR program, sending areas should be priority farmlands in the Ag district and receiving areas should be in or near the hamlets. Receiving areas should have adequate infrastructure, be politically acceptable, compatible with existing development, be clearly designated ahead of time, and in a location where developers perceive a market for higher density. Sending areas must have strict regulations and densities. Too high a density in the sending area will make the TDR option not favorable. A TDR program should be designed as simple as possible with a process that results in certainty and efficient review.



Greenane Farm

Ag-Economic Development

Action 1: Support the existing multi-town or county-wide community kitchen, such as the one run by Lucky Dog. A community kitchen can offer processing facilities available for rent (usually they have kitchens, bakery, bottling, and cool package facilities), as well as dry storage,

refrigeration and freezing. Such a facility is crucial to support expanded agricultural operations and would allow for value added products such as cheese making or jelly's and condiments. It is feasible that Eklunds could also provide an opportunity for a community kitchen and/or be a hub for distribution of local agricultural products. Inventory farmers to understand individual needs for commercial kitchens.

Action 2: Improve farmer and agri-businesses access to affordable state-of-the-art broadband communication and technology systems. Aggressively seek methods to provide up-to-date telecommunication services.

Action 3: Support development of new transportation and marketing systems. This is the number one need to promote successful agriculture in Meredith. Find ways to make it easier and more convenient for local residents to buy locally and regionally produced food. Some ideas that could assist with this include having a local produce coordinator or establish a central location for produce pick-up.

However, there is also a need for a coordinated transportation system to help move local produce to markets in New York City and other urban areas. One idea generated by farmers to address this is to develop a cooperative trucking system to help farmers work together to get produce to market. Another is to create a local distribution hub and, to further reduce costs, link it to existing distribution networks in the region. Other ideas included formation of a buyers club, CSA's, cooperative marketing, and programs patterned after Food Shed Utica and Chenango Bounty.

Develop and promote an "Eat Local" campaign so that area residents are

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aware of the benefits of eating local as well as where local farms are and what products are available. Develop a brochure, map and/or website to help. One suggestion from the community to accomplish this was to create a Meredith Rural Preservation Center. The mission of this Center would be to encourage sustainable agriculture, to celebrate the Town's heritage and natural resources, to preserve the Town's rural character, and promote economic development compatible with the vision outlined in the Meredith Comprehensive Plan. It has been proposed that possible activities organized by the Center could be farm tours, eco and agri-tourism, host a farmers market, and engage in public information/relations activities.

Action 4: Support formation of an agricultural cooperative so that farmers can share labor, equipment, and also to bring together their collective buying power on supplies. Capitalize on collective selling powers and improve cooperation and collaboration.

Action 5: Support the Pure Catskills brand, but also consider development of a local brand for Meredith agricultural products.

Action 6: Utilize the Internet effectively to communicate and market:

- a. As part of the Town's website, create a local farm inventory page that lists location, products, availability, prices, etc. Work with local farms and encourage them to be listed in this and other similar websites. Inform area farmers about the New York Marketmaker website. This is an interactive mapping system that locates businesses and markets of agricultural products in New York and provides a link between producers and consumers.
- b. Link this page to the Empire of Abundance website or other similar efforts.
- c. Coordinate and work with the County, Chamber of Commerce, Cooperative Extension, and Delaware Land Conservancy on the farm map "Delaware County Farms and Farm Markets" to make sure that all appropriate farms in Meredith are included.
- d. For local distribution, employ a model similar to Foodshed Utica. A web-based buying club oriented toward farms within 40 miles of the City of Utica, this concept operates as kind of a virtual farmers market, incentivizing farmers to bring their products each week to a central distribution site while making it convenient for consumers to browse a large selection drawn from multiple farms by visiting one website.

Incentives and Promotion

Action 1: Support applications of local farmers who wish use conservation easements to permanently protect their farmland as part of State and Federal programs.

Action 2: Promote establishment of a "Come Farm With Us" program either within Meredith alone, in partnership with the Delaware Land Conservancy, or advocate such a program at the county-level. This is a program that seeks to connect people who have farmland to sell with people who are seeking farmland to use for agricultural purposes. It is a program that promotes the selling of farmland to new farmers instead of conversion to non-agricultural uses. (For examples, see the Jefferson County program www.comefarmwithus.com and a similar program in St. Lawrence County). One role for the proposed Agricultural Implementation Committee is to develop a "match maker" program that helps link landowners with farmers who need pastures. Similar programs such as the New York Farm Link and the Catskill Farm Link programs should be supported.



Greenane Farm

Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers

Action 1: Promote Meredith as a "Farm-Friendly" Community. Develop an educational packet for residents (especially new residents) on what farming is in town, where, why it is important, and how residents can become part of and support the farm businesses. Create a "neighbor relations" packet for distribution to new town residents. This can also be made available to farmers wishing to further educate their neighbors on farming operations.

Action 2: Create events to involve the community in agriculture. This could include an annual farm tour for residents, and for local and county officials and perhaps an annual farm fair similar to the Dairy Fest that would highlight agriculture in Meredith. Seek ways to build the sense of community through activities such as pot luck dinners, community tours, local training programs, and tie agriculture into other existing events in Town.

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Action 3: Create an easy-to-understand brochure on the realities of living in agricultural areas, and make it available for distribution, including adding such information to the Town website.

Action 4: Develop a public education campaign to connect consumer support of local agriculture with the benefits of open-space, clean water and air, and enhanced wildlife habitat that working farms and forestland provide. Include input from the Cooperative Extension, Soil & Water Conservation District, and other agencies on specific farm-related conservation projects they have worked on. Tie the education campaign to specific initiatives under this Plan to build public political support for protection tools. Work with local newspapers to initiate a regular column that discusses farm and farmland related issues and topics.

Action 5: Advocate to school administrators (and school boards) to purchase local produce for schools (the Farm to School Project has been successful in many other parts of New York State). Work with existing groups that are engaged in this effort such as Farm Catskills and Delaware Opportunities.

Action 6: Advocate for and work with New York State, Delaware County, and local organizations (such as Cornell Cooperative Extension and Delaware Land Conservancy) to create a clearing house of information that includes websites, training and seminars, staff, and funding opportunities for agricultural businesses and farmers. This should be linked to all new farm start-up programs. There are many materials and programs already in existence, but they are not consolidated in any "one-stop-shopping" resource; each agency or organization has its own list and programs. A single portal for information on agricultural programs should be developed.

List of County Initiatives

The following list of ag-related actions is to be submitted to Delaware County (See "General, Communication, Coordination," Action 8, above).

1. Agriculture must be a critical component of county economic development policy and programs, and receive the same government attention as other commercial and industrial businesses. Farm businesses should be targeted by the County for business expansion and retention programs.
2. Complete and then implement an updated county-wide farmland protection plan. Since some agricultural markets and infrastructure tend to be more regional in scope, the County plan should have a strong focus on providing for farm infrastructure. This Plan should also include an economic analysis that details the fiscal importance of farms and what the affects of farm and farmland loss are to the tax base of the Town and County.
3. Provide technical and grant writing assistance to town governments as they implement local comprehensive and agriculture plans.
4. Continue support of Cornell Cooperative Extension, Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District, and other agencies that support agriculture.
5. Support and promote the infrastructure and distribution systems needed by farmers in Delaware County including community kitchens, cold storage facilities, slaughterhouses, and regional distribution networks.
6. Delaware County should initiate other agricultural economic development programs to recruit and retain agricultural businesses. These economic development programs should be on par with other Delaware Partnership and IDA efforts in terms of funding, effort, and staff. This could include formation of a county-wide local development corporation oriented to agricultural businesses, establishment of an agri-business revolving loan fund. Currently, the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation acts in this capacity, for example. A regional approach will be most successful, and the County should look beyond its borders to accomplish this.
7. The County should ensure that town tax assessors have knowledge of the state's agricultural assessment program and offer continuous

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training as necessary. The County should also undertake opportunities to educate farmland owners on the program, and how to apply and comply with agricultural assessment requirements for their farmland.

8. Establish mechanisms to aid in the protection of farmland such as PDR, LDR programs, equity insurance or mortgage programs, and a county-wide Transfer of Development Rights program.
9. Delaware County should build the capacity of existing education and training institutions to provide on-the-job training and fostering of agriculture-related skill development. County support for agriculture-skill development at the high school level, community college level, and through Cornell Cooperative Extension is critical. For example, an intern program that matches students with farmers or a rotating internship program that exposes students to different kinds of farm operations would be beneficial for both farmers and student.
10. Delaware County should consider investing in this critical infrastructure by creating a fiber optic network within the County for farms, residents, schools, and businesses.
11. Include a comparison of tax assessments and rates in the Delaware County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.
12. Any county-level groundwater study that may be conducted in the future should also incorporate analysis of water quality and quantity needs for agricultural activities.
13. Support state-wide real estate transfer tax legislation.



Wildflower Farm Tilapia

List of State Initiatives

The following list of ag-related actions is to be submitted to the New York State Department of Agriculture (See "General, Communication, Coordination," Action 10, above).

1. Provide additional incentives to landowners who rent their land for farmland to maintain the rented land farm base.
2. Create additional funding streams to assist towns and counties to implement the agricultural and farmland protection plans the State has already sponsored. Explore innovations in funding such as use of an impervious surface tax (that could discourage excessive creation of impervious surfaces and use the funds to promote farmland preservation), or use of rural revolving loan funds. Assist the Town of Meredith in funding the agricultural economic development actions identified in this Plan.
3. Develop programs and incentives that encourage small farms and new small farm start-ups. For example, lowering the agricultural assessment requirement of \$50,000 income for farmers having less than seven acres for a few years would help farm start-ups. Another example would be to allow for tax incentives or agricultural exemptions on all farm building that exist, whether currently used or not. This may help preserve existing agricultural buildings for future agricultural uses. Offer other agricultural exemptions to reduce taxes on farm structures.
4. Increase the Farm to School initiatives. Create policies that require state agencies and organizations (such as the SUNY system) to include a certain percentage of local agricultural products in their procurements.
5. Expand local options for raising funds for PDR and LDR programs including passage of the real estate transfer taxes, use of impact fees, and other alternatives.
6. Provide funding to reduce farm production costs, such as on-farm methane digesters, and use solar or small wind facilities to reduce energy costs for farms.
7. Allow local governments to use the penalties that are collected when land that has received agricultural assessments is taken out of production to be used for local PDR funding and other new farm incentives.

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8. Create county by county information on cost of services, cost/benefit analyses, economic multipliers, and fiscal impacts of land conversion. This information is important to help local governments understand the implications of farms and farmland loss to their communities.
9. Develop mechanisms to help local communities bring their local planning to be more consistent with the NY Ag Districts program.
10. Provide additional information and training for local officials and landowners about the NYS Ag District Program, its purposes, and its requirements.
11. Provide a mechanism—possibly through Cornell Cooperative Extension—to provide specific business plan development and marketing support for direct sale, niche farming, and value added operations.
12. Change state level policies that require creation of new jobs as part of the ranking criteria for economic development project proposals.
13. Provide more training for local officials using up-to-date technology such as webinars on a variety of topics including:
 - a. Valuation of farm properties (assessors)
 - b. Provisions of NYS Ag District Law
 - c. Operational details of farmland protection and farmland protection techniques for towns and their attorneys.
 - d. More tools and models for local leaders to help them effectively incorporate agriculture into their plans, codes and ordinances. Create a real toolbox that the average volunteer local official can easily and readily adapt to their situation.
 - e. Assist in the development of a standard model for application of a transfer of development rights program.
14. Initiate state level programs to plan for local “foodsheds” to ensure that New York can “feed itself” in the future.

Implementation Steps

Key to Priorities

The implementation priorities listed in the table below are based on the following scale:



Where:

Initial/Short = Highest priority to be implemented immediately following Plan adoption (Within the first two years after adoption).

Long = Important but not a critical priority, to be implemented after the initial/short priorities and after three years following Plan adoption.

Ongoing = An action item that needs ongoing attention.

High priority actions for implementation are also indicated.



Spring Lake Farm

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Plan Topic	Plan Reference	Action	Implementation Priority	High Priority	Responsible Entity
Farmland Protection	Action 6	Adopt a right-to-farm law.	Initial	●	Ag Committee/ Town Board with Planning Board input
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 1	Adopt this Plan as an addendum to the adopted Town of Meredith Comprehensive Plan.	Initial	●	Town Board
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 2	Create a Agricultural Implementation Committee or working group for Meredith.	Initial	●	Town Board
Ag Economic Development	Action 3	Support development of new transportation and marketing systems. Find ways to make it easier and more convenient for local residents to buy locally and regionally produced food.*	Short, then Ongoing	●	Ag Committee
Farmland Protection	Action 1	Strengthen the existing subdivision regulations so that agriculture has a more prominent role as a resource to be considered and protected during the review process . This includes initiatives identified in this farmland protection action.	Short	●	Ag Committee/Planning Board/Town Board
Farmland Protection	Action 4	Include AML ~25-AA requirements to include the Agriculture Disclosure Notice as part of the subdivision approval process.	Short	●	Ag Committee/Planning Board/Town Board
Farmland Protection	Action 5	Develop rural siting guidelines for new residential development to be given out with all building permits for new dwellings outside the hamlets.	Short	●	Ag Committee/Planning Board
Farmland Protection	Action 8	Work with the County and other organizations to seek alternatives for funding. Includes preparing for and seeking grants.	Short and Ongoing	●	Ag committee

* This action has been identified as a very high priority by the Farmland Protection Working Group.

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Plan Topic	Plan Reference	Action	Implementation Priority	High Priority	Responsible Entity
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 10	Submit List of State Initiatives to New York State.	Short	●	Ag Committee
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 8	Submit List of County Initiatives to Delaware County.	Short	●	Ag Committee
Ag Economic Development	Action 2	Improve farmer and agri-businesses accessibility to affordable state-of-the-art broadband communication and technology systems. Aggressively seek methods to provide up-to-date telecommunication services.	Short		Ag Committee
Farmland Protection	Action 7	Consider adopting a local law to establish site plan review for commercial businesses so as to ensure the impacts of new commercial development in Town on agriculture are reviewed and mitigated.	Short		Town Board
Ag Economic Development	Action 6	Utilize the Internet effectively to communicate and market	Short/Ongoing		Town Board/Ag committee
Ag Economic Development	Action 1	Support a multi-town or county-wide community kitchen.	Long	●	Ag Committee
Farmland Protection	Action 3	Allow for flexibility of lot size and road frontages when a subdivision is designed as a conservation subdivision.	Long	●	Ag Committee/Planning Board
Ag Economic Development	Action 4	Support formation of an agricultural cooperative so that farmers can share labor, equipment, and also to bring together their collective buying power on supplies.	Long, then Ongoing		Ag Committee
Farmland Protection	Action 2	Address future residential development capacity.	Long		Ag Committee/Planning Board

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Plan Topic	Plan Reference	Action	Implementation Priority	High Priority	Responsible Entity
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 3	Work with neighboring towns to explore the feasibility of establishing an inter-municipal agreement for the purpose of developing mutually beneficial ways to carry out the objectives and actions as called for in this Plan	Long		Town Board
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 7	Consider establishing a town (or multi-town if an inter-municipal agreement is reached) local development corporation oriented to promoting farm and agri-business retention and expansion.	Long		Ag Committee/ Cornell Cooperative Extension/ Town Attorney
Incentives and Promotion	Action 2	Promote establishment of a "Come Farm With Us" program either within Meredith alone, in partnership with the Delaware Land Conservancy, or advocate such a program at the county-level.	Long/ Ongoing		Ag Committee/ Local Real Estate Agents
Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers	Action 3	Create an easy-to-understand brochure on the realities of living in agricultural areas, and make it available for distribution.	Long/ Ongoing		Ag Committee
Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers	Action 4	Develop a public education campaign to connect consumer support of local agriculture with the benefits of open-space, clean water and air, and enhanced wildlife habitat that working farms and forestland provide.	Long/ Ongoing		Ag Committee
Ag Economic Development	Action 5	Support the Pure Catskills brand, but also consider development of a local brand for Meredith agricultural products.	Ongoing		Ag Committee
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 9	Explore and participate in New York State agricultural economic development plans	Ongoing		Ag Committee
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 5	Support programs, organizations, and agencies that assist farmers and farmland owners	Ongoing		Ag Committee

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Plan Topic	Plan Reference	Action	Implementation Priority	High Priority	Responsible Entity
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 4.a	Consider preparing for and seeking grants	Ongoing		Ag Committee
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 4.b	Support statewide approvals for use of real estate transfer taxes	Ongoing		Town Board/Ag committee
General, Communication, Cooperation	Action 6	Use every opportunity to convey the importance of agriculture to Town residents and officials.	Ongoing		Town Board
Incentives and Promotion	Action 1	Support applications of local farmers who wish to use conservation easements to permanently protect their farmland as part of State and Federal programs.	Ongoing		Ag Committee
Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers	Action 1	Promote Meredith as a 'Farm-Friendly' Community.	Ongoing		Ag Committee /Town Board
Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers	Action 2	Create events to involve the community in agriculture.	Ongoing		Ag Committee/ Town Board
Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers	Action 5	Advocate to school administrators (and school boards) to purchase local produce for schools.	Ongoing		Ag Committee
Promoting and Recruiting Buyers and Growers	Action 6	Advocate for and work with State, County, and local organizations to create a clearing house of information that includes websites, training and seminars, staff, and funding opportunities for agricultural businesses and farmers.	Ongoing		Ag Committee