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TOMPKINS COUNTY

AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

Phase II

STRATEGIES, ACTION STEPS and IMPLEMENTATION

Prepared by
TOMPKINS COUNTY
AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD

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TOMPKINS COUNTY AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN
Phase II
GOALS, STRATEGIES and IMPLEMENTATION

February 1998

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan is to economically strengthen the County's agriculture industry and protect its agricultural land base. Phase I - Study of Agriculture in Tompkins County (October 1996) presented a comprehensive study of the status, trends, and outlook for agriculture in Tompkins County and defined the long-standing and emerging needs of the County's agriculture industry and its farmland resources. Through a process of seeking public input through meetings, a farmer survey, and an agriculture conference, the study concluded with identification of Goals and a presentation of Options for consideration as strategies in a Protection Plan.

The Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) convened Task Groups in March 1997 to discuss, research, and evaluate the Phase I Options and develop a Protection Plan around these Goals. The Options, and others later identified, were evaluated and developed over seven months into specific strategy recommendations. The Task Groups included AFPB members, representatives of organizations, government, and individuals in the community who are interested in supporting agriculture and protecting farmland.

Phase II - Goals, Strategies and Implementation represents a starting point for the protection of Tompkins County agriculture and farmland. Regular evaluation of progress and of new opportunities will be necessary to ensure effectiveness in achieving its Goals.

Phase I and Phase II reports comprise the Tompkins County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS FROM THE PHASE I - STUDY

The Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board of Tompkins County has found that:

- farmland and its active use for agricultural production contributes significantly to the economy and well being of residents of the County. The community is enhanced through provision of food, incomes, jobs, taxes, wildlife, clean water, scenic vistas, recreation, tourism appeal, and overall quality of life,
- profitable farming is the most effective means of maintaining and protecting farmland,
- actively used farmland in the County has become reduced for several decades and will continue to do so if no changes are made,
- fewer new farmers are encouraged to enter agricultural occupations,

- some of the most productive and profitable farmlands are in adverse competition with other land uses, such as residential and commercial development,
- random patterns of rural residential growth fragment the agricultural land base and produce conflicts between farmers and non-farm residents,
- speculation about development opportunities for farmland reduces commitments to farming investments,
- some policies in the County and Towns create disincentives for the continuation of commitments to farming,
- public cost of providing extended community services for residents throughout the County increases budget pressures for town governments and creates disproportionate tax burdens on farmland owners,
- there is an insufficient level of understanding and support of agriculture by citizens and public officials.

NY STATE GUIDELINES FOR AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLANS

It is the intent of the State Agriculture & Farmland Protection Program to promote local initiatives for protection of agricultural and farmland following a guideline of the Department of Agriculture and Markets. The Phase I Study addressed the following requirements of NY State Agriculture & Markets Law Article 25AAA; a brief summary follows.

- location of any land areas proposed to be protected
- analysis of the lands proposed to be protected as to the
  - value to the agricultural economy
  - value as open space
  - consequences of conversion pressure (change from agriculture to other use)
  - the level of conversion pressure
- description of activities, programs and strategies intended to be used by the County to promote continued agricultural use.

General location of agricultural areas to be protected

The general location of agricultural lands to be protected includes the two Agricultural Districts and other non-contiguous areas of active farming. More specific locations are not required by Agriculture & Markets guidelines. The AFPB determined that specifically identified locations would not be relevant since land use regulation provisions are not part of this Protection Plan. Refer to Appendix of Phase I Report for a Map of Agriculture Districts.

Analysis of values concerning these land areas

Phase I of the Plan presented information on the contributions of agriculture and the pressures under which the industry is operating. Following is a summary of the values of agriculture to the County.

Agricultural products

Dairy and its supporting crop farming represents the largest farm production activity in the County. This and two large agri-businesses account for about half of all County agricultural income. The availability of a diversified and high quality local food supply is of increasing importance to local residents. Farmers also supply the local non-farm population with non-food products such as horticultural and nursery crops, seeds, straw, animal feed, horses, and wool.

Economic Value

Tompkins County agriculture generates over $51 million of sales annually through its 441 farms and agri-businesses. There is substantial potential improvement for the County's economic net cash flow from two directions: (1) expansion of exports of agricultural products, and (2) substitution of locally grown and processed food for presently imported food through direct to consumer sales, sales to institutions, and food retailers.

Environment

Our local environment is undergoing an evolution from loss of field and meadow habitats to increased areas of woodland already cover 63% of the County land area. Such evolution will change the existing balance of plant and animal life as bio-diversity is reduced. Agriculture enhances increased bio-diversity and is a land use which protects natural resources such as water and soils.

Open Space

As owners of 30% of the County land area, farmers provide stewardship of farmland and maintenance of land quality that provides community benefits. Without farming, open space will include less pasture and cropland - the rural viewscapes prized by many non-farm residents and tourists.

Quality of Life

Farming contributes many benefits. A healthy and active agriculture results in not only fresh food supplies but also rural lifestyle, maintenance of open space, and pastoral scenes.

Conversion Pressures

Levels of farmland conversion pressure are much lower in most areas of Tompkins County than is being experienced in more densely populated areas of New York State where farmland preservation policies are publicly supported. Although the Town of Ithaca has recently adopted an Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan, which includes farmland preservation through purchase of development rights, such a preservation strategy does not have much support in most areas of the County where conversion pressures from urban expansion are less evident. However, conversion of farmland from randomly scattered rural residential development is common in most areas of the County.

NEW YORK STATE GOALS TO PROTECT FARMLAND

New York State goals for the protection of agriculture and farmland focus on protection of farmland from conversion to other uses. The State's funding priorities for implementation of protection plans does not include any initiatives intended to economically strengthen agriculture.

State funding priorities for implementation of protection plans:

- intend to preserve viable agricultural land,
- are in areas facing significant development pressure, and
- serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics.

TOMPKINS COUNTY AFPB GOALS TO PROTECT FARMLAND

Tompkins County AFPB has determined that land use controls to preserve farmland will not provide an effective mechanism to maintain its farmland base and its agriculture industry, and that such farmland protection strategies are not viable at this time in most areas of the County.

Alternatively, Tompkins County AFPB favors the use of enhanced local policies which support and protect farming and agricultural activities through municipal adherence to relevant Agriculture District Law provisions. Agriculturally friendly land use policies are needed that respect the needs of farmers for future options with their land and protect the farmland base for farmers and general public into the future. But public policy alone is not enough.

Tompkins County AFPB concludes that increasing the level of public awareness about farming, economically strengthening agriculture enterprises, and gaining supportive local public policies provides the most effective and affordable means to achieve the goals of both state and local agriculture and farmland protection. Therefore, the Tompkins County AFPB has built its Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan around these goals.

1. **AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Strengthen the economic viability of farm businesses through programs of education, business retention and expansion, and the development of diverse agricultural enterprises supplying both local and distant markets.

2. **EDUCATION:** Create a high level of awareness and knowledge by community decision-makers, farmers and other county residents about economic and societal values of agriculture.

3. **GOVERNMENT POLICIES:** Provide a supportive climate for continuation of farming through public policies and actions on land use and taxation that minimize disincentives for farming. Effective action is needed from various levels of government.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

To achieve its Goals, the AFPB Protection Plan sets forth locally defined strategies and actions and an outline for their implementation which is to begin in April 1998. Leadership will be provided by the AFPB and a Committee structure of Board members and volunteer citizens assigned to oversee and direct the work under each Goal area. Staff work will be provided by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County.

Initial work plan priorities:

Agriculture Economic Development -

- Cost/benefit analysis of priority strategies
- Continuation of Agriculture Economic Development Task Group
- Funding search

Education -

- Farm / City Day event
- Farmer/Non-farmer Exchange Day Event
- Fund raising for Ag-in-the-Classroom

Government Policies -

- Educational outreach on Agriculture District Law for Municipal officials
- Work with County Department of Assessment on Agricultural land re-assessment.

ASSESSING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PROTECTION PLAN GOALS

Measures of progress will include monitoring trends, using analysis of agricultural census and other data, accomplishment of success indicators, and surveys of the agricultural community. Relevant quantitative measures include farmland acreage, distribution and size; numbers of farms by size groups; and market values and types of agricultural products sold. Qualitative measures include levels of participation by farmers in the various programs, and surveys and interviews with support service providers and farmers.

Strategies will undergo regular evaluation to adjust to changing needs and opportunities. New strategies are expected to emerge as experience and opportunities develop.

FUNDING

The AFPB will seek funding from private and public sources and seek a partnership relationship with Tompkins County where appropriate. Limited starting funds are available to begin the higher priority elements of the Plan.

ROLE OF TOMPKINS COUNTY IN SUPPORT OF THE PROTECTION PLAN

It is expected that the County view will this Protection Plan as a supportive component of its Mission and Goals and that the economic development components will be integral parts of the County's economic development plan priorities and commitments.

The AFPB will seek private and public grants to implement this Plan. When grants are obtained, requests for matching funds or funding participation may be made to the County. The AFPB expects that such funding requests to the County will be given consideration that reflects the importance of agriculture and this Plan in serving the Mission and Goals of the County.

The AFPB recognizes that additional County funding requests will be on a competitive basis with other needs and that no liability to the County will exist for failure to fund requests in fulfillment of the Plan Goals.

It is further expected that the County will continue provision of AFPB annual operating funds.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES AND ACTION STEPS OF THE PROTECTION PLAN

The following pages detail the specific Strategies, Action Steps, Assignments of Responsibility, Timelines, Priorities, Measurement Criteria, and Success Indicators.

AGRICULTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Strategies and Action Steps

These Strategies address:

- Inadequate financial support for farming enterprises, primarily other than large dairy based operations.
- Underdeveloped access to local and regional consumer and institutional food buyers.
- Underdeveloped capacity for woodland based revenues.
- Opportunities for enhanced farm income from tourism markets.
- Economic potential from development of numerous added-value ventures and activities related to agriculture and food production.

STRATEGY 1. AGRICULTURAL LENDING EXPANSION - ***Improve access to finance and credit sources for agriculture enterprises.***

ASSIGNED: To AFPB and designated staff.
TIMELINE: Ongoing

ACTION:1. Create an agriculture development loan fund or revolving loan fund with a qualified loan administrator and advisory personnel to primarily serve operators of small farms and other rural enterprises that rely upon natural resources.

Measurement criteria: Establishment of a fund and participation by lenders and farmers.

ACTION:2. Research the region for all agricultural lending programs including banks, government agency, and not-for-profit sources.

Measurement criteria: Completion of a directory, documentation, and distribution.

ACTION:3. Periodically publish, update, and distribute to the farm community a bulletin on the sources of agriculture credit, the targeted programs or borrowers, rates, and terms.

Measurement criteria: Completion of a directory, documentation, and distribution.

ACTION:4. Provide advice to lenders when specialized knowledge might be useful in evaluating the soundness of agricultural business plans. A panel of advisors may be formed to provide this support.

Measurement criteria: Formation of the panel of advisors, agreements with lenders to participate and utilization by lenders of the panel.

STRATEGY 2. BUILD LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM LINKAGE TO CONSUMERS AND INSTITUTIONS - ***Build closer supply links between local food producers, area consumers and institutions.***

ASSIGNED: To AFPB and designated staff.
TIMELINE: Ongoing; with periodic evaluation.

ACTION: 1. Develop farmer supportive efforts to define and overcome barriers to accessing institutional food purveyors.

Measurement criteria: Establish discussions with potential buyers for reduction or removal of barriers. Institutional purchasing from local producers.

ACTION: 2. Work with local, regional, and state organizations and programs to develop and strengthen the local and regional food system.

Measurement criteria: Development of agreements on outreach and coordination of resources for supportive changes for local food producers.

ACTION: 3. Maintain and distribute a directory of institutions interested in direct access to farm products and access requirements and a directory of local food producers seeking larger market outlets.
Measurement criteria: Distribute the directory to producers and buyers;, and monitor producer/buyer contacts.

ACTION: 4. Encourage such efforts as Lansing School "Field to Table" program, which seeks to educate youth about food production and consumption, and support expansion to other schools.
Measurement criteria: Continuation of the program at Lansing and expansion of participation to other schools.

STRATEGY 3. DEVELOP AGRI-FOREST PRODUCTS and MARKETS - ***Develop and support production and market access for woodland products from farms.***

ASSIGNED: To AFPB and designated staff in cooperation with forest industry, DEC , and Master Forester owners
TIMELINE: Ongoing.

ACTION: 1. Provide information to farmers and rural woodland owners about the long-term income opportunities available from use of an appropriate woodlot management plan.
Measurement criteria: Workshops and agency contacts.

ACTION: 2 Promote State mandated practice of assessment of woodlands at "current use" instead of highest and best use.
Measurement criteria: Review annual reports from County Assessment department on changed assessments on farmland.

ACTION: 3 Conduct preliminary research into the feasibility of a regional wood processing operation to capitalize on the abundance and high quality of our woodland resources, and opportunities for added value from lower grades.
Measurement criteria: Completed report of preliminary feasibility.

STRATEGY 4. DEVELOP AGRI-TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES - ***Establish farm income generating activities by linking tourists, attractions, and agricultural attractions in innovative ways.***

ASSIGNED: To AFPB, designated staff, and Tompkins County Tourism Advisory Council.
TIMELINE: Ongoing; with periodic evaluation.

ACTION: 1. Inventory and document existing attractions such as farm stands, farmers markets, horticultural, and traditional farm operations that offer educational and entertaining attractions.
Measurement criteria: Completion of the inventory document.

ACTION: 2. Improve and/or create descriptive marketing brochures that promote farm attractions.
Measurement criteria: Completion of brochures.

ACTION: 3. Develop coordinated marketing links to area wine trails, scenic byways, and farm trails.
Measurement criteria: Establish working arrangements with the promoters of the existing "trails".

ACTION: 4. Explore and develop bus tours directed to combination attractions that include farms.
Measurement criteria: Identified attractions are marketed to tour operators.

ACTION: 5. Develop group interest in farm visits such as family, educational, Elder Hostel, conference, and company picnics.
Measurement criteria: Development of a program for farm visits. Promotion of the program to targeted potential interest groups.

STRATEGY 5. EXPLORE ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF FARMING ENTERPRISES - ***Additional time for evaluation should be devoted to other strategies that are effective elsewhere or merit consideration.***

ASSIGNED: To AFPB and designated staff.

TIMELINE: Ongoing

FURTHER ACTION AREAS TO EXPLORE:

- Expanded direct to consumer marketing.
- Value added operations such as food processing and packaging.
- Expanding access to organic markets for a wide range of products from organic seed to organic fruits, vegetables, dairy products, poultry and livestock products.
- Explore new products and uses for agricultural products with Cornell ag research efforts. USDA funded research has been developing a vast range of products to compete with paper pulp, petroleum based lubricants, plastics, and fuels, to inks, adhesives, and many products with industrial uses.
- Conversion of farm waste into methane, feed, bedding, and landscaping products.
- Seek grants to develop and/or strengthen a wide range of traditional and alternative farming enterprises.
- Provide assistance to farm operators for permits and applications for new and expanded enterprises.
- Coordinate existing financial, technical, marketing, management, and educational support for farm enterprises.
- Agricultural Economic Development zones.
- Grants to fund commercialization of agricultural research spinoffs.
- Use of commodity futures for a balanced production program.
- Bulk or cooperative energy purchases.

Measurement criteria: Documentation of research, planning, cost/benefit analysis, and decisions on each topic.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- More farmers make successful investments in more efficient operations, expansion or diversification, or sale of whole farms to other farmers.
- Agriculture Census data reveals improving trends in retention of farms, farm acreage, and market values of products.
- Increase in the volume of food supplied to area institutions by local farmers.
- Increase in number of County or regional agriculture enterprises that process, package, and distribute locally grown farm products.
- Farms improve appearance of their buildings and property in response to tourism incentives and improved profitability.
- More farm businesses continue in operation.
- Successful sales of operating farms to new farmers.
- Expansion and start-up of successful new production and processing operations.
- Increased wood and forest product sales expand profits for farmers.
- County farms become featured attractions in regional tourism promotions.
- County farms form significant partnerships with Cornell University for prototype commercialization of innovations.
- Profitability and environmental gains become common through innovative use of waste resources.
- Increased consumer demand for high quality locally produced food.

EDUCATION Strategies and Action Steps

These strategies address:

- Opportunities to extend awareness about farming and the local agriculture industry to consumers, youth, businesses, and political leaders.
- Need to expand child and youth understanding about farming, the food system, and agricultural careers.

STRATEGY 1. SPONSOR A TOMPKINS COUNTY FARM/CITY DAY - ***A one day event, hosted by a Tompkins County farm family, would generate education to thousands of non-farm people through visiting a commercial farm and through extensive publicity.***

ASSIGNED: AFPB, a coordinating Committee, Cornell Cooperative Extension, paid coordinator, and community and youth volunteers.

TIMELINE: First scheduled for Summer or Autumn 1998; ongoing annually thereafter.

ACTION 1: Organize and structure a planning and coordinating committee.
Measurement criteria: Establishment of the committee and its responsibilities.

ACTION 2: Directly involve community participation as volunteers and as donors.
Measurement criteria:. Sign up volunteers; obtain donor pledges.

ACTION 3: Work closely with the Tioga County, PA. Farm Services Agency and the National Farm/City Day organization as advisory resources for effective planning.
Measurement criteria: Hold meetings and review plans with these parties

ACTION 4: Involve farmers and knowledgeable youth as interpreters of farm activities to the visitors.
Measurement criteria: Have commitments from farmers and youth. Train them.

ACTION 5: Raise funds at the event through an auction and other means to benefit Ag in the Classroom
Measurement criteria: Organize and conduct the event(s); bank the money.

ACTION 6: Plan and conduct a multi-media tie-in to cover this event and educate the public about agriculture.
Measurement criteria: Have media commitments in place; clarify the goals the media are to support. Publish and broadcast the stories/coverage.

STRATEGY 2. FARMER / NON-FARMER EXCHANGE DAY - ***A non-farmer changes work places with a farmer for a day. Provides a media story with unusual public appeal and a high level of public education..***

ASSIGNED: AFPB Committee, coordinator, media personnel..

TIMELINE: Semi-annual ; ongoing.

ACTION 1: Organize a committee of AFPB members, staff, and media.
Measurement criteria: Have commitments to serve in place; identify responsibilities.

ACTION 2: Select appropriate exchange persons for maximum educational and promotional benefits.
Measurement criteria: Names of committed persons known and later publicized.

ACTION 3: Plan the activities for each participant's day for the opposite site and role.
Measurement criteria: Script and timing completed, participants coached and ready.

ACTION 4: Plan and conduct the promotional activities.
Measurement criteria: Media schedule and content completed; interviews and speeches scheduled and prepared.

STRATEGY 3. **AG IN THE CLASSROOM -** ***Provide additional financial and promotional support for the existing program in schools of the County.***

ASSIGNED: AFPB Committee, designated staff person, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Farm Bureau.
TIMELINE: Ongoing.

ACTION 1: Provide funding to support materials costs, field trips, and other necessary expenses.
Measurement criteria: Funds raised at Farm/City Day auction.

ACTION 2: Solicit additional financial support from Ag organizations in the County..
Measurement criteria: Obtain and collect pledges through a campaign to targeted donors.

ACTION 3: Organize a pool of farmers and farm support organizations as mentors to adopt a classroom and/or support career development interests of youth.
Measurement criteria: Have a list of committed participants and a plan for their involvement with teachers and classes.

ACTION 4: Provide recognition of participating teachers, youth, farmers, and community volunteers.
Measurement criteria: Hold a recognition event, issue letters and certificates, and issue press releases.

ACTION 5: Promote the program through media and special events..
Measurement criteria: Issue a schedule of events and issue press releases; invite media to each event. Get events published and broadcast.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Over three thousand people attend the first Farm/City Day Event, stories are published or broadcast in area newspapers, and radio/TV coverage, and public reaction is to ask for more access to farms.
- Public expresses interest for more access to farm experiences and sources to purchase farm products directly.
- Regeneration of interests in Future Farmers of America; increased interest in farming and agricultural careers by youth.
- Funds raised for Ag in the Classroom for several schools.
- Identity and image of agriculture and farming are elevated among non-farm population.
- Increased unity is gained among Ag groups and Ag community.

GOVERNMENT POLICY Strategies and Action Steps

These strategies address:

- The need to educate municipal officials and government employees about their role in supporting farming through the Agriculture District Law.
- The need to educate about adverse impacts of traditional land use decisions on agriculture.
- The need to establish equitable farmland valuation practices.
- Need to promote farming interests in land use planning decisions.

STRATEGY 1. **AGRICULTURE & MARKETS LAW - ARTICLE 25 AA** - ***Educate municipal governing boards and planning boards and general public on regulations promulgated by Article 25AA.***

ASSIGNED: AFPB, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County Municipal Officials Organization

TIMELINE: Ongoing, annually

ACTION 1: Educate about the following issues involving Agriculture Districts: limitations on local regulations and eminent domain, Agricultural land outside Districts, Right to Farm, Fire Tax Agriculture Exemption (possibly work with County Fire & Disaster Coordinator for support).

Measurement criteria: Completed educational workshops with municipal officials. Resolutions by Town Boards to support the spirit of the Agriculture District Law as well as the Law itself. Level of engagement by Towns in Agriculture District Reviews.

ACTION 2: Establish a recognition award for Farm Friendly Municipalities; define criteria for such an award.

Measurement criteria: Establishment of criteria; development of a procedure for selection of candidates.

ACTION 3: Urge supportive policy decisions which positively impact agricultural areas and activities.

Measurement criteria: Evidence by decisions of each Town on relevant issues.

STRATEGY 2. **FARMLAND ASSESSMENT** - ***Actively seek a County policy and practice to assess farmland at its current use.***

ASSIGNED: To be done by AFPB participation in meetings with Director and staff of the Division of Assessment and appropriate Committee of the County Board of Representatives.

TIMELINE: To be done by year end 1999.

ACTION 1: Work with the Director of the Division of Assessment and staff in a joint educational process. The process should result in a balance of lowest current use valuation for farmland and open space with regulatory and professional requirements of assessment practice.

Measurement criteria: Develop an understanding with Assessment staff about procedure and timetable for the change. Request and evaluate annual reports from County Assessment department that document changed assessments on farmland.

STRATEGY 3. **LAND USE REGULATION** - ***Advocate for farmer and farmland owners in land use planning and regulation discussions and decisions.***

ASSIGNED: AFPB and designated staff.

TIMELINE: Ongoing; as municipalities address land use issues that affect farming.

ACTION 1: Gain the reputation and respect of planning boards as articulate spokespersons for the farming community as to the effects of land use policy on farming.

Measurement criteria: Requests for input on relevant policy decisions by Town Boards.

ACTION 2: Educate municipal boards to focus on public policies with incentives for both traditional and alternative farming enterprises.

Measurement criteria: Evidence in Town policies that the agriculture enterprises in the Town are encouraged and supported.

ACTION 3: Educate municipal boards to focus on protecting productive prime cropland as a valuable natural resource of the town.

Measurement criteria: Town Boards consideration to protect prime cropland parcels.

ACTION 4: Advocate to the Town of Ithaca for incentives to encourage continuation of active farming on farmland targeted in its Parks, Recreation & Open Space (PROS) Plan.

Measurement criteria: Modification of the Town PROS Plan to provide incentives and mechanisms for continuation of farming on "preserved farmland".

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Town Board members attend workshops on Ag District Law.
- Right to Farm ordinances and fire tax reductions adopted in all Towns.
- Municipalities gain recognition as Farm Friendly.
- Changes of farmland assessments at "current use" value increasingly show up in County assessment records.
- Town Boards seek input from the Ag community on issues affecting agriculture and farmland.
- Municipalities consider farmland policies with incentives for farming and farmers.