

***Town/Village of Salem Agriculture and Farm Viability Plan***  
**Public Meeting**

**MINUTES**

**Tuesday, April 28, 7:00 – 8:30 pm**  
**Historic Salem Courthouse**  
**58 East Broadway**

**Attending:** Nancy Hand Higby, Chuck Alexander, Brigid Nosal, Mark and Jennifer Cary, Sheldon Brown, Albert Sheldon, Al Cormier, Herb Perkins, Judy Flagg, Renee Bouplon, James Chambers, Al Klein, Meg Southerland, Rob Laukaitis, Eileen Ryan, Charles Burd, Karen Weinberg, Chris DeBolt, John Brennan, Judy and Ron DeWitt, Steve Alexander, Liz Brock

**Background and introductions**

Supervisor Alexander introduced the plan and the process the steering committee has taken to date. He described the motivations for the Town to pursue this grant – the Town had begun a process to update their Comprehensive Plan when they became aware of this funding source. Since agriculture comprises such a large percentage of Town, it was decided to use this funding to create a farm plan that could guide the Comprehensive Plan. The plan is not intended to create new rules but to update the comprehensive plan that the Town currently has to reflect the new types of farms (i.e. alpacas, day lilies) and to identify and document opportunities such as agri-tourism and farmer’s markets. The plan is a joint effort between the Town and Village.

**Overview of the planning process and status to date**

Liz Brock provided an update on the planning process. She explained that a steering committee had been formed to guide the planning process and has been meeting every month since October. She said she had completed 12 stakeholder interviews with members of the agricultural community in Salem and provided a summary of common themes from the interviews to the committee and the interviewees themselves. Liz indicated that the purpose of the public meeting was to get public input on draft goals for the plan and suggestions for tools to achieve those goals and to identify ways the plan can serve the farmers. From there, Liz said draft recommendations for the plan would be developed by the steering committee and presented at another public meeting in the future. The goals will steer the recommendations to promote farming viability.

**Draft goals for the plan**

The steering committee, using information gathered through the first public meeting and the stakeholder interviews, developed four draft goals under the guidance of American Farmland Trust. These four draft goals were presented for input on their validity, pertinence to Salem agriculture, potential audience and partners to achieve the goal and possible strategies to meet it. All comments by the audience were captured as ideas to consider. Those comments are compiled here with goals listed in no particular order.

***Help the Town become a source of information about agriculture for the community.***

Liz described that information could be provided on: available ag programs (ag districts and tax abatement resources), land rental opportunities, grants, importance of agriculture to the

community, opportunities to “buy local”, process outlines for such things as building permits and subdivisions. Potential audiences for this information could include: new landowners, farmers, and the non-farm public. Collaboration with other organizations to provide available information and resources could include: Cornell Cooperative Extension, SWCD, Planning Board, Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Comments:

- ✓ “Helpful for people coming into the town or new farmers, not sure about current farmers – whether it’d be useful to them.”
- ✓ Link to the Village – include Village in this information distribution/exchange
- ✓ Educate on Buy Local campaigns – perception that local is more expensive. May be, but it lasts longer in your fridge.
- ✓ Great vehicle for this would be the Town/Village website – link to other agencies with this information readily available such as USDA/SWCD/NRCS/Dept of Agriculture and Markets.
- ✓ Promote farms on the web page
- ✓ Partner with the Salem Chamber of Commerce – create a mentor/resource list for small businesses.
- ✓ Importance of Cornell Cooperative Extension cannot be emphasized enough – large budget cuts this year impacting programs.
- ✓ Another potential partner would be NY Farm Net/Link – provides information on landowners and opportunities for sale/lease/mentoring to new farmers.

***Seek ways to maintain and expand agricultural infrastructure to support the viability of farms in Salem and beyond.***

Liz described that existing infrastructure can be thought of as county/regional economic assets. Farms are more viable while these businesses (i.e. Salem Farm Supply, Carovail, Cargill) are located here. While many tools to maintain these assets are beyond the scope of the Town, the Town could play an important role of champion for them. The Town could consider using traditional economic development tools to attract new agricultural infrastructure businesses to the community.

Comments:

- ✓ These businesses are the largest employers in Town – keeps residents working and buying locally – economic multiplier effect of these businesses is beyond just the impact on agriculture.
- ✓ Rail restoration critical
- ✓ Could tax incentives be offered – Empire Zone? Potentially not being renewed – not a long range tax abatement tool.
- ✓ Potential federal incentives for “green” jobs creation?
- ✓ Other services potentially important to agriculture in the community that could be here – wind generation, methane digestion, slaughterhouse – especially for small ruminants, fiber mill, private composting operations, recycling centers – including possibly agricultural plastic recycling. More business means more people can be employed here and keep resources here.
- ✓ There is a wholesale fiber purchaser that is looking to start a fiber mill

- ✓ Town could demonstrate the need for these businesses – write letters of support and make it easy for those businesses to locate here.
- ✓ Local development Corporation at County is lending to some agricultural businesses – additional help possible at the County
- ✓ Farm Credit has lending program for start up farms.
- ✓ Look at other communities to see how they attract agriculture support businesses.
- ✓ Are there opportunities (possibly stimulus money) to fund initiatives such as methane, wind, composting operations?
- ✓ Opportunity for school cafeteria/restaurant waste for composting.

***Promote the benefits that agriculture brings to the community.***

Liz described that this goal could increase awareness of the diversity of agriculture and promote farms through traditional tourism. Potential opportunities to link with County resources and organizations to create and release information including; Cornell Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

**Comments:**

- ✓ Many potential partners in Cooperative Extension, Dept. of Agriculture and Markets, Farm Bureau, Salem Chamber
- ✓ Link with events – including bike tour, cheese tour, fiber tour
- ✓ Cheese Tour – brings about 1,000 – 1,200 people through town, working on a \$1,500 budget for the event. Town does not contribute.
- ✓ Fiber Tour – similarly big event – 14 farms in Washington County, working on \$1,300 budget – some match received from County Tourism office. Work together as a community to encourage these kind of ag education events that bring people to town
- ✓ Educate the public about events and their importance. Public perception is that events like the bike tour just bring a lot of traffic to town, headaches for residents.
- ✓ Shared use kitchen in Battenkill Kitchen, Inc – important to community, could educate more people about it.
- ✓ Do public education on the realities of agriculture – the daily practices necessary to keep “open” spaces.
- ✓ Beyond “events”, quantify the economics of agriculture in Salem – sales tax, property taxes, multipliers of farms investing locally. Make an economic case for people about why agriculture is important.
- ✓ Improve agriculture program in school – expose students to the diversity of agriculture in Salem, not just traditional commodity products.
- ✓ Farm maps – getting people out of the village, off the main roads to the farms.
- ✓ Potential opportunities to expand/grow/advertise the Farmers Market
- ✓ Starting a community garden at the Courthouse on land donated by Sheldon Brown. Working with students K-6 and FFA students from the high school to grow, sell agricultural products.
- ✓ Opportunity to provide health Washington County food at the Fair – or a Farmer’s Market at the Fair.
- ✓ Doing a fiber festival at the Fairgrounds in September – significant opportunity to market fiber products from Salem

- ✓ Marketing is needed to promote area and farms. Local merchants need to be educated in marketing.
- ✓ Find a way to track benefits of local events to promote these events to the merchants.

***Prepare to address the impacts of new development.***

Liz described that at this point in time, from conversations with farmers and community members, there don't seem to be a lot of challenges related to development pressure. There isn't a lot of residential development occurring and farmer/neighbor complaints are few. When land does go up for sale, if it's quality agricultural soils, a farmer typically buys it. However, are there tools Salem can consider now to ensure this positive environment continues in the future, when development pressures might increase? The plan can outline strategies that can be taken if and when they become necessary to combat the impacts of new residential or commercial development on commercial agriculture.

**Comments:**

- ✓ We have quality soils and water resources here – how do we quantify their importance and dependence of agriculture on these resources?
- ✓ “If you protect the farmers, you'll protect the land.” But, second point – how do you get beyond world economy that plays a big role in agricultural viability in commodity markets.
- ✓ Educate the public on the cost of development – that agriculture pays more in taxes than it demands in services compared to residential development.
- ✓ Is Salem ready for zoning as a tool to protect viable farmland? General consensus was, no. How do you define “viable farmland”?
- ✓ Strengthen subdivision regulations as a tool to protect farmland? Need to define the economic impact to the town. Takes it away from property rights issue – can still develop, but in ways that minimize impact to farmland and neighboring farm businesses.
- ✓ Public opinions are based on what you see – purely visual.
- ✓ Identify how much farmland is needed to keep farming viable in Salem.
- ✓ Support agriculture without additional regulations.
- ✓ Find a way to formalize the costs to the Town for new development – possibly a “cost to the community services” study or require economic analysis.

**Land use mapping**

Chris DeBolt, Washington County Planner, described the process that he and Heather Baker from the Office of Real Property Services have gone through to develop a series of resource maps for the Town of Salem. He provided maps of state certified agricultural districts, soil and water resources as well as an aerial photo of Town flown in fall of 2005 and spring of 2006. Lastly, he provided a master land use map based on assessor codes. The steering committee had worked to “correct” assessor codes to identify parcels currently in agriculture. Chris and Liz asked for feedback from the participants at the meeting to check parcels that they own, work or neighbor to determine if the coding is correct. (Try to identify owned verses leased farmland) The goal is to create a master land use map that identifies all agricultural land in Town, helping to highlight the resources needing support. Feedback provided at the meeting will be taken back by Chris and corrected. If desired, Chris can provide smaller copies to farmers interested in taking more time with the map. Contact him at: (518) 746-2290.

To stay updated on the Plan, find minutes and dates of steering committee meetings, visit:

<http://www.salem-ny.com/townminutes.html>

or contact Liz Brock, American Farmland Trust at:

518-581-0078 ext. 305 or [lbrock@farmland.org](mailto:lbrock@farmland.org)

Steering Committee meets second Monday of the month at 7:00 at the Town Office on Main St. All are welcome to attend. ***NOTE: Please check the website or contact Liz Brock prior to attending a meeting as the meeting date occasionally needs to be rescheduled.***