



Sullivan County Agriculture and Sustainability Policy Committee

December 4, 2014 AGENDA

2:00 PM

Committee Members:

Cindy Kurpil Gieger, Chair, Cora Edwards, Vice-Chair, Gene Benson, Alan Sorensen, Kitty Vetter

Call to Order

Attendance

Comments: Committee Chair

Public Comment

Reports:

1. Office of Sustainable Energy (OSE) Monthly Report- Carol Roig & Stephen Stuart
2. Agricultural Report- Melinda Meddaugh

Presentation: None

Discussion:

1. Farmland Protection Plan Priorities

Resolutions: None

Adjourn

Farmland Protection Plan Update: The public hearing for the FLPP is scheduled for Dec. 18th and will be on the Legislative Planning Committee December agenda. Staff also reached out to the County Assessors association to get input on the plan. The consultants also received input on the plan at a public meeting hosted on November 3rd. The Final Plan is attached for the committee to review.

Dairy RBEG: A resolution was passed by the Legislature approving the Catskill Mountain Dairies application. Next steps are to work with the business and the attorney on the contract.

Educational Programming: CCE coordinated a High Tunnel Class with over 30 attendees. Attendees learned about growing winter greens and tomatoes in High Tunnels, along with the economics of extending their season. A Maple Syrup School program was offered on Nov. 22nd. Attendees learned about maple tree management, production and value added processing. Attendees consisted of both existing and new farmers. Both programs had Cornell University State Extension Specialists as speakers. CCE also offered a seminar for farmers on health care, taught by a Health Navigator. CCE and Planning are offering a Farm Funding Workshop on December 8th. Staff are in the process of developing programs for 2015.

Agri-Business Revolving Loan Fund: Planning staff are in the process of scheduling yearly site visits and working with potential applicants. Staff are also in the process of developing outreach around the loan program in order to attract new applicants.

Training: Staff attended a 3 Day Ag In-Service Training at Cornell University and will be attending a Hops Conference on Dec. 6th.

In House Assistance: Assistance included information on:

- Visited farms to provide them with info on the MPP and other funding opportunities
- Soil & Forage Testing assistance
- Assistance with Livestock production
- Loan and grant information, specifically info on the County Agri-Business Revolving Loan Fund
- Information on Agriculture Districts & Agriculture Assessments
- Assistance with Dairy Processing Requirements & equipment
- Assistance with general Beginner Farmer information
- Provided assistance with business planning information
- Assistance with identifying diseases/pests
- USDA Milk Margin Protection Program
- Animal Health
- Assistance with info on processing facilities
- Information on land use resources

Upcoming Classes for Remainder of 2014:

December 8th Farm Funding Opportunities, 1-3pm.



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Sullivan County



www.sullivanccce.org
845-292-6180

Farm Funding Workshop



Monday, Dec. 8, 2014

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

FREE!

64 Ferndale-Loomis Rd.

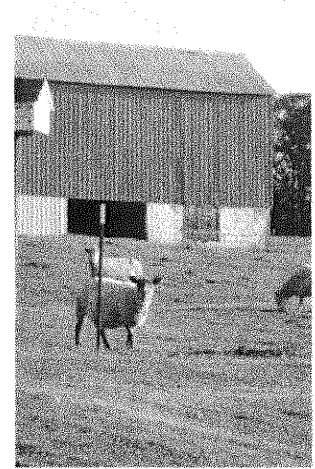
Liberty, NY

Develop or expand your agricultural business!

Join Cornell Cooperative Extension and Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management for a workshop designed to help you identify which loans or grants might be right for you.

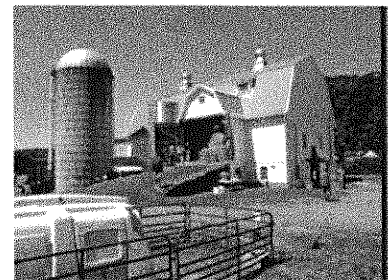
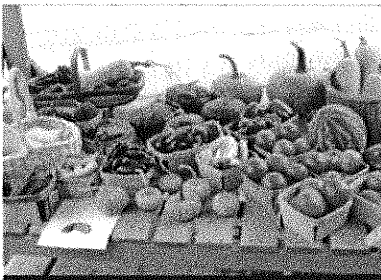
Topics will include:

- \$ Sullivan County Agri-Business Revolving Loan Fund;*
- \$ County of Sullivan IDA Agri-Business Revolving Loan Fund;*
- \$ Catskill Mountainkeeper Capital Access Ag Loan Program;*
- \$ USDA Farm Service Agency funding programs;*
- \$ USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service funding programs;*
- \$ Information on NYS, NYSERDA, & NYSEG grant programs.*



Executive Summary

December 2014

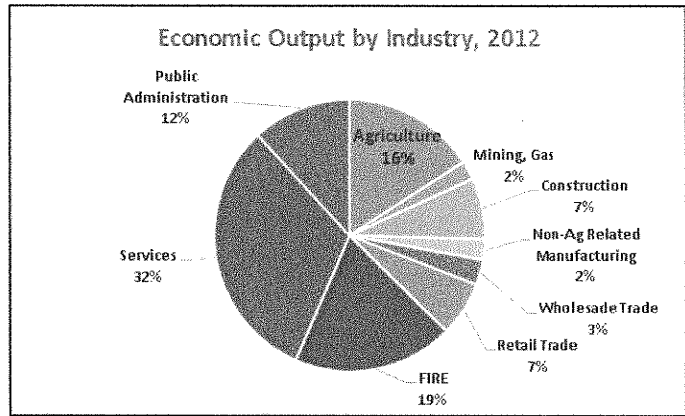


Agriculture is Vital to the County Economy and Identity

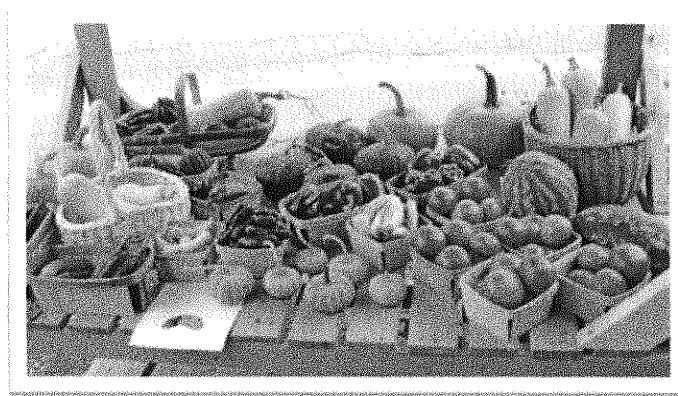
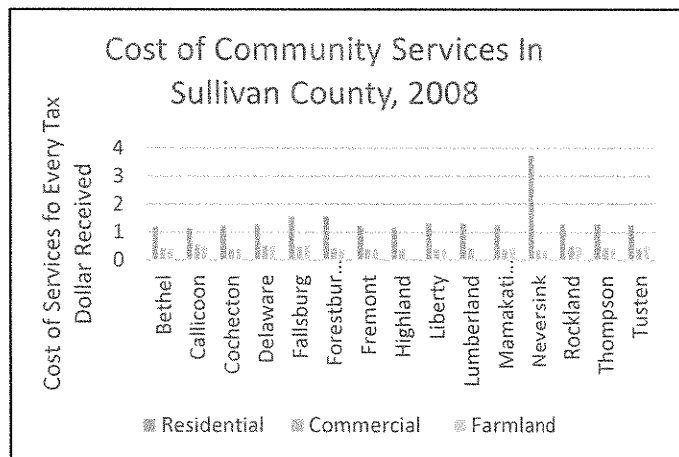
- Agriculture contributes to jobs and income, and supports economic activity in many other sectors, including manufacturing, tourism, and retail. In 2012, agricultural industries, including agricultural production, support services, and manufacturing, directly contributed \$714.1 million in output and nearly 1,500 jobs to the Sullivan County economy.
- When multiplier effects are considered, these values grow to an estimated \$1.0 billion in economic output and 2,625 jobs, respectively.

For every \$1.00 brought in by property taxes in Sullivan County Towns, it cost less than \$0.50 to provide services for farmland. On the other hand, for the same \$1.00, it cost more than \$1.00 to service residential uses.

- Farms keeps property taxes down as agricultural lands require less in services than they supply in property tax revenues.
- Farmlands are a significant feature of the County's visual landscape and rural character, which in turn contributes to local quality of life.
- Farms provide fresh, healthy, local food products.
- Agriculture preserves and enhances the quality of the environment through soil conservation, carbon sequestration, and conservation of biodiversity.



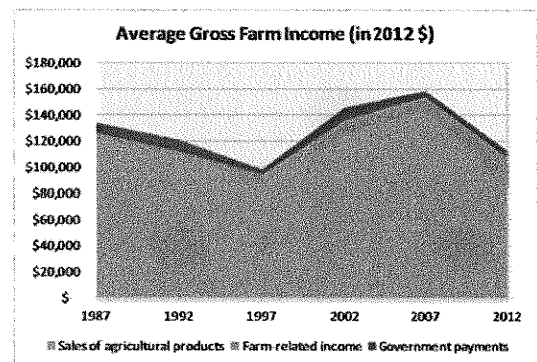
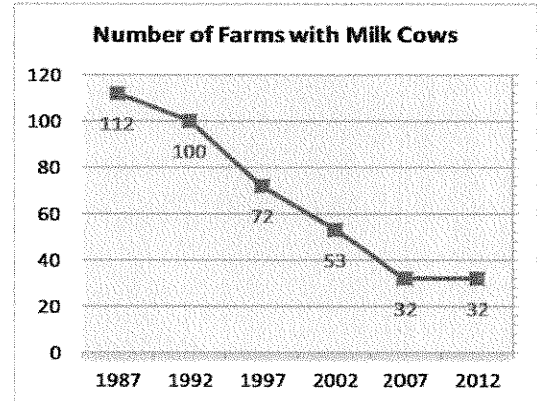
(Data Source: Copyright 2014 Minnesota IMPLAN Group, Inc.)



Threats and Opportunities

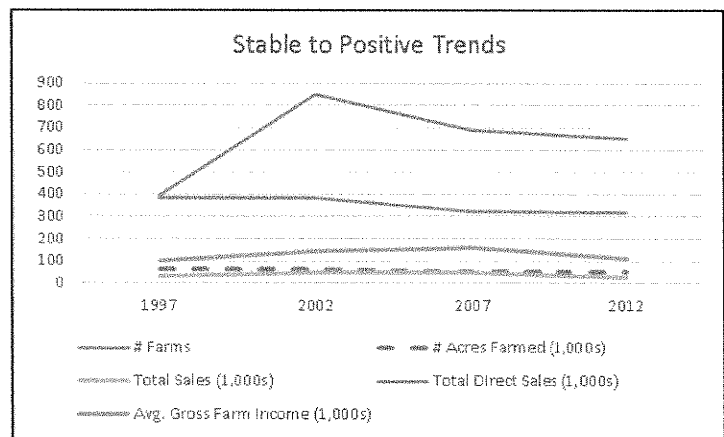
The current condition of agriculture in Sullivan County is both promising and concerning. Compared to historical records, the number of farms and their economic health has declined. Many farmland acres have been converted to non-farm uses over the past few decades.

- Dairy was the principal commodity for just 24 farms (7.5% of the total), down from 46 in 2002.
- Fewer farms in the County are raising beef cattle, producing milk, or breeding, hatching, and raising poultry for meat or egg production.
- Between 2007 and 2012, sales of agricultural products declined nearly 36%.
- Four commodity groups made up 91% of Sullivan County's agricultural output: poultry and eggs, dairy products, cattle and calves, and horses and ponies.
- In constant 2012 dollars (i.e., in values adjusted to account for inflation), total farm sales declined about 41% between 1987 and 2012.
- The majority of farms in the County do not generate significant income from the sale of agricultural products. Farms with sales of less than \$10,000 represented 55 -60% of all farms in the County between 1997 and 2012.



More recently however, some of these downward trends have stabilized and some agricultural sectors are growing.

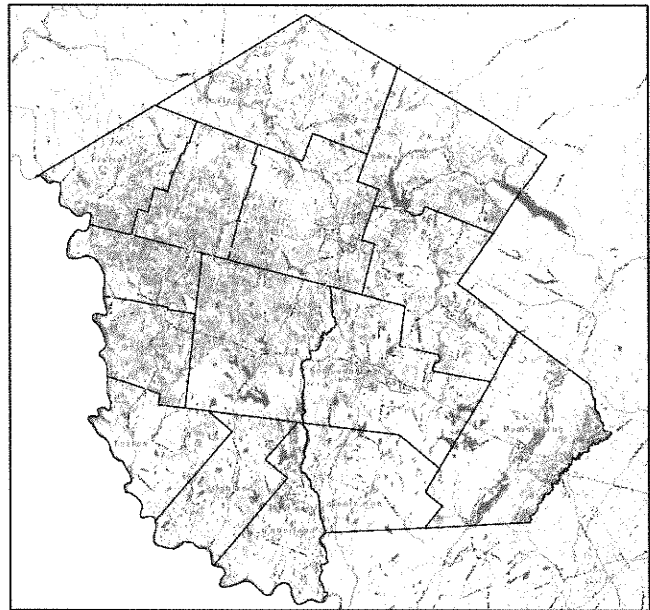
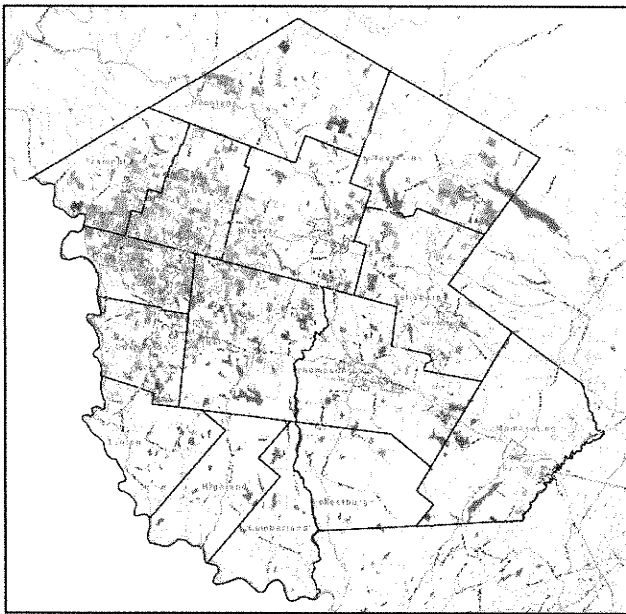
- The 2012 Census of Agriculture reported 321 farms in Sullivan County, a minimal decline from 323 farms in 2007.
- The amount of land farmed has increased since 2007, to 53,859 acres. Approximately 9% of the total land area in Sullivan County is in farming.
- Agritourism is a small, but growing component – the number of operations has increased from 9 farms with \$170,000 in sales 2007 to 15 farms with \$300,000 in sales by 2012.
- The percentage of farms with net income gains increased from 29.9% of farms in 2007 to 32.4% in 2012. The percentage of farms with net income gains increased from 29.9% of farms in 2007 to 32.4%, in 2012.



Agriculture in Sullivan County

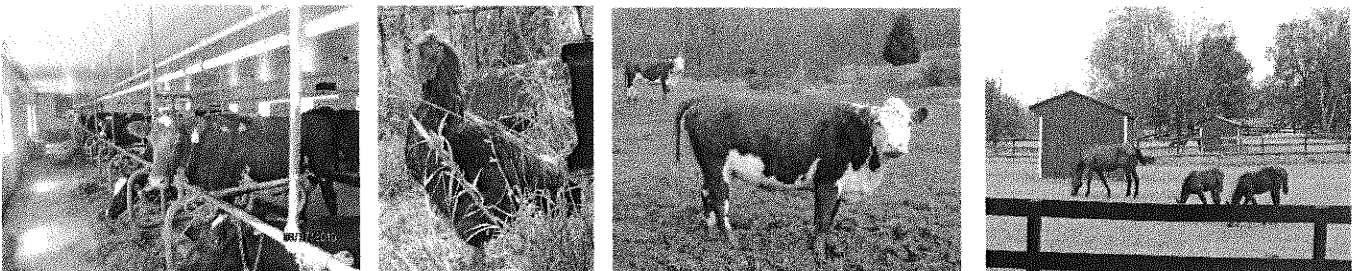
Sullivan County has a long history of farming. Beginning in the late 1800s, farms in the County benefited from proximity to New York City, and provided animal and livestock products for the growing metropolis. In 1925, nearly half of Sullivan County's land area was in agricultural use. Today, that proportion is less than 10%. There have been many demographic and economic changes in the County that has influenced this trend.

Sullivan's topography and geology also influence farms, and a lack of high quality soils have resulted in farms being dispersed about the County. About 39,000 acres or 6.2% of the County can be considered "prime" farmland and the best soils for farming can be found on about 4% of the total land area. This geology puts County famers at a disadvantage for State PDR programs, which place a high level of importance on the amount of prime farmland soil present. Sullivan County farmers must overcome poorer soil conditions using more costly soil amendments and with proper management.



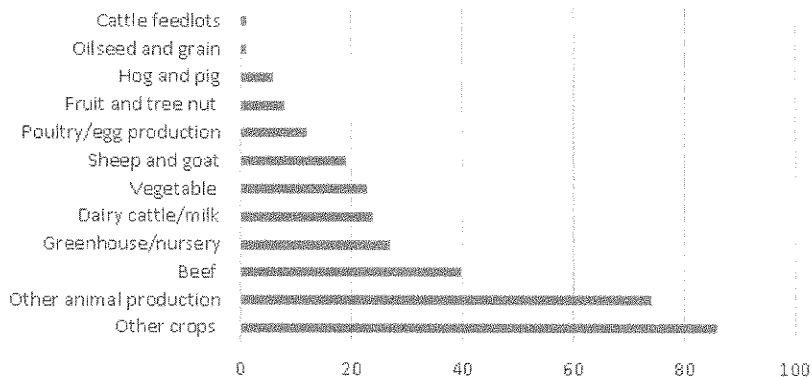
Left: Locations of farms. Right: Location of Prime Farmland Soils (Brown), Soils of Statewide Significance (Yellow) and Farms (Green)

Today, most farms are found north of Route 17/17B. Active farm fields are often separated by larger wooded parcels making forestry an important corollary and compatible use for many farms.



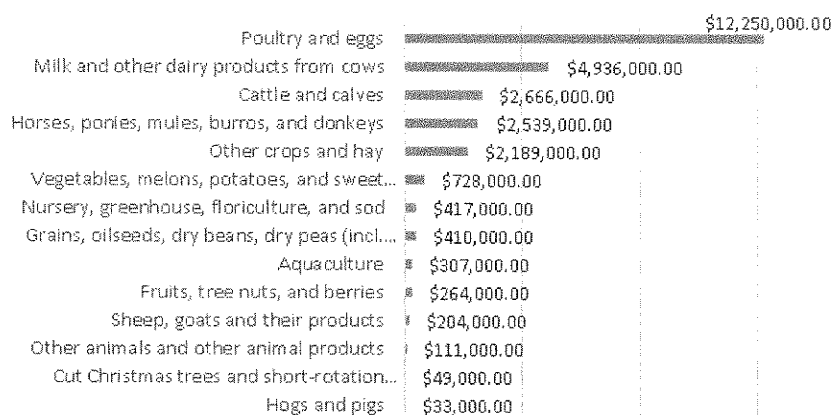
The main commodity products in Sullivan County are dairy, poultry/eggs, cattle/calves, and horses/ponies

Farms by Commodity



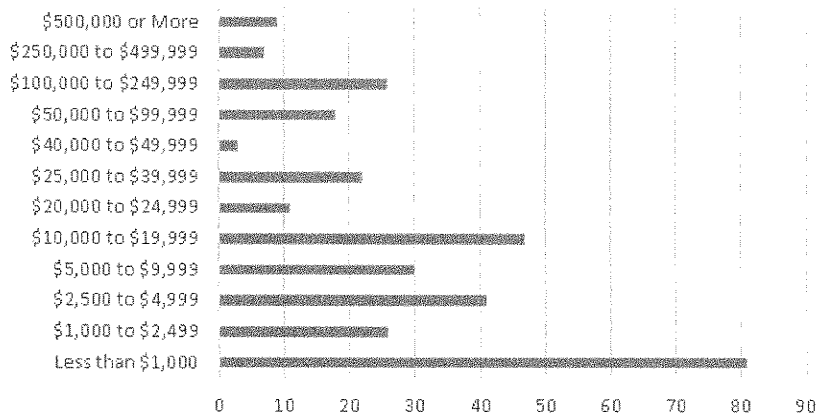
Most common crop is forage. Most common animal is horses and ponies.

Market Value of Sales



The highest value of sales comes from poultry and eggs followed by dairy.

Farms by Value of Sales, 2012



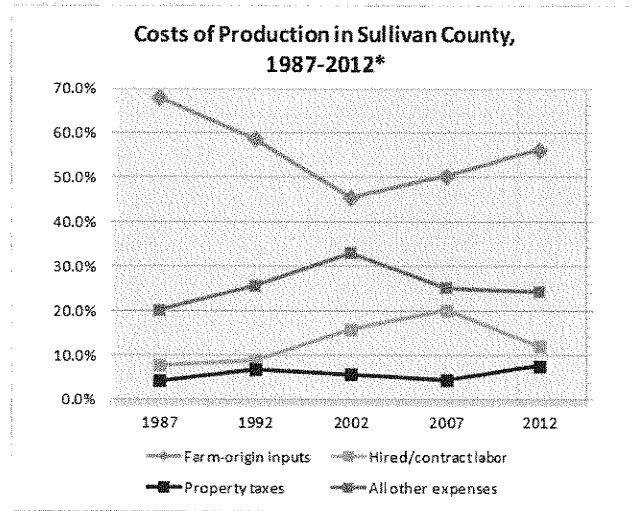
55% of farms have < \$10,000 in sales. 13% have sales >\$100,000

Other Sullivan County Farm Characteristics	2002	2012
% Farmers having farm as primary occupation	63.8	59.5
Average age of farmer	54.8	59.7 (57.1 years NYS)
% of Farmer < 35 years old	5.3	1.9

Local Government and Agriculture

Taxes

- Property taxes paid by farmers have remained a relatively stable proportion of farm production expenses in Sullivan County relative to other farm costs over the past 25 years.
- Property taxes on both a per acre and per \$1,000 basis are lower in Sullivan County than those in both Orange and Ulster counties. The average rate of taxation for farms in Sullivan County is now \$10.39 per \$1,000, lower than the state average of \$11.18 but comparable to the average in Ulster County (\$10.80).
- Between 1987 and 2012, farm property taxes in Sullivan County, in constant 2012 dollars, increased 21.5%. Farm inputs such as agricultural chemicals (153.3%), seeds, plants, and trees (49.7%), and petroleum products (33.8%) rose far more dramatically.
- Agricultural value assessments are offered to eligible farmers throughout the County to help reduce the tax burden. Some landowners do not yet take advantage of this State-level program.



Local Plans and Regulations

- Sullivan County towns express support for agriculture in their comprehensive plans.
- In some towns however, there is often a disconnect between that intent to support agriculture and the actual regulations that are enacted.
- Some zoning laws contain regulations that place adverse challenges to farmers who wish to initiate or expand a farm or farm-related business. This is often done through acreage or setback requirements, or limitations on type or number of animals allowed.

Municipal Efforts Related to Agriculture		
Town	Has Right to Farm Law	Town-Level Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan in Place
Bethel	Yes: Chapter 160: Farming	Yes
Callicoon	Yes: Chapter 100: Farming	Yes
Cochecton	Yes: Chapter 180: Right to Farm	
Delaware	Yes: Local Law #2	Yes
Fallsburg	No	
Forestburgh	Yes: Chapter 89: Farming	
Fremont	Yes	
Highland	No	
Liberty	Yes: Chapter 76: Farming	Yes
Lumberland	Yes	
Mamakating	Yes: Chapter 100: Farming	
Neversink	Yes: Chapter 35: Right to Farm	
Rockland	Yes: Local Law #2: Right to Farm	
Thompson	No	
Tusten	No	

Issues and Opportunities

This Plan identifies a variety of issues and challenges that negatively impact farming in Sullivan County. The issues are often complex and interwoven. Some of the threats to agriculture extend well beyond county boundaries, and some require action to be taken at the state or national level.

Important issues include the following:

- Farmers are unaware of support mechanisms and programs
- There is often a lack of communication and coordination among agencies and organizations involved in agriculture and helping farmers
- Some farmers who sell directly to individuals lack marketing expertise
- Lack of new and “next generation” farmers makes the future less certain
- There is a continued loss of dairy farms
- Farming has high production expenses with low profitability
- Farmers often have difficulty finding qualified labor
- Vegetable and crop production and sales does not reach its potential

This Plan evaluates those weaknesses to identify new opportunities for expanded agriculture. It establishes a positive outlook and direction for agriculture and emphasizes the many opportunities that the County and the farm community can take advantage of.



These opportunities include:

- Growing interest in agritourism
- Value-added and niche markets exist and can be taken advantage of
- Land and resources that would be attractive to new farmers
- Financial and technical assistance to farmers is available
- Direct marketing locally and in urban areas has growth opportunities
- Existing regional brands exist that farmers can take advantage of
- Initiatives are underway that can be enhanced such as the food hub and red meat processing
- Farmland protection can be promoted using the ‘Important Farmland Map’ as a guide to target programs to certain areas, but Plan’s premise is that the best way to preserve farmland is to have economically viable farm operations
- More public education and marketing could benefit agriculture

Support for Agriculture in Sullivan County

There are several exciting initiatives that have already been started in Sullivan County over the past few years that will support agriculture in many ways. These projects complement the range of ongoing programs offered by public agencies and private organizations to support agriculture. Continuation and expansion along with more marketing and collaboration between those agencies and organizations that administer those programs is a centerpiece of this Plan. Effectively building on these efforts is a critical action Sullivan County should work on.

Recent Agricultural Initiatives in Sullivan County include:

- Completion of a **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan**, which identifies agriculture as one of the primary drivers of the local economy;
- The **Agricultural Summit**, which brought together farmers, agribusiness leaders, and agency and organization representatives to discuss challenges facing agriculture and find solutions;
- Development of a **commercial kitchen** at Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Liberty campus to support small-scale food production;
- **Promotion of agritourism opportunities** and the development of the *Fresh from the Farm* agricultural trail;
- Coordination of **farmers’ markets** in multiple locations;
- Events including **Farmstock** and **Down on the Farm Day** to raise public awareness of agriculture;
- Development and construction of a **red meat processing facility** to serve livestock producers, scheduled to begin operating in 2015;
- Development of a **food distribution hub** project, providing farmers with improved access to New York City markets; and
- **Ongoing programs** administered by various agencies and organizations to support farms, protect farmland, market local agricultural products, and strengthen the viability of the agricultural sector.

Partner Agencies and Organizations That Support Agriculture in Sullivan County

Name	Role As Related to Agriculture
CADE – Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship	Provides professional, individualized and confidential business and marketing consulting to agricultural entrepreneurs.
Catskill Mountainkeeper	Promotes sustainable growth and the protection of natural resources in the Catskill region; advocate for local agriculture through its Catskill Food Initiative
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County	Offers outreach, education, and research-supported technical assistance to farmers and landowners; coordinates numerous events to raise public awareness of agriculture
County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency	Lead agency in the development and construction of the red meat processing facility and a food hub; administers a revolving loan fund for agriculture
Delaware Highlands Conservancy	A land trust offering information on conservation easements and other tools for land protection
Hudson Valley Agribusiness	An economic development agency offering technical assistance, business

Development Corporation	development services, and the coordination of financial resources to farms and agriculture-related businesses
Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB)	Advises and makes recommendations to the County Legislature regarding agricultural districts, reviews and endorses applications for state PDR funding
Sullivan County Agricultural Advisory Board	Works with county, state and federal legislators on policy issues while identifying high priority agricultural infrastructure projects
Sullivan County Department of Public Health	Involved in efforts to encourage large consumers such as school districts and prisons to purchase local farm products
Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management	Leads agriculture and farmland protection planning and implementation for the County; provides staff support to the AFPB and REAP; administers revolving loan funds for agriculture
Sullivan County Farm Bureau	Local affiliate of the New York Farm Bureau, a membership-supported organization that serves as an advocate for the agricultural industry
Sullivan County Farm Network	A coalition of farmers and non-farmers interested in expanding agricultural activities in Sullivan County; organizes Farmstock, series of “open farm” days
Sullivan County Farmers’ Market Association	Coordinates farmers’ markets in Callicoon and Liberty, and hosts an annual farm-to-table dinner
Sullivan County Soil and Water Conservation District	Provides technical and financial assistance to farmers to address water quality issues and implement environmental projects
Sullivan County Visitors Association	Sullivan County’s designated tourism promotion agency; promotes local farms and agriculture as part of its overall marketing program
Sullivan Renaissance	Offers a limited number of grants for projects that protect, enhance or conserve natural resources, including innovative agricultural initiatives
Sullivan-Wawarsing Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone	Designated by the USDA; a pilot technical assistance program with a plan to mitigate lack of employment and job loss. Support for agricultural economic development.
USDA Farm Service Agency	Offers a variety of financing options for farmland ownership, operating expenses, beginning farmer financing programs, etc. as well as crop insurance and other specialty programs.
Watershed Agricultural Council	Works with farmers to support economic viability of agriculture and forestry, protect water quality through land conservation; the Pure Catskills branding campaign.

An agricultural business retention and expansion program is needed to provide a framework for communicating directly with farmers and helping them navigate through the available resources, improve their profitability, and solve problems. It is also needed to coordinate implementation of priority projects, financial and technical assistance programs, and business planning assistance.

Vision and Goals

This updated Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, funded by a planning grant from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and Sullivan County, is designed to evaluate the current status of agriculture in Sullivan County, and outline initiatives to further promote and enhance it, with an emphasis on agricultural economic development.

It incorporates input received from farmers, agricultural groups and organizations, economic development officials, community leaders, and the general public, and gives the County:

- a long-term vision and direction to guide the development of policies and programs;
- strategies to maintain agriculture as a critical land use and economic driver;
- a framework for organization and collaboration to promote existing and new farm operations;
- an analysis of current conditions, issues, and trends in agriculture, including the impact of property taxes on Sullivan County farms;
- an evaluation of local land use laws and policies to determine their “farm-friendliness”;
- the development of priority farmland criteria for use in farmland protection initiatives;
- the identification of marketing opportunities, potential project partners, and sources of funding;
- data, maps, and other information that can be used to support marketing, grant writing, and other programs related to agriculture; and
- resources on agriculture to be used by county staff, elected officials, and farmers.

Based on input from the AFPB, farmers, the public, agriculture-related agencies and organizations, and the public, this Plan establishes a positive vision for the future of agriculture in Sullivan County. This vision includes:

- Farms that are financially successful;
- Agriculture will be a top economic driver for the County;
- The public is educated about the role and importance of agriculture;
- Promotion and enhancement of agriculture is an economic priority in the County;
- Supportive County programs and policies;
- Available and accessible farmland; and
- Sullivan County is a location for and farming offers a stable and viable career opportunity for the next generation.

The plan presents five goals to support this vision:

1. Maintain the County’s valuable farmland in active agricultural use.
2. Increase the financial success and stability of farm operations.
3. Integrate agricultural economic development into County economic strategies.
4. Increase public recognition of the value of agriculture and farmland, and develop a better understanding of farm issues by non-farmers.
5. Attract new entrepreneurs and younger households to farming ventures and assist this next generation of farmers.

Priority Initiatives

The plan recommends programs and projects to be implemented that address the critical issues and capitalize on agricultural opportunities in Sullivan County. Six major initiatives have been identified as priorities, as they serve as the foundation for other successful outcomes. These priority initiatives build on the many existing efforts in the County and address critical issues and opportunities.

Priority Initiative 1: Building Capacity, Organization, and Collaboration

Many of the problems, or lack of solutions to known problems in the County, stem from not having the capacity, communication, and collaboration in place to support implementation. Agencies and organizations involved with agriculture, both within the County and the broader region, need to work together, efficiently use the talents of staff and volunteers, find ways to eliminate duplication and fill gaps in programs, and build relationships. This initiative is a foundation for success and is as important as adequate funding support.

Recommended action steps for this initiative include:

- Setting up effective **communication systems** to share information among agencies and organizations that support agriculture and help farmers;
- **Evaluating existing programs** to reduce duplication of effort and address gaps in services;
- Continuing to **fund** Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), Soil and Water Conservation, and the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation (HVADC) as they serve critical functions;
- Scheduling **regular multi-county meetings** of Planning staff, HVADC, CCE, and others to improve coordination between the counties in the region on agricultural issues; and
- Establishing a **committee to provide leadership**, assistance, coordination, and support to implement the priority projects identified in this plan. This committee should consist of representatives from organizations that support agriculture and agribusinesses along with plan implementation partners. It should meet on a regular basis to discuss the status of agricultural projects, share information, and assist in implementation of the projects outlined in this Plan.

Priority Initiative 2: Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program

Modeled after Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) programs used in non-farm economic development, and similar to existing CCE farm management programs, this initiative will provide a framework for communicating directly with farmers to increase their awareness of available resources, improve their profitability, and solve problems. Central to this effort will be the creation of an Agricultural BR&E Program Coordinator position.

He or she will visit farms on a regular basis and will be responsible for working directly with farmers to provide general assistance, referring them to service providers in such areas as business planning, marketing, value-added processing, and diversification as appropriate. He or she will also play a role in the other priority initiatives and serve as a spokesperson for agriculture in Sullivan County.

Recommended action steps for this initiative include:

- **Structuring** the Agricultural BR&E Program and outlining its **objectives**;
- Determining **how** the program will be **administered**;
- **Evaluating options** for the new position, and recruiting and hiring staff;
- Developing a **database** of farms;
- Developing and implementing a proactive **business visitation** program;
- **Providing assistance** with respect to business planning, farm management, succession planning, obtaining financing, securing and training workers, reducing production costs, etc.;

Priority Initiative 3: Agritourism Enhancement

Agritourism has been identified as a strong niche by the Sullivan County Visitors Association. The agency already features local farms, farmers’ markets, breweries, distilleries, and farm-to-table restaurants in print materials, on its website, and in social media. These and other efforts to develop and promote farm-based tourism have been beneficial, but have not yet reached their full potential.

There is a need to develop new agritourism products, experiences, and events; leverage the resources of and coordinate with existing organizations involved in agriculture and tourism; and make the County more “tourism-friendly.” This would provide additional opportunities for both new farmers and existing farmers to diversify and increase their incomes, while bringing valuable external dollars into the County.

Recommended action steps for this initiative include:

- Working with interested farmers to **increase agritourism** activities (e.g., farm markets, tours and demonstrations, corn mazes) and **create farm stays**;
- Increasing the **online presence** of farms;
- Developing **additional special events** or festivals focused on agriculture;
- Improving the existing **agricultural trail map** by making it available online and allowing users to view the location of nearby lodging, restaurants, and other amenities;
- Developing a **coordinated wayfinding signage** program with a mobile phone app; and
- Increasing **collaboration** among farmers’ markets, agritourism providers, and agencies and organizations involved in promoting agritourism.

Priority Initiative 4: New/Young Farmer Program

This program represents a concerted effort to “sell” Sullivan County as a good place to farm, targeted to young farmers and the next generation of farmers. It includes initiatives such as a farmer/farmland match program, along with mentoring, agricultural business incubation, training, coordination with organizations such as the Glynwood Center, apprenticeships, and educational efforts via schools, Sullivan County BOCES, 4-H, and SUNY Sullivan.

Recommended action steps for this initiative include:

- Creating **fact sheets** on market opportunities that may be viable for new farmers;
- Providing **training and support** for new farmers;
- Adapting the Orange County **New Farmer Manual** for use in Sullivan County;
- Providing incentives and advertising **existing funding opportunities** for farm start-up operations;
- Promoting Sullivan County **agribusiness loan programs**;
- Tapping into and promoting **veterans in farming** programs;
- Working with local realtors to **inventory available agricultural property** that would appeal to new and existing farmers;
- Encouraging Farm Credit or local banks to **create a set-aside** to provide capital or loan guarantees to qualified new and beginning farmers to purchase land;
- Getting local **schools involved** in agriculture; and
- Helping Sullivan County BOCES agriculture students’ **transition to agricultural employment and farming.**

Priority Initiative 5: Value-Added and Diversification

This program has two parts. The first part will take agricultural initiatives already underway, including the Liberty Red Meat Processing Facility and CCE’s community kitchen (the EaT Kitchen) and help make them more successful. It will involve good organization, planning, coordination with farmers, getting the right operators, and marketing. The second part is oriented to offering training and assistance to farmers in understanding market opportunities, and helping them take advantage of funding that can be used for value-added processing, diversification and expansion.

Recommended action steps for this initiative include:

- Expanding **farmer participation** in the Pride of New York and Pure Catskills branding campaigns;
- Continuing existing **consumer education** efforts and **farmers’ markets** to help the public understand the importance of agriculture;
- Developing a **local food procurement** policy for County agencies and institutions; and
- Continuing efforts to create a **Farm-to-School Program.**

Priority Initiative 6: Buy Local

This initiative is aimed at improving the local sales of and demand for fresh, local foods. Project components include farm-to-table, farm-to-institution, and farm-to-business programs, as well as local marketing/public relations and a Pride of Sullivan or Sullivan Fresh initiative to highlight businesses that use or sell local produce and products. The initiative also calls for creating a marketing campaign to advertise local farms and educate residents about the benefits of buying locally-grown and raised farm products.

Recommended action steps for this initiative include:

- Educating farmers on **diversifying** their farms for financial stability;
- Facilitating the development of **specialty farm operations** and products;
- Providing **training or technical assistance** to farmers in business planning and value-added processing;
- Developing a catalog of **potential niche/specialty crops** that can be grown in Sullivan County;
- Continuing CCE's **high tunnel program**, developing a funding mechanism for farmers to **purchase high tunnels** after completing training, and possibly adding **cheese-making** programs at the EaT Kitchen;
- Tapping into the **expertise available** at Cornell University, SUNY Sullivan, and other regional colleges and universities to help farmers diversify their operations;
- Determining the potential **demand for other facilities** or services to piggy-back on the red meat processing facility; and
- **Working with livestock producers** and cooperatives, both within and outside Sullivan County, to market and sell meat from the processing facility.

Farmland Preservation

In addition to the six priorities, this Plan recommends that efforts continue to be made towards farmland preservation in Sullivan County. While the County is not currently under intense development pressure, loss of farmland still occurs due to both conversion to non-farm uses as well as abandonment of farmland.

The best way to preserve farmland is to have economically successful farmers. However, the complexity of issues facing farmers today makes it imperative that farmland remain available and affordable, especially for the new and young farmers targeted for recruitment.



The Plan update recommends that the County work to establish a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program to permanently preserve critical farmlands. Along with this, a Lease of Development Rights (LDR) program patterned after the State program would provide affordable land opportunities to encourage

new farmers in the County. Both these programs will require establishment of participation criteria and funding.

The County can also play a critical role in training local officials and encouraging use of farm-friendly local land use regulations and adoption of right-to-farm laws. Farmland preservation programs should include succession planning for farmers to ensure farm operations can continue into the next generation, and a farmland/farmer match initiative. The County could explore the possibility of arranging for placement of conservation easements on foreclosed lands that are suitable for farming so that land could be rented or sold at affordable rates to farmers.

Marketing Opportunities

A significant effort is made in this Plan to identify marketing opportunities. There are a variety of audiences and messages that must be conveyed for success: the general public, farmers, local businesses, agr-businesses, and organizations to name a few. This Plan update offers specific marketing recommendations needed to implement each of the six priority initiatives. These range from helping farmers tap into the New York City metro and other urban markets, to leveraging existing marketing and branding programs such as Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley Bounty and helping promote buy-local programs within Sullivan County. As an aid to this, Appendix A and K offer a compendium of resources that can help.

Implementation

Implementation will require leadership, collaboration and communication between many people and agencies, from county departments and committees to organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension (see list in the text box, below). Some projects may be more effective for *regional* implementation, working closely with adjacent counties and regional or even state agencies. All of these entities – and of course, the farm community – have important roles to play in implementing these initiatives. For each recommendation, the Plan lists potential partners that can work with Sullivan County to implement the project. It also outlines a critical organizational framework to get the job done that includes formation of an advisory task force and creation of an agricultural business retention and expansion coordinator to help the County, agencies, organizations, and farmers navigate to success.

Potential Implementation Partners

- Catskill Mountainkeeper
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County
- County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency
- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- Local school district food service directors
- SUNY Sullivan
- Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development
- Sullivan County Agricultural Advisory Board
- Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- Sullivan County BOCES
- Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce
- Sullivan County Department of Planning & Environmental Management
- Sullivan County Department of Public Health
- Sullivan County Farm Bureau
- Sullivan County Farm Network
- Sullivan County Farmers' Market Association / other farmers' markets in the County
- Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development
- Sullivan County Visitors Association
- Sullivan Renaissance
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- Watershed Agricultural Council/Pure Catskills