

**ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD**

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DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 6, 2008, 7:30 PM

County Courthouse, 48 Court Street, Room 226 A and B, Canton, New York

I. Call to Order

- (a). **Roll Call and Determination of a Quorum.** Andrews called the meeting to order at 7:35 PM. **Members present:** Robert Andrews, Clive Chambers, Ken Lawrence, Dan Martin, and Keith Zimmerman. **Members absent:** Judy Aldrich, Kevin Bresett, Dan Girard, Jon Greenwood, Steve McKnight, and Jane Powers. **Staff present:** Matilda Larson. **Others present:** Brent Buchanan, Betsy Hodge, Dawn Howard, Mendy Martin, Allyn Tubbs, and Robert Wilson.
- (b). **Adoption of the Agenda.** Due to a lack of a quorum, no action was taken on the meeting agenda.
- (c). **Approval of the Minutes.** Due to a lack of a quorum, no action was taken on the June 26, 2008 meeting minutes, or on the September 9, 2008 meeting minutes.

II. Business Items

Review Proposed 2009 Scope of Work. Zimmerman and Andrews reviewed the history of developing the 2009 budget to implement four agriculture activities. Zimmerman noted there is a possibility the Ag Board's funding request to the Board of Legislators (BOL) may be restored to 2008 funding levels.

Martin suggested promoting the availability of soil maps as a 2009 activity, and explained some of the farmers he interacts with do not know the resource exists. Wilson replied most farmers visit the Soil and Water Conservation District office to identify soil conditions on land they're interested in buying. Zimmerman added the Planning Office also has this information available in digital format. After Martin suggested the County publicize the availability of this information, Howard explained an announcement was recently published in Cooperative Extension's monthly "Ag News" newsletter, and said 25 out of 525 hard copies of the publication were distributed.

Howard reviewed the history of preparing the County's soil maps with active farmers, and said the digital version of the maps was received eight years ago. The printed quadrangle maps were received in July. A press release announcing the arrival of the paper copies was distributed to local media, and staff delivered presentations announcing their availability. Buchanan suggested they would print another article in Extension's "Ag News" newsletter. Howard noted the resource is free. After Andrews recommended distributing the resource to local libraries, Howard said that step was done. Howard said she would distribute another press releases to promote the availability of the product. Zimmerman asked if the hard copy includes soil series data. Howard described what is included in the publication.

Lawrence wanted to know the benefits for paying an annual membership fee to participate in the Come Farm With Us marketing campaign. Buchanan distributed a copy of the 2009 Come Farm With Us budget, and said more funds will be invested in advertising than attending trade shows. Funds are also used to pay for a regional coordinator in Lewis County to coordinate regional meetings, prepare promotional packets, arrange travel, and serve as the primary contact for the project. Buchanan affirmed for Lawrence there is no overlap in responsibilities between him and the regional coordinator. Andrews said the regional coordinator's position was recently vacated by Arlene Hall, and is now filled by Joe Allen. Following a description of the promotional packets that are mailed to prospective farmers, Zimmerman said the County's Industrial Development Authority underwrites the production of 300 promotional packets annually, and lists the Extension Office as the County's primary contact.

After Lawrence asked if 20 hours of staff time per quarter is the bare minimum to participate in the marketing campaign, Buchanan explained the campaign is a multi-county effort, and responsibilities to attend trade shows can be shifted to the staff members of other participating counties. Buchanan confirmed for Wilson that they are seeing more hits to the County's Come Farm With Us website, and the target audience at the Keystone Trade show in Pennsylvania primarily consists of Mennonite and Amish farmers. Buchanan explained returning to the convention each year helps establish trust with prospective farmers who are working for their parents and are building equity to establish their own farms elsewhere.

After Wilson asked what the mission of the marketing program was, Zimmerman explained it began as an effort to prevent original farms from being piecemealed as they were sold. Wilson recommended purchasing ads that promote the affordability of land in mid-west publications, rather than in regional papers. Martin said he became aware of the North Country after subscribing to a regional publication called "Country Folks." Lawrence said he believes the County should be a part of the initiative, but was wondering if any of the other three activities should receive more hours.

Chambers suggested a project to assess the actual presence of farm land in the county. Andrews said Powers has distributed information to town assessors to increase understanding of how to assess land more accurately, but noted the town's assessments

and real property land use classifications won't be consistent until the effort is centralized.

Hodge reported she's received good responses to a letter sent to school districts, and said she conducted a questions and answers session with students in Brasher. She conducted the Apple Program in Colton, the Pizza Program in Canton, showed the PowerPoint presentation at Edwards-Knox, and is currently arranging a presentation in Potsdam. The presentation was also displayed at the Harvest Festival, and she will do one more revision to it before it's finalized. Hodge affirmed for Andrews that the hours allocated for Ag Careers will be fully expended before the end of the school year, and noted that she is hoping for more requests for the following school year.

As for updates to the County's Agri-Business Directory, Buchanan said staff would reorganize its content by town, category, and in alphabetical order. Buchanan said other business categories, such as portable sawmills, would be added to the directory. Recommendations were made to distribute press releases to add new businesses to the book, and to have a table or booth at County events asking individuals to sign up, and to collect business cards.

For the County's participation in the Tri-County Recycling Ag Plastics Project, Martin reported having difficulty stuffing the baler with the minimal amount of plastics used on his farm. Martin recommended changing the configuration of the baler as the current arrangement is labor-intensive. A suggestion was made to include a horizontal hopper to its configuration. Buchanan reported the machine was originally designed as a tobacco baler, but should have resembled a hay baler instead.

III. Reports

- (a). Partnership Grant for Ag Plastics Recycling Project.** Larson provided an overview of the funding source and the County's request to disseminate Best Management Practices to participating farmers on preparing ag plastics for recycling.
- (b). Soil and Water Conservation District.** Howard provided an update on the State's amended regulations concerning CAFOs. Medium farms will self-certify, and large farms with nutrient management plans will be subject to public hearings conducted by the DEC. Howard also reported more than 1,000 people attended the Day at the Farm Tour held on McKnight's farm in Madrid, and 33 persons attended a Water Quality Panel held in the County Legislative Chambers on October 16. The Big Foot ag plastics baler was demonstrated at Cooperative Extension's Harvest Festival, the Day at the Farm Tour, and at the EMC Conference on the Environment.

Howard reported that after the closure of Heritage Cheese in Heuvelton, 60 Amish families lost their dairy market. AgriMark agreed to purchase storage tanks, and Howard explained the details for using electricity for pasteurization while complying with Amish protocols. Following Assemblywoman Scozzafava's intervention, the DEC is waiving

certain fees and requirements for the project. Clarkson University students are assisting with the engineering to satisfy the stamped plans requirement. Wilson said the pasteurization process for Grade A milk will increase the Amish's earnings. Andrews added the project will be subject to higher standards and inspections, both of which will require new business logistics. Buchanan added the DEC will temporarily allow the comingling of milk from different farms. Martin concluded the discussion by saying without Heritage Cheese, a local market for Grade B milk doesn't exist.

Howard said the towns of Madrid, Lawrence and Massena have each examined adopting local land use regulations that would effect farming operations. Chambers said these recent events serve as a good educational opportunity to improve the public's understanding of the County's Right to Farm law, and to promote good farm management practices. Martin said the public's loss of confidence in farming practices instantly creates a bad image for all farmers, and jeopardizes the Right to Farm law. Wilson recommended reviewing alternatives to spreading manure. Zimmerman said the long-term concern is the State's vulnerable Public Health law. Residents can approach a public health official to determine if a management practice is unsound. Lawrence added it is the personal responsibility of all individuals to raise issues with farmers if complaints are being made. Howard mentioned the Safe Harbor consent order between the EPA and larger farms. Thresholds and enforcement issues are currently being worked out.

IV. Other Items

- (a). Recognizing Ken Lawrence's Years of Service.** Andrews read aloud a letter of appreciation for Lawrence's years of service and contributions to the Ag Board. Andrews noted a letter of appreciation is also being mailed to Aldrich. The appointment of two new members to the Ag Board will be made by the County Board of Legislators in December.
- (b). Next Meeting.** Members in attendance agreed by consensus to schedule the next meeting for Thursday, January 29, 2009 at 7:30 pm in Room 226 A and B of the County Courthouse. The meeting will establish a meeting calendar. The election of officers will occur at a subsequent meeting so that new members will have sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the roles and responsibilities of the Board, and to become acquainted with other Board members.

Wilson suggested delivering a "State of Agriculture" presentation to the Board of Legislators. Zimmerman said it would be best to deliver this presentation in the summer before the Board begins preparing the County's 2010 budget, and the Ag Board should prepare its presentation during the winter and spring months. Wilson commented the USDA's Agriculture Census tally of total acreage in production is not accurate. Martin added he could complete the 2007 Ag Census survey and qualify as a non-farmer. Zimmerman suggested a student intern could compile data and present findings of what is known and what data gaps exist. A suggestion was made to use the agribusiness directory as part of an outreach effort to conduct an accurate assessment of acreage in

production. Zimmerman noted this project is presently not a part of the 2009 work plan. The Planning Office will not have the staffing capacity this spring to take on another project. If the Ag Board would like to add another project, it would be an initiative that would require the time of Board members. Wilson suggested adding this to the 2010 work plan once data gaps are known. Zimmerman said the real property classifications for a town could be verified through a windshield survey and satellite imagery, but reiterated Planning staff won't be able to drive this project; it would have to be completed by Ag Board members instead.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 9:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Matilda Larson