

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

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**APPROVED MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, March 15, 2011, 7:30 PM

County Courthouse, Room 226, 48 Court Street, Canton, New York

**I. Call to Order**

**A. Roll Call and Determination of a Quorum.** Andrews called the meeting to order at 7:37 PM. Members present: Bob Andrews, Darren Colton, David Coffey, David Fisher, Jon Greenwood, Steve McKnight, Allyn Tubbs and Keith Zimmerman. **Members absent:** Tony Arquiett, Clive Chambers and Dan Martin. **Staff present:** Matilda Larson. **Others present:** Jay Matteson, Jefferson County Agricultural Development Corporation; Fred Morrill, St. Lawrence County Legislator; Brian Norton, St. Lawrence County IDA staff; Barry Ormsby, Jefferson County Legislator; Don Peck, St. Lawrence County Legislator; Karin Risso, dairy farmer; and Julia Robbins, staffer for Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush.

Andrews welcomed everyone to the meeting, and asked all those in attendance to introduce themselves.

**B. Adoption of the Agenda.** An update by Brian Norton on ag-related IDA activities was added to the agenda. The modified meeting agenda was adopted by consensus.

**C. Approval of the Minutes.** The November 4, 2010 meeting minutes were unanimously approved. (Colton/McKnight)

**II. Guest Presentations**

**A. Jefferson County Ag Development Corporation.** Jay Matteson began his presentation by stating he is the former Director of Jefferson County's Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and worked for Oswego County's SWCD prior to that. Matteson said the Local Development Corporation (LDC) is a non-profit organization that was created in 2001 following a local conference held on agriculture. Matteson explained the conference attendees asked whether the ag industry received enough focus, and concluded it was time to give ag industry the attention it needed. As a result, the LDC was created to specifically address ag-related economic development initiatives.

Matteson said the LDC does not issue or manage any loans, as there are adequate loan programs in existence.

Greenwood arrived at 7:44 pm.

Matteson said the organization became an LDC in 2002, with the mission to assist in the retention, promotion and growth of Jefferson's ag industry, and to help identify resources to bring an ag project to fruition. The LDC also markets agriculture in the county.

Matteson said there are 13 members who serve on the board, and nine of these members are appointed by Jefferson County's Board of Legislators. Matteson reviewed the representation of the board, and identified the Development Authority of the North Country (DANC), and the Tug Hill Commission as interested partners who regularly attend their meetings.

Matteson added he is an employee of the IDA, and there is a contract between the IDA and the LDC to coordinate the program. Matteson said he began working with the IDA to open up their revolving loan fund to provide gap financing to agricultural projects. Matteson added the fund isn't just limited to value-added projects; it is also available to on-farm capital and production projects. For example, the first funded project was the expansion of an existing dairy farm, which was a \$1.5 million to \$2 million investment. Zimmerman asked if the IDA maintains control of the fund. Matteson said yes, and the underwriting requirements are comparable to other projects that are considered for IDA funding.

Matteson said the LDC also maintains the [comefarmwithus.org](http://comefarmwithus.org) website to promote the county's ag industry. All farmers markets and farms that are listed for sale in Jefferson County are posted on the site. Information about the farmland protection program, the county Dairy Princess, and the Dairy Princess Parade are also posted. Matteson said the site receives approximately 5,000 unique visitors per month. Matteson also said the program is involved with dairy profit team projects, and is the lead pilot project in New York State. Matteson explained \$13,000 of state funds was invested in the project, and created twelve new positions, which is proof that investments in the ag industry yields returns. Now DANC investments are being used to create additional teams. Matteson also said he has hosted "The Home Grown Show," a one-hour weekly radio program since 2001.

Jefferson County Legislator Barry Ormsby added the county's ag industry was previously on the sideline when examining economic development, but the creation of the LDC brought it into the spotlight to recognize it as part of economic development. Ormsby added the county is seeing a diversification in the industry with organic beef, wineries, and CSAs. Matteson referred to a handout that promotes ag tourism among young adults, and said the local wineries love the marketing tool which has combined agriculture and tourism. Matteson said the LDC worked with county tourism development council, and added 15 to 20 more stops to the self-guided tour. Matteson said in 2009, 89,000 people

visited the Seaway Winery Trail. The Jefferson County Legislators are currently looking at declaring October as Wine and Grape month.

Matteson said the LDC hopes to work on promoting the beef industry next, and believes grass-based, small livestock and beef presents an opportunity in the county. The LDC anticipates on working with state legislators to open doors at SUNY institutions and at correctional facilities to purchase locally grown beef. If successful, the industry would purchase and raise bull calves, not for prime cuts of beef, but for hamburger.

Matteson said the program surveyed its membership, and the strongest message received was to increase ag promotion and ag awareness. As a result, the LDC is doubling its efforts on local foods awareness such as local wine and grapes, produce, and dairy. Specifically, the LDC is looking to partner with grocers to identify products on their shelves that are grown locally; to create a farmers market guide; and to create a local foods guide. Matteson said he is also engaging in public education about the proposed state budget and its impacts of ag programs.

- B. St. Lawrence County IDA.** Brian Norton reported IDA staff has been in contact with a couple of prospective businesses regarding the North Lawrence Dairy Plant, and they are working to market the facility. The IDA also met with the CEO of Pineland Farms. Norton said the business is looking to double the capacity of its feed lots, and will retain its current staff. Norton said of the company's 10 buildings, the business is currently occupying six, and intends to occupy all of the buildings by the end of the year. Norton said the IDA provided information about local vets for support, and the OBPA can assist with shipping feedstock.

A question was asked about Pine Tree rendering. A comment was made that a truck or two are currently on the roads picking up downed cows for rendering at their facility in Brier Hill, and are making additional stops to purchase used oil from restaurants. Norton said the business hasn't requested any assistance from the IDA.

With regards to a proposed mobile slaughtering unit, Norton said the company is finalizing their business plan with the Small Business Development Center, and Renee Smith is joining their corporation on part-time basis. The company is preparing an initial RBEG application, which is due to USDA today. Norton said the business is also looking to create a rendering facility, which will be incorporated into their business plan.

Norton said GardenShare, and the North Country Grown cooperative received RVRDA applications for funding. Norton said the IDA will provide technical assistance on efforts to establish a state-certified commercial kitchen in Potsdam. Norton said SUNY Canton was approached to consider developing a culinary food program. A comment was made that a culinary food program exists at BOCES tech centers. Norton said the North Country Symposium will be held at SLU on April 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, and the keynote speaker is Ben Hewlett from Vermont, who will deliver a presentation on the implementation of a localized food system. Zimmerman said Hewlett is the storyteller, and has been directed to spend time examining the structural elements on what did and didn't work, and

examine where the entrepreneurial funds came from. Zimmerman said the community recently constructed an aging facility for novelty cheese on a cooperative basis, and the biggest challenge they faced was organizing the producers.

Zimmerman said he would like to know the financial structure of the LDC. Matteson said he brought copies of their most recent audit for distribution. Norton said the Center for Entrepreneurship at Clarkson is providing a Business 102 course, and is in search of farming businesses to examine what works, and identify areas that can be improved. Norton distributed a copy of the program's description.

Andrews said rumors are rampant regarding a new Pineland Farms facility in Nicolville. Andrews said the first rumor is that once the business is established, they will pursue a local food emblem. Andrews said Pineland Farms is already established in Wegmans and Hannafords groceries. Morrill asked if there was anything wrong with that rumor, and added if customers want New York grown, that's not a bad thing. Andrews said he only wanted to clear up rumors. Andrews said the second rumor was whether Pineland Farms would purchase animals locally. Greenwood said the company will seek uniform sized animals for volume, and the challenge will be getting producers to meet the company's standards.

McKnight said the standing issue is there aren't enough processing facilities. Matteson said some livestock producers complain they need larger USDA processing facilities, but the issue may be to improve scheduling. Matteson said there is plenty of processing capacity in Central and Northern New York. Andrews asked where those facilities were located, and said Tri-Town Meats doesn't do commercial killing; they don't have kill floor. A comment was made that Tri-Town can't afford workers compensation. Matteson said that according to Rich Brown of the New York Cattleman's Association, processing capacity is primarily due to scheduling than the current number of facilities. Andrews said not having a value-added slaughtering facility in St. Lawrence County is a missed opportunity. Andrews said he recently had a downed animal and called Willards, but their freezer was full to capacity. Andrews then called Jordan in West Carthage, and said he was impressed with their service. Andrews added they process beef, chickens, and turkeys. Andrews said it is a modest facility, but is immaculately clean.

Matteson said there are common threads between both counties, and scheduling the processing of locally grown produce is one of them. Matteson said the farm industry needs to work smarter, not just harder, and it there should be better coordination of existing facilities. For instance, Matteson said, Great Lakes cheese was another producer that didn't have enough milk supply. Small incentives were provided to improve the quality of milk and increase farmer profitability. Matteson explained small, 50-50 cost share grants of up to \$2,000 were made available for cow comfort practices such as changing stall sizes and improving bedding.

Peck said he was glad to see a regional approach, and said anything that improves farming in Jefferson County improves farming in St. Lawrence County. Andrews highlighted the volume of milk made in St. Lawrence County that is supplying producers in Jefferson County. Morrill said that during his time on the IDA board, the ag industry

was a bit of step child, and said the IDA needs to do more in St. Lawrence County. Morrill said he thinks Jefferson County's Ag Development Corporation is doing a great job, and that St. Lawrence County can do better. Matteson said they have been told by other IDAs that their work isn't happening in other counties. Greenwood said the IDA has been involved in ag projects, but nobody knows it. Greenwood asked if the North Lawrence Dairy Plant is being stripped of its equipment. Norton said that an inventory was done, and they are receiving calls from liquidators. Andrews said he heard rumors that the equipment is going to their facility in Vermont. Andrews asked if there were any conversations with Losurdo Cheese in Heuvelton, and where they were taking their whey. A comment was made that the whey is being brought to Doug's digester in Jefferson County.

Norton asked what the LDC's job creation requirement was for investments. Matteson replied one job for every \$20,000. Matteson said they currently have a revolving drainage fund, and are looking to expand into other types of infrastructure investments. Matteson was asked how the LDC was funded. Matteson said the corporation is primarily funded by the County Board of Legislators, and they are a membership organization, and currently have a membership of 85 members. Annual membership fees are based on a sliding fee scale. The organization also sells advertising on the website and on its radio show. Matteson said when the corporation was established, it was intentionally created to not be a grant driven organization.

### **III. Review of Proposed State Budget Cuts**

This discussion was tabled by consensus as the state budget was finalized prior to this meeting. Morrill said that in addition to working with the new Commissioner of Ag and Markets, both counties need to take advantage of the current composition of the region's state representation.

Ormsby said he wanted to add one more point on networking. Ormsby said he shares a lot of information with Legislator Alex MacKinnon, but would like a point of contact for forwarding resolutions. Ormsby noted he has already forwarded two resolutions to Planning Staff. Zimmerman said he would provide him with the County Deputy Clerk's email address.

### **IV. Reports**

**A. Board of Legislators.** Morrill said the County reassigned duties in the Public Defender's office to improve management, and said the new Board of Legislators is working well together. Morrill said there is a lot of debate, but also a lot of cooperation. Peck said the working atmosphere has improved, and is not vindictive. Andrews said he's talked to all sorts of legislators, and appreciates the communication.

**B. Soil and Water Conservation District.** Andrews reviewed Howard's report. Andrews said he knew of four farms that are for sale, and would like to where they should be

advertised now that the County's has discontinued its membership with the Come Farm With Us program. Matteson said those postings could be forwarded to him.

**V. Other Items**

**A. Correspondence.** None.

**B. Next Meeting.** The next Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting will be on Thursday, June 2, 2011 at 7:30 pm in Room 226 of the County Courthouse in Canton.

**VI. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm. (McKnight/Tubbs)

Respectfully submitted,

Matilda Larson