

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

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APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, June 3, 2010, 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 7:32 PM. **Members present:** Robert Andrews, Clive Chambers, David Fisher, Dan Girard, Dan Martin, Steve McKnight, Jane Powers, Allyn Tubbs, and Keith Zimmerman. **Members absent:** Jon Greenwood. **Staff present:** Brent Buchanan and Matilda Larson. **Others present:** Elizabeth Graham, Dawn Howard, Mendy Martin, Jon Montan and Fred Morrill.
- (b). **Adoption of the Agenda.** Andrews recommended the agenda be amended to discuss the DEC's proposed regulations for Outdoor Wood Boilers, and 2011 funding for the Ag Board. The modified meeting agenda was adopted by consensus.
- (c). **Approval of the Minutes.** The February 4, 2009 meeting minutes were unanimously approved (Fisher/Tubbs).

II. Presentations

Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Future of Farming in New York. Fred Morrill reviewed the goals and intent of the Task Force, and said it initially met on March 15th before he was appointed to serve on the group. The Task Force aims to find solutions to keep agriculture the number one industry in the state; will meet in the summer to discuss issues; and intends to present its recommendations to the NYSAC membership at the annual fall meeting. Morrill reiterated for Martin that the Task Force is looking for feedback on issues NYSAC can address. Martin responded by saying the County will need to find efficiencies to provide mandated services, and reviewed the Ag Board's position that if the County had to generate revenue to cover County costs, it should be done through an increase in sales tax. Martin said generating revenue through a property tax is antiquated, and preferred a raise in the sales tax over property tax. Morrill said if the County's operating costs are covered, the tax rate would be cut, and added that farm inputs are exempt from sales tax. Fisher said though it's unpopular, the County will have to cut services because it can't raise property taxes. Morrill responded the County would

look to cut areas that have the most discretionary spending, which primarily consists of the Highway Department and the Sheriff's Department. He noted, however, that the inability to maintain and repair transportation infrastructure impacts the farming industry's ability to deliver goods.

Zimmerman said he learned at a recent Department Head's meeting that the number of unique individuals served through the Department of Social Services is 39,000, roughly one-third of the County's population. Morrill added the demand for their services increased by 18%. Andrews recommended the Blue Ribbon Commission review a summary of the County's four focus group meetings held in January and February; minutes from a recent RC&D meeting to discuss agricultural issues; and examine how economic development funds can be invested in the agricultural industry. Larson said she would prepare a synopsis of the focus group meetings for review. Fisher suggested the Ag Board review the document before it's publicly released and distributed. Morrill requested that a copy of the synopsis be emailed to him.

Morrill also announced an FFA Ag Awareness Project to promote the recycling of ag plastics will be on display at the County Fair in Gouverneur. A \$1,500 grant was received to construct a 12' x 16' outbuilding to display the exhibit, and a picnic table built with recycled plastic material will be raffled off. When asked if the plastic baler would be available to display at the Fair, Howard said the County's plastic baler is in Florida and will be shipped following the release of funds from the DEC.

Grass Pelleting Potential in St. Lawrence County. Jon Montan said he recently attended a seminar at SUNY Potsdam on developing a renewable fuels roadmap, and explained why grass energy should be included as a fuel resource in the state. Montan reviewed field trips with a local renewable energy working group to Unadilla, New York and to Benton, Pennsylvania. Montan described Enviro Energy's pelleting process in Unadilla, and explained they purchase hay at \$60 per ton from farmers that live as far as 40 miles from the pelleting plant. Montan said Enviro Energy's pellets are made from a mixture of hay and weeds, and he explained the disadvantages of switch grass briquettes. Montan described a multi-use pellet boiler system at a school in Benton, Pennsylvania, and Edward-Knox school's heating system and its use of wood chips. Montan then described how mobile pelleters manufacture pellets.

When asked by Tubbs, Montan said he didn't know how many tons are manufactured by mobile pelleters, but said a good rate would be 1 ton per hour. Montan added greater productivity is reached with stationary pelleters. Fisher asked the BTU per ton for grass pellets. Montan said the BTU rate is comparable between grass and wood; the BTU for grass is 5% less than wood. Martin asked if an energy input-output analysis has been conducted for manufacturing grass pellets. Montan said it was important to minimize the energy used for harvesting and transporting grass for pelletization, which is why it is important to promote local consumption of the resource. Montan said the ratio is 14 to 1 for switch grass pellets, compared to 1.6 to 1 for producing ethanol. Montan said the next steps to promote grass pelleting in the county are to identify major consumers because there presently isn't enough demand from residents. Montan also said the local

group is seeking funds to pay an individual to monitor and help develop the local industry. Morrill responded that a profitable grass pelleting industry in the county will rely on local demand, and fuel prices. Fisher recommended placing greater emphasis on manufacturing of grass pellet stoves. Montan said the local group is emphasizing issues it can influence, and said the stove industry needs to manufacture multi-purpose stoves that can burn various types of biofuels.

III. Reports

- (a). **2010 Focus Group Meetings.** Larson reviewed the top ag priorities that were determined by focus group participants, and said she would write a narrative for distribution. Fisher recommended the narrative be reviewed by the Board before it's publicly distributed. Suggested locations and organizations to receive the narrative included the County website, focus group participants, state and county officials, NYSAC's Blue Ribbon Commission (via Morrill), the County IDA, and in Cooperative Extension's "Ag News" newsletter. Morrill suggested the creation of a local development corporation (LDC) to help direct IDA investments toward the farming industry. Morrill recommended approaching the County IDA about the possibility, and for assistance in its creation. A statement was made that the cost to create an LCD ranges from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Morrill recommended inviting IDA staff (Patrick Kelly) to the next Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting in August to discuss why and how LDCs are created. Andrews complimented Larson for facilitating the January and February Focus Groups. A motion to distribute the Focus Group narrative to various organizations in the county and state carried unanimously (Martin/Fisher).
- (b). **Northeast SARE Ag Plastics Recycling Grant.** Buchanan reviewed recent ag plastic collection dates, the publication of best management practices in Cooperative Extension's "Ag News" newsletter, and the amounts of plastics recycled to date. When asked by Andrews, Larson replied that as long as post-surveys are completed with participants to gauge before and after behaviors, the project will have achieved its objectives.
- (c). **Board of Legislators.** Girard said the IDA established an LDC to help fund non-profit projects such as the EJ Noble expansion in Canton, and believed one could be a useful tool in assisting small farmers. Girard said the Board of Legislators received the Ag Board's letter stating that any necessary increase in taxes should come from an increase in the sales tax, not the property tax. Girard added the State Legislature intends to allow county governments to raise sales tax to 4% without any state involvement. Girard said the County's sales tax issue will be addressed by the Board of Legislators before the end of this year.

Girard reviewed a County resolution sponsored by Morrill that opposed the DEC's proposed outdoor wood boiler regulations. Morrill added while the County supported clean burning regulations, the proposed regulations are too restrictive. Andrews said the County Soil and Water Conservation District submitted a letter to the DEC in opposition to the proposed regulations, and recommended the Ag Board submit a letter as well. A

comment was made that the proposed regulations do not identify biomass as a permitted fuel. A statement was also made that the regulations were detrimental to the county's ag community, and contrary to Ag and Market's good agricultural practices. Howard said the proposed regulations would be retroactive and require the dismantling of existing outdoor boilers. The regulations would also require stacks to be higher than the nearest structure, which would be difficult to stabilize. Larson asked what the contents of the Ag Board's letter should say. Suggestions were made to reiterate the Farm Bureau's written position, the Board of Legislators' resolution, and the Soil and Water Conservation District's memo.

Chambers asked if there was any resolution to Morrill's recent resignation from the County IDA Board, and the alleged violation of the County's ethics law though the appearance of a conflict of interest. Girard said Morrill's former seat on the IDA remains vacant and a County Legislator is not presently serving on the IDA board. Girard added the County's ethics law needs to be amended, otherwise none of the County Legislators will be allowed to serve on a County Board. Zimmerman said disclosure forms for advisory board members will not be distributed for completion until issues with the County's ethics law are resolved.

- (d). **Soil and Water Conservation District.** Howard said more than 300 acres in the county have been tilled since the arrival of the no till grain drill. The District's budget will remain level with EPF reimbursements, and the office is no longer expected to pay for use of the computer network at the USDA service center. Howard said funds for conservation easements in regions with development pressure are available through the New York State Protection Fund, and asked if the County would want to participate in the program. Both Zimmerman and Fisher said unlike some areas in Clinton, Essex and Franklin Counties, there is relatively little development pressure in St. Lawrence County to warrant participation in the program.

Howard said her office continues to develop nutrient management plans; conduct federal wetland delineations; and prepare forest management plans, ag valuations and stormwater designs. Howard said Cooperative Extension will assume responsibility of the farm safety day camp, which is visited by 200 children during each day of the camp. When asked, Howard said she didn't have an update on SUNY Canton's proposed manure digester.

- (e). **2010 Ag Tour.** When asked by Andrews, there was consensus by the Ag Board to sponsor another Farm Tour for the County Board of Legislators. Suggested locations for the tour included Cool Brands in North Lawrence, Dan Martin's farm in Potsdam, Curran's Renewable Energy in Massena, and Tri-Town Meat Packing in Brasher. Fisher, Tubbs and Martin offered to serve on a committee to help organize the event. Larson said she would contact them to schedule a committee meeting. Fisher agreed to contact the Farm Bureau to sponsor the bus rental. A suggestion was made to bring a portable speaker system to use on the bus, and to invite New York Farm Credit and the Dairy Princess to distribute free samples.

- (f). **Annual Budget Request.** Andrews said last year the Ag Board returned its funding allocation to the Board of Legislators as a gesture to oppose any raise in property taxes, and said the Board will not be submitting a request for funds this year. Andrews said, however, that it is important for staffing levels to remain unchanged at the Planning Office in order to support the activities of the Ag Board. Girard said he would reiterate this request to the County Legislators. Zimmerman said the County will be asking for draconian cuts to operating budgets as County revenues are down \$800,000 despite a rise in the sales tax. Morrill said the emphasis on budget reductions will be through efficiencies, and said it will be difficult to cut services if Legislators protect certain offices or programs over others.

Martin asked to be excused at 10:02 pm.

Growing Nuisance Bear Population. Andrews said the bear population in the county is on the rise; as many as 40 bears have been sighted in and around Harrisville. Andrews said nuisance animals destroyed 15% of his corn crop this past year, and he critiqued the DEC's guidelines for handling nuisance animals. Andrews recommended the Ag Board submit a letter to the DEC Fish and Wildlife Management Board at their meeting in Lowville on June 17th. The letter should recommend adjusting current management plans, and promoting recreational hunting in the county. A motion to submit a memo to the Fish and Wildlife Management Board that recommend changes to existing management plans carried unanimously (Girard/McKnight and Tubbs). Both Howard and Andrews offered to assist Larson with the preparation of the memo.

IV. Other Items

- (a). **Next Meeting.** The next Ag and Farmland Protection Board meeting will be on Thursday, August 5, 2010 at 7:30 pm in Room 226 of the County Courthouse in Canton.

Zimmerman said he recently spoke with Bob Wilson on the phone. Wilson recently relocated to Arizona, and sends his well wishes to the members of the board.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 10:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Matilda Larson