



## County-wide Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan update

### Compilation of Notes from the November, 2013 Public Meetings

BOCES in Auburn, November 13, 2013, 7 pm - 9 pm

Moravia High School, November 14, 2013, 6 pm - 8 m

Cato-Meridian Central School, November 19, 2013, 6 pm - 8 pm

*Please note: The comments below are a compilation of all discussion notes generated from each of the three public meetings held for the county-wide agriculture and farmland protection plan update in November, 2013. Comments were edited for clarity only. Comments recorded in a given meeting can be found with all the other notes from that meeting. Some comments were moved from under one question to another question, for ease of reading and organization (For example, if a need was expressed during the discussion about strengths, the comment was placed under the question about needs). Question marks (?) indicate handwriting that was difficult to decipher. Comments under each question are loosely grouped by subject.*

## **BOCES in Auburn, November 13, 2013**

### **QUESTION 1: What should our county agriculture and related businesses look like in the next 20 years?**

#### **Summary:**

Innovations and technology will result in higher efficiencies. The county will see more diversity in its farms, in terms of the size of the farms but also in terms of what they produce and who produces them. Good farmland will remain in production and will not be lost to development. The Mennonite/Amish community will continue to increase and farm successfully here. Young people will choose farming and forestry as careers. Niche product markets will grow, as will niche farm production. Local consumers will buy more local food and have better access to local food. The number of value-added businesses will increase.

#### **Innovation, technology, efficiency**

- More innovation and technology – robotic milking will take over
- Efficient businesses
- Bigger, better, more efficient farms
- Greater production out of an acre
- Farming will be more sustainable, better use/control of transportation

#### **Diversity and Local Food**

- Diversity of farm sizes
- MORE DIVERSE: farm sizes, crops (dairy versus niche), conventional versus Amish/Mennonite
- Diversification of farms
- Smaller farms, no increase in larger farms
- Support all size farm operations
- More niche farming
- Future niche market, bees, hops
- Still have big dairy farms, lot more micro-agriculture
- Locally grown products

- More local consumers buying local foods
- More local foods
- Food will be grown closer to where we live
- Value added businesses
- More value-added operations

#### **Land Use**

- Good farmland will remain in agricultural production (Sennett was specifically mentioned)
- Farmland will be protected from development

#### **Recognition and Support from General Public**

- There will be agriculture-related events and people learning about farming
- Better education and understanding of the farm community and benefit to the county

#### **Young Farmers**

- Young people will be attracted to farm and manage forests

#### **Comments regarding what WILL happen/IS happening**

- Old program: Ag District deterrent no longer there
- food from South America
- People in Skaneateles want it to look the same
- Up north is low development pressure. More people moving in who are not connected to agriculture, think homes are (?)
- Summerhill not getting developed. Taxes high → have to work land to make it pay, farm directly or rent it to a farmer.
- Need to have time to work the land. No time restrictions
- We're moving from dairy to grapes?
- Can be small
- more people want to be farm managers, not land owners
- main competition with ourselves
- \$10,000/acre recent sale in Geneva (?)
- Consolidated → fewer farms with lots of land.
- Less of middle size farmers, large farmers will decrease some.
- Surprised that # of farms is increasing
- part time, small farm
- feel # will go back down
- profit have increased, will go down
- Land that has not been farmed. And should not be farm used because cash crop and up. Fertilizer and seed prices will likely go up.
- Big farms not coming to county
- Prices will go down
- last 20% export crops commodities may drop
- Fewer middle age farmers

- Locally grown became of mad cow disease
- India only country that buys apples
- What does the world need that we can produce?
- Now –all time high – cash crops
- Unless you're going to inherit your farm, forget it.

## **BOCES in Auburn, November 13, 2013**

### **QUESTION 2: What needs and challenges do our farms and agricultural businesses face?**

#### **Summary:**

The costs associated with operating a farm are rising, including fuel, labor and complying with government regulations. Taxes are very expensive. Small and large farm operators are sometimes at odds, but they also need to work together in order to lobby their political leaders. Non-farmers are buying up land for development along Cayuga Lake. There is a need to educate the public on the importance of farms to our rural way of life and to the economy, both at the local and state levels. In general, the public does not understand that farming is a business. There is potential for local consumer demand, but locals need to understand the benefits and have better year round access. More services and support are needed, especially for smaller farms and niche producers. Agricultural businesses are getting squeezed by narrow profit margins and there is limited local access to some services and supplies, such as feed. Local roads experience a lot of wear and tear due to large farm equipment, which can be a burden for the towns. With improved technology and the increasingly sophisticated methods used in farming, farmers need more education to be successful. Current farmers are concerned that young people are less interested in farming, creating uncertainty for the future of current farm operations.

#### **Markets**

- Markets – getting products to right consumers
- Commodity vs. free market
- Is ethanol part of the solution? With current corn production, ethanol would be cheaper
- Increasing exports
- Technology may be driving production to the point of excess, resulting in lack of market
- Export market going down. Lack of regulations in other countries, wages overseas

#### **Natural Resources**

- Climate change
- Ag uses a lot of land
- Environmental side. Farmers have to make living but need to be good steward
- Protecting water
- Manure management

## **Costs**

- Costs of operation, fuel, labor, equipment
- Costs of operation (equipment and labor)
- Moving in direction of Pennsylvania: rising land values pushing out agriculture.

## **Farmer Collaboration and Conflict**

- farmers compete against farmers
- Small and larger farmers working together (lobbying – ex: farm bureau)
- there isn't enough land
- NEED: everyone to get along. Small and big. There is a division between big and small.

## **Regulation/ Taxes/ Neighbor Conflicts**

- High land taxes, especially school taxes
- Farmers have to keep record of fertilizer and spray timing, records are time consuming
- "Compliance." Used to be 100% in production now has to have compliance and keeping neighbor happy
- Taxes – current inflated prices
- Environmental regulations
- Tax structure – lowering exemptions
- Food safety, environmental regulations will increase
- Lots of property taxes
- Development along Cayuga Lake: People from Ithaca buying up, cheaper taxes, lake views.

## **Recognition and Support from General Public**

- Education of government and local and regional population
- people don't recognize it's a business
- Raise awareness – People need to understand that they're in an agricultural area (ex: moving large equipment, loading trucks, etc.)
- Lack of representation (of farmers) in legislature
- Educate/drive demand
- Connect local farmers to the (year round) market
- Need locally grown products

## **Services/Infrastructure**

- Service providers have low margins
- agricultural businesses need to diversify
- Big service, supply companies (?) went away. Everybody goes to Penn Yann for feed. Get a lot from Penn
- Services aren't there now for the small farmers (e.g. organic)
- Transportation, back roads can't handle the big equipment, it's a burden on the town to maintain the roads
- No university that supports small farmers

- Cornell and Coop Ext needs to provide information for small farmers, be more helpful
- Dept. of Agriculture basically non-existent
- Resources for small farms (capital, support services)
- Service providers harder to get – predators (?), labor

#### **Labor**

- Labor – willingness – limited amount to work in agriculture, non-glamorous. More labor required. Can't find qualified labor. Reliable, educated.
- Labor, if getting away from commodity grain. Immigration issue for fruit farmers
- Wages

#### **Young Farmers/ Education**

- Farming become more complicated -> need more education
- Transition to younger farmers, if younger generation doesn't want to farm, who is going to buy? Will the land go dormant?
- Encourage young population of farmers
- young people economically shut out of agriculture (can't afford land)

#### **Other Comments**

- Mennonites moving in but don't participate in economics of community, use marginal farmland
- Diversification

## **BOCES in Auburn, November 13, 2013**

### **QUESTION 3: What strengths and opportunities will sustain and grow our agricultural economy?**

#### **Summary:**

Local farmers are motivated and willing to take risks, such as with the SWCD manure digester. There is no end to the energy that young farmers bring to their operations. Cayuga County is in a good location in that it is close to major population centers, an ethanol plant, enjoys a good quality of life and experiences relatively low development pressure. The soils, water, and land are very good for farming. The weather is also good, so that irrigation is minimal and the extreme flooding and drought experienced in western states does not occur.

There are several opportunities to take advantage of. Beer, wine and spirits sales are increasing. There is increased consumer interest in local foods and niche products, and increased interest in niche farming. Value-added processing such as slaughterhouses and food packing could allow local producers better market access and to boost sales. The demand for organically produced foods continues to increase. There are many opportunities to educate school children and the general public, and to introduce young people to agriculture as a viable career option. These include: school gardens, school

fieldtrips to local farms, an agriculture curriculum at CCC, reestablishing FFA and FHA in some schools, supporting the Big Six, 4-H, and the Jr. Grangers, and sponsoring a county agriculture day.

## **Strengths**

### **People**

- Motivation of farmers and people
- Risk takers – Cayuga County methane digester
- Strength, opportunity in the youth
- No end to energy of young guys who come in. expanding.
- Energy of young people

### **Location**

- Proximity to population centers
- Population still located close to major markets
- 0 farms for sale in Cayuga County -> farmland so valuable. Especially from big dairies.
- Diverse markets
- Can't pick agricultural lands up and move
- Location to population (centrally located)
- Close by populations
- Good location to markets
- Geographic location
- Low impact from development pressure
- Low cost of living
- Good quality of life
- Ethanol plant nearby

### **Services**

- Local state database (?) of agricultural service providers
- Ag businesses
- Good service providers

### **Niche/ Specialty Crops**

- Wineries, distilleries growing hops
- Apples
- Dickman Farms
- Horticulture at BOCES
- Hops – breweries 20' tall poles
- Niche – organics
- Diverse foods

### **Community Recognition, Support, and Education**

- “Ox roast” at State Fair
- Leadership Cayuga (FFA and FHA gone)
- Chamber of Commerce + business community that recognizes value of agriculture
- Supportive business community. Chamber
- School has trips to see milking production
- Knowledge base and educational resources
- Math/agriculture connection

### **Natural Resources and Weather**

- Access to water, climate in general
- Very diverse (?) soils to support economy
- Still have land
- good soils throughout county
- Eco services
- Great farm land
- our weather (don’t need irrigation) for stable climate
- Water, soil, land
- Have great farmland
- Climate changes- swings in weather patterns
- Weather that does not include flooding as in west
- Western states – floods, etc. – corn hybrids, soybean hybrids
- Hospitable climate for agriculture
- Sheltered from natural disasters
- Greater production out of an acre

### **Existing Farms and Businesses**

- Diversity of farm types
- Agricultural business strong, but need to grow steadily
- Used to be places to buy bags of feed. Now all coop supplies and own equipment
- Sustainability is there
- Strength in staying in rotation. Not dependent on one crop. Improves soil quality
- Corporate farm -> efficiency + survival
- DIVERSITY of people-> all types of products. E.g. goats
- Small and large farms
- Diversity
- Local- regional farmers market
- Agri-tourism (specifically wineries)
- Milk/ yogurt big deal
- Yogurt- not a fad

### **Government and Regulation**

- State emphasis on farms and casinos
- Not more government involved

- Zoning
- Focus on higher development areas
- Farmland Protection Program
- Local FP program

## **Opportunities**

### **Demand for Niche, Specialty, Value-added Products**

- Wine, spirits, beer opportunity growing. BEER sales up, up, up.
- Opportunities for food-grade grain. NYC, Ithaca want local flour.
- Opportunity for slaughterhouses and food packing
- Demand for organic keeps growing, especially milk. 3-year straight-up for organic.
- Corn prices down. This will lead to other crops?
- Opportunities in organic milk market, organic turkey.
- Lots of interest from small-scale.
- Niche markets, wine beer, organic
- Wineries
- Growing hops, distillery
- Meat packing co-op

### **Human Resources**

- Strength, opportunity in the youth

### **Outreach and Education**

- Tours for schools – opportunities to educate people
- Education children – advocacy
- Bus trip to farm, agricultural museum
- School gardens
- Sponsor agriculture day in Cayuga County – by legislature
- County fair
- Big 6 at Emerson Park, animal showing, 4-H, Jr. Grangers: Need to find a way to support these

### **Services and Support**

- Need opportunities for transition of family farms
- Need significant tax incentives
- Exploring ways to purchase development rights. + working with town.
- Eco services business opportunity e.g. hold water

## BOCES in Auburn, November 13, 2013

### QUESTION 4: How can we ensure farmland is protected for future farmers?

#### Summary:

In order to protect farmland for future farmers, we need to keep farming profitable and ensure that adequate services, financing and education are available for farmers. Farmers can choose to sell their land only to others who will farm it, and not to developers. Support and recognition from local and state political representatives and the general public will also help ensure that farmland remains in production in the future, particularly educating people on the tax contributions that agricultural lands make while requiring minimal public services such as schools, police, and sewer. Town governments can help by enacting sound zoning laws and comprehensive plans. The county can help the towns by providing guidance and model laws. Continued use of right to farm laws and the agricultural districts may also help, as will a strong link to elected officials in Albany. Agricultural and environmental easements were also suggested, but some farmers do not like the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program.

#### Profitable Farming, Market Forces

- Profitable and sustainable agriculture
- Keep farming profitable
- Land values triple in past decade
- High price of farm equipment
- Good stable markets and local infrastructure

#### Farmer Access to Services, Resources, Education

- Estate planning
- Tax education
- Erosion – cover crops – proving to public we are good stewards of land
- Technology (e.g., feeds, fertilizer) increases efficiency, especially big farmers
- Need resources and education
- Education, financing to get young people capable.
- Only one bank now (Farm Credit) need more banking opportunity (more financing opportunities) local banks won't even look at you.
- Financial help for new farmers to
- Greater support for niche (?) farmers (capital investment/ tax incentives)
- Young farmers need to get capitalized
- Organic farming – mentorship program.
- Make sure there are future farmers
- Young farmers program (mentorship)
- CCC should offer Agriculture course

#### Farmer Choice

- Don't sell land to develop
- Don't sell land except to be used in agriculture.

### **Public Recognition, Support, and Education**

- Educate local politicians
- Need people who aren't farmers to want to buy local food
- Educate people on taxes – farmers pay taxes (get fewest services)
- Ag pays for services but get no services. Businesses pay for services taxed. Residential – don't pay for services – costs the most in taxes.

### **Easements, Development Rights**

- Ag easements
- Environmental easements
- A lot of farmers don't like Farm Preservation Program (PDR)
- Advertisements – attorneys specialize in extracting people from farm easements.

### **Zoning, Planning, Right to Farm**

- Zoning – keeping good land open for agriculture. Guidance to towns
- Good zoning
- Suggest zoning models to towns to protect agriculture
- Comprehensive plans that identify agriculture as priority
- Right to farm
- Continued use of agricultural districts

### **Role of Government (Other)**

- No agreement on farm protection bills – no tax payers supporting farmers that way. Promote agricultural exemptions
- Need strong link in elected officials in Albany
- Not opposed to protection
- Tax incentives – federal, state, local
- Stable tax structure
- Restrict development rights if possible eminent domain

## **Moravia High School November 14, 2013**

### **QUESTION 1: What should our county agriculture and related businesses look like in the next 20 years?**

#### **Summary:**

Farms will remain economically viable and profitable and will follow market trends. Agriculture will look much the same as it does now, but with increased efficiencies by adopting technology. The high

demand for land in especially the south west area of the county will continue. There will be a diversity of farm sizes and types of farms such as dairy, wineries and specialty crops. These different farm types will complement each other. Young people will have educational opportunities and will be able to get farming experience through the larger farms. Small farms will have access to adequate support and resources to be successful. The needs of both the farming and the non-farming community will be met.

### **Farm and Farmland Viability**

- We would like farms to continue to be profitable
- Economically profitable
- Follow market needs/trends
- Private property – farmers can do what they want to
- Much like today but technology might change
- Maximized yields
- Things have stabilized
- Like to see farmland protected - confer well (?)
- If the county could hold land for future farmers instead of adding to the base
- Produce will still require employees (?)
- Amish communities must abide by same regulations
- Land will continue to be held for farming – there is not a lot of development pressure in farm areas for anything other than farming
- Technology may help keep yields up.

### **Farm Size**

- Small farms need the help; the large farms are doing fine Less farmers but bigger farms
- Cap growth of large farms
- We would rather see more farmers rather less farmers (Summerhill)

### **Role of Farms in the Community**

- Farms, especially the large farms, should do more to involve the community in their plans and in their work – there should be more communication about what is going on with the larger farms

### **Young Farmers**

- There's opportunities for young farmers to work on one of the corporate farms. Tenant farming may be the future for starting farmers.
- Education for young people (boys) and we should encourage them to stay in school before they go into farming
- The High Schools should have a farm curriculum

### **Diversity and Local Food**

- Cayuga County should be able to sustain its communities through Cayuga County agriculture
- Like specialized/organic products, diverse farms
- In the future, the large farms will continue to grow – but we also think the smaller, diversified or specialty, farms will grow as well – these two types of farms in the County can complement each other

- Recognize value of diverse land and use
- More vineyards, specialty operations, will look pretty much like it does now.
- Consolidation of family corporate farms but also more specialty crops
- Predominantly dairy farms
- Complimentary efforts that fill the gaps

#### **Comments regarding what WILL happen/ IS happening**

- Parcels (?) and farms that are here now will still be here because family farms have already transitioned to corporations
- Less road side stands in the southern region. Not sure if roadside stands will survive. Not enough non-local traffic for real rural stands.
- Consolidate – 1 dairy in a town
- Property ownership
- Less farmers -> larger farms
- Woodlands could be converted

#### **Other Comments**

- Small farms need the help; the large farms are doing fine
- Concerns about government regulation market will drive the need
- Still a lot of land not in production
- Rural non-farm community's needs are important. Balance between farmers and non-farming residents for example, manure smell.
- The community needs to balance its support of farming with support of non-farming interests
- Maybe there will be better jobs but they will be more factory-like (?)
- Wouldn't it be nice if county could hold some agricultural land for incubator? Response: don't want government in the land business.
- Crime we hire so much foreign labor. Mostly dairy farming.
- We have great land so the large farms ain't going to give it up
- How many of the farmers (big and specialty) will still have outside income outside the farm business?
- May need it in future when food isn't so cheap from other countries

### **Moravia High School November 14, 2013**

#### **QUESTION 2: What needs and challenges do our farms and agricultural businesses face?**

##### **Summary:**

Land prices are increasing, as are the costs of fuel, fertilizer and other inputs. There is a shortage of reliable, skilled labor. More economic activity and other industries need to come into the county, which would create more local consumers and increase local demand for specialty crops. More small farms and a greater diversity of farms are needed to create demand for more agricultural support services and

a more diverse rural economy. There needs to be more market demand for specialty crops. It is difficult for new farmers to access land due to high prices. School programs need to create an interest in young people for farming. Some meeting attendees felt that environmental and CAFO regulations drain farmer resources. Others felt that farms should be regulated judiciously to minimize environmental impacts and produce healthy foods. In towns with a lot of land in production, the agricultural exemption is less effective because taxes still need to be levied in order to meet expenses. Development impacts need to be monitored to minimize impacts. Manure management is a challenge. There needs to be a balance between maintaining clean water and air, and farmers' need to use natural resources. Large farm equipment damages the roads and muddies them. Conflicts between farms and neighboring residences are rising, especially as farms get larger. Negative impacts on residences include low residential land prices. The number and diversity of support businesses have declined; some have moved up north for logistical reasons. Access to financing and the ability to maintain capital are both challenges. It can be difficult to find workers with experience using new technologies.

### **Costs**

- Fuel costs high, fertilizer – have to go further
- Land prices
- The high cost of fuel and other agricultural inputs

### **Labor**

- Farms have become bigger due to fixed cost of – bigger is more profitable – labor
- Dairy farmers using foreign migrant labor that speak Spanish but they don't communicate well – not a lot of volunteers willing to help – literacy volunteers needed to teach English
- There is less access to a reliable and ready farm labor force

### **Economic Trends, Market Forces**

- Milk will travel – need to be competitive with other areas – all need to be in balance
- Need increased processing capability
- Need more industry to bring more money -> more food consumers to help sustain and grow diversity of agriculture.
- Bring other business to county to support non-agricultural businesses
- Finger Lakes generate enormous tourism and taxes going up is hurting locals
- We need more community businesses growing out of the farm economy – this does not seem to be the case. There was discussion that in the past the number and diversity of small farms helped to create a more diverse and distributed rural economy and related business supports.
- GMO vs. Natural Food is a future challenge – but may also be an opportunity
- Worried about impact on communities – no local business – population declining/ school

### **Diversity**

- There needs to be more diversity in our farms
- Need diverse markets
- Need growth of diverse markets

### **Young Farmers**

- Need school programs that interest the students
- Knowledge of new farmers is a challenge
- The significant increase in the value of farmland and related challenges for new farmers looking to get into farming facing significant costs to get into farming

### **Role of Government/ Regulation/ Taxes**

- Taxes – property taxes. In towns with all or mostly agriculture, the exemption is diluted because the town still needs to levy money. Property taxes and the impact of farm assessments on local government resources.
- Too many government regulations - same paperwork for big and small operations
- Gentrification and urbanization should be watched to limit impacts on farm lands
- Look at farm regulations judiciously to promote the farming of wholesome, healthy food
- Every farm – certified CAFO – renewed (?) yearly
- CAFO reviews are necessary and we need more (better) oversight to see that the rules are being followed and implemented.
- Environmental restrictions
- Biggest challenges come from Albany. State doesn't understand local conditions
- Pros and Cons of farmland protection: property rights being challenged by PDR. We need to balance protection of property rights (right to sell or subdivide) vs. protection of farmland.

### **Natural Resources**

- Need more stringent environmental regulations. As different techniques creates more yield, there are equal issues with run off, muddy roads.
- Getting rid of manure is a challenge, come a long way.
- Clean water versus clean air versus farm resource needs. Balancing clean water and air w/ farm needs to utilize and/or impact these resources.
- Source of water
- Weather unpredictability
- Large farms draw our resources down – water, pollution

### **Neighbor Conflicts**

- Farm - neighbor conflicts – property values/ smell, noise
- Farm-Neighbor challenges will continue to grow – especially as farms grow larger. There is some discussion that residential property values are negatively impacted by large farming operations proximate to other uses

### **Farmer Access to Resources**

- Support business needs – farm machine dealerships, used to be between the Finger Lakes, now all moved up north because of logistics. Lakes protect from develop but farms are further from services.
- There is less competition among suppliers
- Finding an agriculture friendly bank/ financing
- Maintaining capital is a challenge
- Workers (?) are needed with this new technological knowledge that requires college

- Reduced access to supplies and suppliers. These have consolidated and costs have risen – including the cost to access these supplies
- 

### **Infrastructure**

- Infrastructure - internet
- Traffic is creating problems – they use more resources (roads, water), rough on the roads.
- Big equipment affect roads – big scale of everything
- Scale of farms and farm equipment have created a physical burden on our infrastructure – especially the increase in farm and truck traffic on our non-commercial rural roads (both in terms of wear and delays/safety)

## **Moravia High School November 14, 2013**

### **QUESTION 3: What strengths and opportunities will sustain and grow our agricultural economy?**

#### **Summary:**

Cayuga County is geographically sheltered and has low population pressures. It is close to ethanol plants and Cornell University, which supports agri-businesses and innovative farmers. Out-of-state people bring new strengths and resources. Natural resources such as the soil and water are assets. The community college is a strength for young people interested in getting an affordable education, but more educational opportunities are needed. Local governments do a good job with planning and have proactive planning boards. There are job opportunities on larger farms and our farms enjoy a good reputation. The yogurt boom, artisanal cheeses, and other local food tourism trails create new opportunities. Collaborations and cooperation among farmers can create new opportunities. Farming entrepreneurship should be encouraged. There are many opportunities for promoting locally grown foods and for expanding the local food and specialty crop markets; particularly hops, alpaca, and organically grown goods.

#### **Strengths**

##### **Location**

- Lack population growth
- Geographically sheltered
- Proximity to ethanol plants
- Proximity to Cornell University to support agri-business and can take advantage of the knowledge, serve the most innovative farmers
- We have good port access for agricultural commodities through the Port of Oswego
- Location between lakes protects from growth
- Less development pressure
- Educationally competitive
- Out-of-state people bring in new strengths and resources.

## **Natural Resources and Weather**

- Great land resource
- Water resources
- Water, rain and lakes
- Soils
- Nature of the land in south west part of the county
- Clean fresh water here helps promote growth – keep it protected from some industries other than farming
- We have good soils and abundant, clean water in the County; we need to put protections in place to keep them good and abundant.

## **Farmer Resources**

- The proximity and influence of Cornell University and their research and agricultural programs are important assets
- Grants

## **Young Farmer Support and Education**

- Educational opportunities – CCC is a strength. Supports further education because smaller schools can't offer the opportunities. We need to maintain and improve it is a "next step" for many of our young people who cannot afford to go away to a larger, 4-year college. It is a valuable resource.
- It's a challenge for students to learn about all aspects of agriculture, as such technology, equipment, supply, etc. FFA encourages students to study and go to college.
- Schools are loaded down with educational requirements so they do not have a lot of time for teaching agricultural education.
- We need to have young people learn and understand the changing technological nature of current farm practices and operations and we need to work to define a pathway with FFA on one end of the spectrum with college on the other end with K-12 education opportunities and programs aligned with the new technical needs of farming.
- We hope that BOCES can establish an ag-tech program
- Kids visit farms to see what opportunities might be.

## **Government Leadership**

- Good local planning (proactive). We generally have good local planning and proactive planning boards.

## **Existing Farms and Market Trends**

- Corporate Farms: Are they – or aren't they – better positioned to manage volatile market changes?
- Job opportunities on larger farmers. There are job opportunities associated with the growth of farming
- Cheese artisans – local tour trail
- Yogurt boom
- Ag tourism w/ some diversity of farm types

- There are good and bad – assets and liabilities, associated with Ag-Tourism. The good is bringing more money and people to the area; the bad being liability (?)
- Good reputation
- Out-of-state people who own property here compromised by heavy industry – factory farming, industrial – anything that destroys the rural environment.
- Tourism is a strength

### **People**

- Individuals who have different way of farming organic, traditional, etc.

### **Opportunities**

#### **Farmer Collaborations**

- The banding together of local agricultural groups (Cayuga Marketing was mentioned) creates opportunities and strengths. We should encourage like-minded individuals and businesses engaged in agriculture to look for similar opportunities and strength in numbers

#### **Outreach and Marketing**

- We need to brand or market our locally grown food assets (the Cheese Trail and other “food artisans” were mentioned)
- Increased awareness of the quality of food and where it comes from – we need to open the market for local, small farm foods
- Awareness of quality of food – and where food comes from
- Promote USA food – pricing of food costly for good food and some local foods
- Consumer awareness of locally grown food – push it, advertise it
- Market milk locally
- Movement to support locally grown products- hops for micro-breweries
- Marketing locally from own produce stands
- Farmers market

### **Employment**

- Employment – milk plant behind BOCES

### **Stewardship**

- Can water be recycled in farms?
- Preservation of hedgerows and natural barriers to wind erosion and spreading of farm run-off into our lakes

### **Entrepreneurship**

- Opportunities for more support businesses to locate here
- We need to encourage entrepreneurial farm operations
- CSA should be expanded

- The growth of, and demand for, locally grown products and farm-to-table focus can be seen as an opportunity for growth of small and diverse farms in the county
- Encourage entrepreneurs – by financing
- Increase of growing markets, like hops, alpaca wool, organic – Ithaca

#### **Other**

- Property land values – very high – hinders non farmers from buying land.
- Use proceeds from grants to support community if required
- We need our leaders to work on developing non-agricultural business and industry to create more local jobs and general new wealth so that we can have more growth of communities that will in turn support smaller, niche farms and related businesses

## **Moravia High School November 14, 2013**

### **QUESTION 4: How can we ensure farmland is protected for future farmers?**

#### **Summary:**

Farmland can be protected for future farmers by creating a farm-first, farm-friendly community and by being good stewards of the land. Increasing awareness by non-farmers of the importance of farming can also help. It is important to attract young people to farming and to protect the natural resources, such as topsoil and clean water, which are essential to sustain farming. Landowners can ensure their land is protected through deed restrictions or by selling to someone who will take care of the land. Some meeting attendees spoke in favor of easements and purchasing development rights, but others felt that selling development rights should not be in perpetuity while others were concerned about fraud related to the sales of development rights once they are controlled by a land trust. Other ideas included proper zoning and smart growth techniques to encourage growth in appropriate areas, away from farmland, but some meeting attendees felt that there should be no zoning at all and less regulation in general. Carefully planning out water lines and other public infrastructure was also suggested, although there were mixed opinions about the state's restrictions on lateral water lines. There was a sense that grants tend to mostly favor the larger farms without helping the smaller ones. Meeting attendees also questioned whether farmland protection was really needed in the southern portion of the county, since the farmland did not seem to be in danger. Do we need to allocate resources to address a problem that isn't an issue?

#### **Public Recognition, Support, and Education**

- Getting non-farmers to understand the importance of successful farms
- We need to maintain a farm first friendly culture and be an agriculture-friendly community.
- Supporting local agricultural businesses

#### **Young Farmer Cultivation**

- Protect and promote the interest in farming so next generations stay involved in farming
- Create future farmers – FFA – seems like not much of an incentive to farm – expensive
- Attract people who want to farm

- We need to create and encourage future farmers so they will want to work with the land we are protecting

### **Farmer Choice**

- Improving land from how you found it even as operations grow because need to protect investment: adequate drainage (artificial), fertility of soil, it's costly to maintain land for continued use w/o depleting the soil and resources.
- If we do sell our resources, ensure those they are sold to do right by the seller
- Use of deed restrictions may be better way to protect land

### **Protection of Natural Resources**

- Protect top soil
- Phosphorus/nitrogen – limits nutrient cycle
- Soil and water assessment and see how to improve land qualities
- We need to protect topsoil and expand best practices to manage and reduce topsoil loss and reduce impacts from agricultural run-off. We need to find ways to provide access and education to farms about these best practices. Discussion continued to look at CC Soil & Water Conservation District programs and grants. Some in the group felt that the “rich” farms are the only ones that can access grants and that it is a shame that we have to offer grants at all to encourage farming or best farm practices.

### **Farmland Protection Isn't a Concern**

- Maybe we don't need to focus on protecting this part of the county because it is best used for farming
- Question – is protecting our farmland really an issue? Do we really need to allocate resources to the preservation of farmland if it is not an issue?

### **Easements, Development Rights**

- Purchase developmental rights (independent group/ municipalities/county)
- Conservation easements
- Land trust – preventing fraud! Not saving land but selling the property rights against the wishes of the trust.
- Selling of development rights should not be in perpetuity
- Selling development rights or forever farming concepts (PDR)

### **Zoning, Planning, Right to Farm**

- Building lots not being put on farms
- It is good to have zoning against sprawl
- Zoning regulations
- Local governments should consider Smart Growth as part of their comprehensive plans. This could build in protections of agricultural land areas, and encourage growth in appropriate areas that does not negatively impact active farm lands. This was debated at the table, where others advocated limiting regulation in favor of individual property rights.
- Ensure that the extension of water and sewer lines – public utilities, in the farm land areas is carefully thought out and monitored. A discussion of how these were funded ensued and the

requirement by Ag & Markets to establish lateral restrictions for any use other than agriculture was discussed (with mixed feelings).

- Solid implementation of the farmland protection plan
- Less zoning, “we don’t need zoning in the country”
- Zoning is the next defense against urban sprawl, industrialization. Rural areas cannot be protected without zoning

#### **Role of Government (Other)**

- Grants favor large farms over smaller farms
- No tariffs on food stuff – political price (?)
- We need to provide or maintain (better) enforcement of regulations that are in place to protect our land resources – we need to make sure there is oversight of this function.
- Less regulation in general
- To allow land owners to sell their resource – source of capital to sustain farm
- Freedom versus regulation – we shouldn’t try to over-regulate land use

#### **Other Comments:**

- What is our GOAL? Some were not really sure.
- There should be a balance between protection of farms and farmland operations with protection of our beloved rural communities (an increase in land values associated with the expansion of large farms was seen as a threat to the stability and growth of these communities)
- Discussions ensued about freedom vs. regulations
- Is global warming an issue? Not sure if it is an issue.

### **Cato-Meridian Central School November 19, 2013**

#### **QUESTION 1: What should our county agriculture and related businesses look like in the next 20 years?**

##### **Summary:**

New technologies in dairy will increase efficiencies. Renewable energy sources will become more important and animals and crops will continue to be bred to increase yields. We will entice people to live mostly in cities and build houses in such a way as to keep farmland in production rather than building double-wides or houses on large farm parcels. There will be non-government support in getting young people started in farming, and increased visibility of agri-tourism by increasing signage. There will be a variety in the scale of farming and in the products created. In particular, the northern part of the county will be able to support small diverse commodity production.

Current and expected trends were also discussed. The Mennonite population in the northern part of the county is increasing, and along with grain producers, are increasing the demand for farmland. Farmers are investing more money to develop their land for production. Participants also noted that there is minimal development pressures in Montezuma and Scipio.

### **Innovation, technology, efficiency**

- Robotics play a bigger/major role
- Animals and crops will be more efficient – yields can't possibly go down
- Moving to renewable energy. You can see the shift in the cities in the next few decades.
- New technology

### **Recognition and Support from General Public**

- More signage toward agri-tourism
- More non-governmental support in getting young people started

### **Markets**

- Variation of scale and products
- Northern part of the county will be able to support small diverse commodities
- Agri-tourism is increasingly important

### **Land Use, Housing**

- Entice more people to stay in cities
- Housing market rebounds
- no doublewide or house in the middle of farmland
- there will be room for houses but not on farmland
- plan for building areas only

### **Farm Viability**

- Already headed in the right direction. Looks like it will look in 20 years, as long as profit margins can be maintained.
- Agricultural financing – change?
- Natural resources are available in the county to meet demands of the growth of the agricultural industry

### **Comments regarding what WILL happen/IS happening**

- Significantly more Mennonite families in the area
- "You're not going to recognize it"
- Bigger farms and bigger fields
- "Very competitive"
- Help them be a place for small farms so people will remember when it started (?)
- Farm income should go up
- Fewer cattle, nobody wants to feed over winter
- Odor issue will get more complicated
- Everything is more scientific. More specialty and more encouragement (?) or a way to get younger people involved
- Right direction – profit margin
- More Mennonites and Amish farm year to year

- New rusts (?) will continue
- More houses (laughter) in certain areas
- There are no development pressures in Montezuma, Scipio
- People are spending more money to develop land for production
- Farmers are not going to compete against state land base
- Newly mandated wages are worth paying to workers if they are highly skilled.
- What will happen when grain prices tank in 2014?
- 20 years from now the farmers will be older
- 20 years from now, will agriculture be able to compete against the developers?
- Why can't we entice more people to stay in the urban areas?
- Cayuga County has been recognized as a choice location for dairy farming

## **Cato-Meridian Central School November 19, 2013**

### **QUESTION 2: What needs and challenges do our farms and agricultural businesses face?**

#### **Summary:**

Production costs, availability of a quality labor force, fuel costs, school taxes, and the price of land are all challenges for farmers. Pests such as fruit flies create a challenge, as does climate change, and development pressures. There is a need to educate the public about agriculture's importance, and that it is a business rather than an occupation. Agri-tourism can play a role in educating the public. Neighbor conflicts and nuisance complaints over noise, odors, and spraying are also a challenge. Farmers must compete with big box retailers to capture consumers, and need to develop new markets for goods other than grain and dairy. Farmers need better access to services and supplies such as quality equipment, financial services and grain mills. Farmers also need better access to mentors and need less government regulation and more public outreach and education about farming by the county planning and tourism offices.

#### **Costs**

- Lack of available labor force
- Qualified labor at affordable rates
- Labor force: consistent, trained, reliable, willing
- Keeping up with technology
- Labor issues
- Rising production cost
- School taxes
- Fuel costs
- Prices of land in comparison to the rest of the country
- There need to be more profitable farms

#### **Natural Resources**

- Climate change is changing our crops
- Pests – fruit fly – will change need
- Land availability
- Weather issues
- Development pressure
- Northern pressures are going to be from Mennonite/Amish and some grain producers
- Weather patterns are going to kill debt carriers

### **Recognition and Support from General Public**

- People don't understand farming
- Farmers need good farmer and non-farmer rapport
- Neighbors against farmers: noise, smells, spraying. Homes too close
- Standards in relation to population
- Public education
- Public needs to understand this is viable and important
- Public needs to see farming as a business, not an occupation
- Public needs to understand – agri-tourism more important

### **Markets**

- Box store bigger store competing with local groceries with sale of imported crops
- New markets are required – think stepping out of the box to develop markets for new crops besides grains and dairy
- Production needed to increase to feed population by 2050
- Signage – poor for agri-tourism – off thruway exit 40
- Consumers – it's difficult competing against the big guys

### **Farmer Access to Resources**

- Financial challenges, interest rates will increase
- Insurance
- Keeping up with technology
- Grain mills gone – need to go further away to sell product
- Need more access to funding
- Inferior products, equipment, service providers
- alternative fuels
- Medium/small farms are going to be kicked out because the large “guy”/farm will keep eating up the land base

### **Farmer Education**

- Educate producers to present an acceptable product – professionalism/appearance
- Need more education programs for farm management (?)
- Mentoring for young people, mitigating risk for mentors
- Qualified labor – less school programs
- Farming education to be attractive and sexy

- How do you keep kids on the farm? Western New York has high school agriculture programs – FFA

### **Role of Government/ Regulation/ Taxes**

- Are labor laws holding back hiring of younger workers?
- Regulations – GAP program – small farms
- Government regulations
- County planning and county tourism to do public education
- Individual towns need to plan ahead, “be ahead of the game”

## **Cato-Meridian Central School November 19, 2013**

### **QUESTION 3: What strengths and opportunities will sustain and grow our agricultural economy?**

#### **Summary:**

County farmers enjoy good water, soils and climate. Agricultural land is relatively inexpensive. Farmers are able to rent land from non-farmers. Especially in the northern portion of the county, farmers have good access to transportation resources such as the Port of Oswego, the Thruway, and an improved rail system. There are regional markets available to sell produce, and the county is close to New York City and other major population centers. The agri-tourism industry is growing. There is great demand for organically grown products, and for Cayuga County products in general. The county has a strong agricultural base and skilled operators. A diversity of commodities helps sustain the economy during ebbs and flows. Our farmers are resilient and independent, but also work together in cooperatives and collective initiatives.

There are several opportunities available to farmers. The world’s population is increasing, creating a demand for more food. New products can be created and new markets accessed. The interest in local food and our proximity to urban centers presents many opportunities for local marketing and niche products. There is also opportunity to improve infrastructure such as internet access, provide trainings such as webinars, and promote farming to the general public.

#### **Strengths**

##### **Natural Resources, Infrastructure**

- Good water, climate, and soil
- Natural resources
- Agricultural land is fairly inexpensive in this area
- Ability of farmers to lease land from non-farming property owners
- Roads infrastructure water grid
- Water

- Good land
- Decent weather
- Water availability
- State to state – sprays on produce
- Better seeds, biodegradable sprays

### **Transportation/ Market Access**

- Port of Oswego, improved rail system
- Proximity to transportation
- Thru-way close – to move products
- Regional markets to sell produce
- We are close to larger cities to move our products
- Proximity to New York City
- Support. we have close trucking companies to help move agricultural products
- Tourism, growth in agri-tourism

### **Market Demand**

- High demand for organically produced goods
- Market for product

### **Existing Farming Assets**

- Good skilled operators
- Strong agricultural base
- Location, location (proximity to trade shows: NY Farm Show at State Fairground, Empire Farm Days)
- Established farms
- County embraces agricultural nature
- Ag-related higher education
- Cayuga County programs that promote farm markets
- Cap on tax increase
- Diversity
- Diversity of commodity should help to stimulate and help sustain the ebbs and flows
- Always have some “sort” of crop

### **Quality of Life**

- Good schools

### **People**

- “Been kicked around” but still fighting ->resilient
- Co-farmer collective initiatives or multiple farm. fruit industries started, dairies are now doing it ->the ability to control more exposure
- Farmers have their own way of doing things, but have common goals

## **Opportunities**

### **Technology and Farmer Resources**

- Hydroponic growing and technology are going to replace methods.
- Fruit/vegetable trade show in January in Syracuse
- Affordable internet access (infrastructure)
- Reinvestments in manufacturing: CMI, Fulton ethanol plant

### **Entrepreneurship**

- Creation of new product lines
- Develop appropriate products
- World population is increasing
- Younger people may enjoy working for self- not factory
- Opportunity to transition existing farms to an interested farm
- Ability to grow (?)

### **Outreach and Marketing**

- Local marketing/niche
- Promote/educate the value of the agricultural resources that are here, to foster understanding
- Good schools – foster understanding
- Close to urban markets
- 50 mile rule

### **Education and Young Farmer Support**

- The county could help with wages if the farms hire younger inexperienced workers/tax incentives?
- Webinar programs – training, new and old ideas
- Increased age “wisdom” of farmers in county for young farmers

## Cato-Meridian Central School November 19, 2013

### QUESTION 4: How can we ensure farmland is protected for future farmers?

#### Summary:

In order to protect farmland for future farmers, owners of agricultural land need to continue to own it and not “sell out.” Deed restrictions could be used to require that land is not developed. Farmer accountability and involvement, and passion to make farming work will also protect farmland. Adjusting to change and embracing innovations and new technologies will keep farming viable. We need to get young people interested and keep them interested in farming. Educating the public about the importance of farming is also important, as is high-visibility programs such as a Dairy Princess, nutrition programs, farm to table, and farm to school. Good town planning should be in place that prevents houses from being built on fields. The agricultural districts should be preserved. Civic involvement by farmers and bigger agricultural exemptions based on soil type could also help.

#### Profitable Farming, Market Forces

- Traceability on a limited basis will help develop pride in the consumer
- Make farmland more valuable for farming than for development
- High commodity prices

#### Farmer Choice

- Own it
- Passion to maintain what is there
- Don't sell out
- Deeded – agricultural land protection, not including water rights or natural gas
- Passion to make farming work
- Passion for change
- Embrace innovations
- ACCOUNTABILITY & INVOLVEMENT

#### Farmer Access to Services, Resources, Education

- Education – farmers need to be business people, embrace new technology
- Education about new laws
- Education on the cost to planting in relation to market prices (profit/loss ratio (margin))
- Keep young people interested
- Get young people interested

#### Public Recognition, Support, and Education

- Advertise the importance of farming and where food comes from. And it is a big deal.
- Communication with your customers, neighbors, and leasers
- General public education – best use of land
- Getting in touch with the 98% of non-farming public to educate the public.

- Relations with the agricultural community. Network: Dairy princess, nutrition programs, farm to table, farm to school

### **Zoning, Planning, Right to Farm**

- No homes in large farmland areas
- Possible zoning changes
- Zoning laws/fees/good planning
- Strong agricultural districts
- Plan ahead, get it in place and keep it enforced
- Development plan – encourage more homes built in an area together
- Preserve the agricultural districts

### **Role of Government (Other)**

- Ag exemptions 5 year plan
- Tax incentives to encourage farmers to stay in agriculture
- Bigger agricultural exemptions based on soil type of property
- Keep gas prices real
- Government support: who do you vote for, who do you advocate to
- Legislation – loop holes
- Be more involved in boards, municipalities, and agricultural agencies

### **Other comments**

- Buckshot