

4-Town Comprehensive Plan



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AGRICULTURE

Town of Amboy, Oswego County, NY – Comprehensive Plan 10/27/03 AGRICULTURE AND WORKING LANDS

Productive farm and forest lands are important and valuable economic and cultural assets, which must be managed wisely.

Potential Threats to Agriculture in the Town of Amboy

Nonfarm uses mixed into agricultural area may be a problem, particularly when they are residential in nature. Agriculture is an industry. It involves many activities which may be incompatible with residential living such as irregular hours of operation, the use of heavy machinery, the spraying of chemicals, the spreading of manure--unpleasant noise, lights, and smells. Urban and suburban residents often move to rural areas for open space, peace, and quiet, then complain about the industrial aspects of agriculture. Residents often become antagonists to agricultural operations, advocating interference with, and limitations on agriculture operations making coexistence difficult.

There is evidence of a general decline in the efficiency of farm operations when nonfarm dwellings become too prevalent. Nonfarm land uses scattered throughout farming areas make it less economical to operate farms. At some point, farms are driven out of operation by the difficulties of competing with nonfarm uses. Studies have indicated that between 2 and 2.5 nonfarm dwellings per 100 acres of farmland can make agricultural operation too difficult to conduct.

Means of Protecting and Preserving Agriculture

There are several means of preserving and protecting agriculture. Most of these means may only be initiated through local action. As New York State has an agricultural protection program initiated through the counties, this will be discussed as well. New York State, through the Department of Agriculture and Markets, has established "agricultural districts" for the protection of farmlands. Several properties in the central part of the town are included in Oswego County Agricultural District #_. These districts are designed to protect agriculture from the following threats 1) over restrictive zoning, 2) excessive real property taxation assessments, 3) ad valorem assessments for special improvements, 4) the exercise of eminent domain, and 5) certain policies of State agencies. It is not believed that any of these threats exist at present in the town, but such protection has been afforded to most agricultural operations in the town. There are other techniques which afford some protection to farmers from excessive land taxation. One such technique is to voluntarily convey conservation easements to another entity such as a local government or a nonprofit organization pursuant to the New York Environmental Conservation Law. Similar to this are purchase of development rights (PDR), lease of development rights (LDR), and transfer of development rights (TDR) schemes. With such schemes, a farmer will relinquish some or all of his development rights, usually on a voluntary basis. In return, the farmer is financially reimbursed for his loss of development rights in some manner, and his land assessment is reduced to reflect the reduced value of his property. These schemes are all designed to remove development rights from selected farmlands and thus afford their preservation as viable agricultural operations.

Analysis of Farmland Protection Schemes

The loss of farmlands to development in this region has been characterized mainly by small, incremental development decisions being made by farmers to subdivide small parcels over long periods of time. Much of the farmland that has been abandoned has not been developed, but has reverted to succession growth. Therefore, development pressures are not a major factor in agricultural loss in this region. The general health of the dairy farming industry appears to be the primary factor in farmland loss.

Agricultural Protection in Amboy

A balanced approach to agricultural protection would seem to be appropriate in the Town of Amboy. There is recognition that agriculture may be increasingly less economically viable in the future. The trend towards the abandonment of farms and the decline of the farm economy will most likely continue, although at an unknown rate. This may eventually lead to significant loss of agricultural support infrastructure, which in turn will lead to an acceleration of the decline in agriculture. Agriculture may not decline, however. In hopes that economic conditions may change in favor of this region, it would be prudent to secure some degree of viable agricultural lands for future production.

Agriculture and Working Lands

11. Nonfarm intrusions into agricultural areas should be minimized, thus decreasing conflicts with existing agricultural operations.
12. Agricultural support uses should be allowed in close proximity to primary agricultural areas.

Town/Village of Lowville – Comp Plan 2005 Agricultural Lands

In 2005, there were over 60 active farms in the Town of Lowville. These farms together gross approximately \$15-16 million a year. Productive farmlands are important and valuable economic and cultural assets and should be preserved. New York State, through the Department of Agriculture and Markets, has established “agricultural districts” for the protection of farmlands. There are five agricultural districts in Lewis County. Nearly the entire Town of Lowville lies in two such districts with the exception of some lands on State Route 12, west of the Village. These districts are designed to protect agriculture from the following threats 1) over restrictive zoning, 2) excessive real property taxation assessments, 3) ad valorem assessments for special improvements, 4) the exercise of eminent domain, and 5) certain policies of State agencies.

Lewis County has adopted an Agriculture Enhancement Plan which states that...

There are other techniques which afford some protection to farmers from excessive land taxation. One such technique is the voluntarily conveyance of conservation easements to another entity such as a local government or a nonprofit organization pursuant to the New York Environmental Conservation Law. Similar to this are purchase of development rights (PDR), lease of development rights (LDR), and transfer of development rights (TDR) schemes. With such schemes, a farmer will relinquish some or all of his development rights, usually on a voluntary basis. In return, the farmer is financially reimbursed for his loss of development rights in some manner, and his land assessment is reduced to reflect the reduced value of his property. These schemes are all designed to remove development rights from selected farmlands and thus afford their preservation as viable agricultural operations.

AGRICULTURE

The Importance of Agriculture to Lowville

Agriculture is of fundamental importance to the economy of both Lowville and the region. It is important not just for the farm jobs that are created, but also for the agri-business which supports farm operations. Lowville is made up of large amounts of prime agricultural lands, most of which are still in production. This natural resource is an important and valuable economic asset, which must be managed wisely.

Agriculture is important for non-economic reasons as well. The culture of Lowville and the region is agriculturally oriented. Agriculture is responsible for the rural atmosphere that residents feel is important. This atmosphere is largely defined by rural landscapes composed of open space, farm fields and pastures, farm buildings and outbuildings, and rural lifestyles.

Potential Threats to Agriculture in the Town of Lowville

There are several potential threats to agriculture in the Town of Lowville. These include 1) the loss of agricultural lands through development, 2) the intrusion of non-farm uses into agricultural areas making agricultural operations less efficient and economical, 3) the loss of farm support businesses through a general agricultural decline in the region, 4) economic impacts which reduce the profit of agricultural

operations, and 5) a relatively non-diversified property tax base which depends heavily upon the agricultural sector.

Agriculture has been in decline in the region for many years. However, these declines have not been attributed to development pressures. They have been caused by increased family costs such as health insurance and social security taxes and economic changes in the agricultural industry which have made dairy farming, the primary component of local agriculture, less profitable.

Nonfarm uses mixed into agricultural areas may be a problem, particularly when they are residential in nature. Agriculture is an industry. It involves many activities which may be incompatible with residential living such as irregular hours of operation, the use of heavy machinery, the spraying of chemicals, the spreading of manure---unpleasant noise, lights, smells. Urban and suburban residents often go to rural areas for open space, then complain about the industrial aspects of agriculture.

There is evidence that there is a general decline in the efficiency of farm operations when nonfarm dwellings become too prevalent. Nonfarm land uses scattered throughout farming areas make it less economical to operate farms. At some point, farms are driven out of operation by the difficulties of competing with nonfarm uses. Studies have indicated that between 2 and 2.5 nonfarm dwellings per 100 acres of farmland can make agricultural operations too difficult to conduct.

In addition, a robust farm economy is needed to support a healthy mix of agricultural support businesses. The more economically viable farms there are in operation in a region, the more support facilities will exist. As farming declines in a region, or as farms become larger but fewer, there will be a decrease in general agricultural support facilities.

Many of the economic impacts on agriculture are beyond local control. There have been problems with the dairy industry in the Northeastern United States which has led to an economic decline in local agriculture. National tax policies have likewise worked to undermine agricultural profitability, and have had local impacts. Local property taxes is one area where local policies may help to protect agriculture. Property taxes on agricultural operations can be kept to a minimum by a well-diversified commercial/industrial economy which can help defray property taxes on large land consumers such as agricultural operations.

Means of Protecting and Preserving Agriculture

There are several means of preserving and protecting agriculture including agricultural districts and purchase of development rights programs. Some of these are discussed on page 36.

A more aggressive means of preserving farms is through agricultural zoning. By this method, farms are prevented from being subdivided into parcels below a size considered to be viable for agricultural operations. Such a size is believed to be approximately 100 acres. This acreage represents the "core" parcel of the farm, excluding the out-parcels, and thus is not in any way intended to represent the gross farm size believed to be viable.

Analysis of Farmland Protection Schemes

The farm economy in Lowville has slowly declined over a long period of time. There have been few major threats to agricultural lands due to development pressures. This may be about to change, however.

The profitability of dairy farming, which is the major type of farming in the region and the Town is decreasing. This decrease in profitability is largely due to changes in federal tax policy as well as declines in dairy price supports. Many local farms may eventually be uneconomical to operate and thus become sites for large-scale residential development. Additionally, many of the farm operators that do survive may be attracted to selling smaller portions of their land holdings for development in order to make ends meet.

Many of the traditional methods of agricultural protection and preservation are ill suited to coping with agriculture in this economic environment. Most of these mechanisms are geared towards protecting profitable farmers in the path of urban expansion from being forced out of farming by development pressures. That is generally not what is happening to farms in the Lowville area.

The loss of farmlands to development has been characterized mainly by small, incremental development decisions being made by farmers to subdivide small parcels over long periods of time. Any farmland that has been abandoned has not been developed, but has reverted to succession growth. Therefore, development pressures are not a major factor in agricultural loss. The general decline of the health of the dairy farming industry appears to be the primary factor in farmland loss.

Agricultural Protection in Lowville

A balanced approach to agricultural protection would be appropriate in the Town of Lowville. There is recognition that agriculture may be increasingly less economically viable in the future. The trend towards the abandonment of farms and the decline of the farm economy will most likely continue, although at an unknown rate. This may eventually lead to a significant loss of agricultural support infrastructure which in turn will lead to an acceleration of the decline in agriculture. In hopes that economic conditions may change in favor of the farming industry, it would be prudent to secure some degree of viable agricultural lands for future production.

Development pressures in Lowville are presently low. However, this could change quickly and the Town should be prepared. The Town of Lowville Zoning Law currently has an agriculture (AG) zone. This zone allows small lot subdivisions of any magnitude. A change in the development climate could result in unhealthy development patterns for those farmers wishing to continue agricultural operations. The existing zoning does not provide much long-range protection for agricultural areas.

The current zoning does help protect against intrusions into agricultural areas to some extent. The lot size requirement tends to make large-scale subdivision less profitable, thus, less likely to occur where public facilities would be necessary. Many subdivisions are on five acre lots in rural areas in order to circumvent the community public facilities reviews and requirements of the New York State Health Department. The zoning therefore tends to make small scale development of water or sewer facilities less probable.

The existing zoning cannot stop a trend towards suburbanization. This tends to reflect the realities of the farm economy, where farmers wish to retain the option to sell their land for development. It may also reflect the reality that farmers need and depend to some extent on small lot sales to subsidize farm operations. The danger, however, is that the cumulative impact may be to put some agricultural operations out of business prematurely.

Recommendations

- **Minimize nonfarm intrusions into agricultural areas, thus minimizing conflicts with existing agricultural operations.**
- **Maintain moderate-size lot zoning in agricultural areas to minimize subdivision activity.**
- **Allow agricultural support uses in close proximity to primary agricultural areas.**

GOAL: PROTECT IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES, WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE DIVERSITY, CHARACTER AND GENERAL HEALTH AND WELFARE OF LOWVILLE.

1. **Make full use of State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) when reviewing development projects.**
2. **Continue to participate in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) programs.**

3. Encourage compliance with state and federal wetlands programs and the state stream protection program.
4. Require an erosion and sediment control plan for new development.
5. Encourage voluntary conservation easements on large parcels of land.
6. Consider the fee purchase or purchase of development rights on key parcels by the town.
7. Maintain and improve surface and ground water quality.
8. Create incentives, including financial and regulatory tools, for property owners to protect working lands.

PLANNING ACCORD FOR TUG HILL (PATH)

A 15-town Plan for the Future of the Cooperative Tug Hill Council Area - 1991

GOALS FOR OUR FUTURE

4.0 Retain area's existing farms and best farm soils for farm production. Local action alone cannot retain our farms. This depends on the individual actions of our farmers, the natural economy and state and national farm policy. Locally, we can take actions that help keep good farmland from inappropriate development and help farm diversification.

- 4.1 Support town-by-town identification of important farm lands, and updates of existing farmland inventories.
- 4.2 Support town actions to update land use controls that would limit farmlands being taken out of production.
- 4.3 Support voluntary actions taken by individual farmers to keep their farms in production, through tools such as ag districts, and ag land assessments.
- 4.4 Support programs to help strengthen dairy farming and to help farmers that wish to diversify their operations.
- 4.5 Share information on important farm lands between CTHC member towns.
- 4.6 Encourage educational programs that demonstrate to school students and adults the importance of farming to our area.

TUG HILL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Cooperative Tug Hill Planning Board -1976

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The plan for Tug Hill must reflect the needs and aspirations of its people. Hence, early in the planning process, the Cooperative Board sought direction from local residents through a questionnaire, Appendix B, and a series of local meetings.

This Section relates the results of those responses to the physical, social and economic conditions of the region. It consists of a series of goals and objectives with respect to major land use categories. The goal statements represent broad policy positions adopted by the Cooperative Board. The objectives are more specific actions necessary to bring each goal into reality.

The formulation of goals is an important part of the planning process. After physical, social and economic elements are studied, the goals of the community provide further direction for change. The end result is a Resource Management Plan, which can be implemented through a variety of administrative and legal

programs. As values and circumstances change, so do community goals. Thus goal forming, planning and town action are a continuous process, adapting to changing needs and aspirations.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Goals

1. Identify and maintain high quality agricultural lands for agricultural use. Agriculture is of primary importance to the area's economy. Farming also maintains land in open space, which is essential to preserving the rural character of Tug Hill. Because lands favorable for farming are often favorable for other types of development, conflicts occur. In order to encourage agricultural uses, it is important to delineate valuable agricultural lands and protect them from competing uses.

Objectives

1. Protect good farmlands from undesirable development pressures.
2. Discourage development, which would tend to disrupt agricultural practices.
3. Encourage only those land uses, which lend support to the agricultural industry.
4. Discourage practices that damage other important natural resources.

2006 Community Survey - Summary Towns of Harrisburg, Martinsburg, Montague & Pinckney

11. Which types of development do you feel would be compatible for our community? (Please check () all that apply.)

62% <i>ATV trails</i>	31% <i>Campgrounds/RV parks</i>	6% <i>Multi-family homes</i>
59% <i>Snowmobile trails</i>	30% <i>Natural gas development</i>	5% <i>Adult entertainment</i>
58% <i>Single family homes</i>	23% <i>Broadband access</i>	4% <i>Subdivision housing</i>
48% <i>Farms/Agricultural uses</i>	20% <i>Light industry</i>	3% <i>Mobile home parks</i>
48% <i>Tourism/recreational businesses</i>	12% <i>Mobile homes on single lots</i>	
46% <i>Wind turbine development</i>	11% <i>Entertainment</i>	1% <i>Junkyards</i>

The top six types of development survey respondents feel would be compatible with their community include: **ATV trails** (62% overall, although there was 70% in Montague), **snowmobile trails** (59%), **single family homes** (58%), **farms/agricultural uses** (48%), **tourism/recreational uses** (48%), and wind turbine development (46%).

	Overall	Harrisburg	Martinsburg	Montague	Pinckney
ATV trails	62%	62%	52%	70%	74%
Snowmobile trails	59%	65%	46%	66%	69%
Single family homes	58%	69%	58%	48%	62%
Farms/Agricultural uses	48%	57%	51%	37%	47%
Tourism/recreational businesses	48%	39%	48%	47%	60%
Wind turbine development	46%	60%	44%	40%	48%