

# Bringing us together: A project to develop and strengthen the connections to our farms

## Final Report for CNE08-045

Project Type: Sustainable Community Innovation

Funds awarded in 2008: \$7,178.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2009

Region: Northeast

State: Massachusetts

Project Leader:

[June House](#)

Rehoboth Agricultural Commission

## Project Information

### Summary:

#### SUMMARY

This SARE project had 3 components:

- Conduct a Needs Assessment of Rehoboth Farm Enterprises
- Development of a Rehoboth Farms GIS database
- Production of an educational/marketing brochure celebrating Rehoboth agriculture

#### Needs Assessment

A self-administered 7-page questionnaire was mailed to 267 known farm enterprises. 67 useable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 26.8%, representing a broad mix in terms of age, farm products/activities; and the share of family income derived from agriculture. Survey responses were coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for analysis. Key findings were incorporated into a needs assessment report. The report's findings will provide direction to the Agricultural Commission's future work in Rehoboth. The report was sent to agricultural agencies and nonprofits active in the Southeastern Massachusetts region.

#### GIS Database

A data set including parcel ID numbers for Rehoboth's farm enterprises was created and provided to agencies with the capacity to utilize GIS for the sustainability of Rehoboth farms. These include the regional planning agency, SRPEDD, and the Trustees of Reservations which operates in Bristol County, MA. and provides mapping and information to the Rehoboth Land Trust. A map of Ag Lands protected under Chapter 61A was produced and sent to MASSGIS. A parcel-specific map showing prime agricultural soils was produced for AgCom use. A map showing the location of farms engaging in direct marketing was created and is presented along with farm products, availability, and other information in a brochure to be widely distributed in our area.

#### Educational/Marketing Brochure

The Needs Assessment findings pointed to a significant problem associated with

new residential neighbors and nuisance complaints against farms. This played a major role in the focus of the educational portion of the brochure. Instead of providing facts and figures about Rehoboth agriculture, the texts (and photographs) help readers to understand what they see when they drive through Rehoboth, with particular emphasis on the importance of agriculture throughout the Town's history. A "sidebar" provides an explanation of Right-to-Farm and its importance in protecting our farmers against nuisance complaints.

Significant research was required to identify the farm enterprises which invite the public to come to the farm for products and/or services. The brochure provides product and availability information and maps the location of 23 farms and 8 equestrian centers.

A glossy, folding, map-style 17" x 20" format was selected for the color brochure. Through competitive bidding, the Agricultural Commission was able to produce 11,000 copies.

#### Project Objectives:

##### OBJECTIVE 1 - COMPREHENSIVE AGRICULTURAL INVENTORY/NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A 7-page questionnaire was mailed to 267 known farm enterprises. A total of 67 useable surveys were returned and coded into SPSS for statistical analysis. Each of the 4 outcomes as identified in the grant application have been achieved: An up-to-date mailing/contact list of Rehoboth farms has been compiled. The AgCom now has a prioritized list of local farms' needs which will direct our future work efforts. This same list has been provided to Agricultural service providers serving Rehoboth farms. The AgCom has gained information which will be useful in assessing the need for changes to local regulations.

##### OBJECTIVE 2 - AGRICULTURAL DATASET FORMATTED FOR- AND LINKED TO GIS FOR MAPPING/ANALYSIS

A data set including parcel ID numbers for Rehoboth's farm enterprises was created and provided to agencies with the capacity to utilize GIS for the sustainability of Rehoboth farms. These include the regional planning agency, SRPEDD, and the Trustees of Reservations which operates in Bristol County, MA. and provides mapping and information to the Rehoboth Land Trust. A map of Ag Lands protected under Chapter 61A was produced and sent to MASSGIS. A parcel-specific map showing prime agricultural soils was produced for AgCom use. A map showing the location of farms engaging in direct marketing was created and is presented along with farm products, availability, and other information in a brochure to be widely distributed in our area. It is anticipated that this mapping will, in future, provide assistance in the review of future developments planned in areas with potential impact on Rehoboth farms.

##### OBJECTIVE 3 - COLOR EDUCATIONAL/MARKETING BROCHURE PROMOTING REHOBOTH FARMS

The AgCom Brochure Subcommittee selected a folding 2-sided map type format for our brochure, which is complete and was delivered from the printer this December. One side contains a map and descriptive information pertaining to Farms engaging in direct marketing. The other side contains educational information about Rehoboth farm history and agriculture today. This single page folding brochure (17x20") design is less expensive to produce than the booklet design utilized in cost estimates for the grant application, and as a result we are thrilled to have 11,000 copies of this brochure to distribute widely in Rehoboth and in surrounding towns. The text was specifically designed for persons unfamiliar with agriculture, so that they will gain an understanding and appreciation for our farms.

# Research

## Materials and methods:

The Survey Sample is a “convenience sample” of 267 farm enterprises compiled from readily available public information. Two weeks prior to receiving the questionnaire, farms received a “heads up” postcard from the Agricultural Commission. The self-administered survey included a return address and postage. 67 useable questionnaires were returned. It is understood that this is not a “scientific survey” and that the survey findings cannot be used to make inferences about ALL Rehoboth farms.

The survey was designed so that the findings would be useful to agricultural agencies and nonprofits working in our area. One section of the survey collected information regarding respondents’ familiarity with various organizations. The responses to this question were cross tabulated with type of (respondent) farm by product/activity and presented in detailed tables in the report appendix so that the organizations could assess their success in reaching their target clients in Rehoboth. Specifically, the agencies represented in this question were the MASS Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), the Bristol County Farm Bureau, the Southeastern Mass Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), the Bristol County Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Pilgrim RC&D Area Council, Inc., the Bristol County Farm Service Agency, and the RI Center for Agricultural Promotion & Education RICAPE). With the objective of designing a survey that would provide maximum useful information to these organizations, the Project Leader contacted each of these organizations by mail and again by email offering the opportunity to comment on the draft survey questionnaire and to provide additional question topics. Pilgrim RC&D and Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts provided input.

The Project Leader is a professional planner trained in survey research and the use of SPSS – computer software widely used to analyze survey responses. This made it possible to cross tabulate various portions of the survey responses to maximize the findings and insights to be gained from the data. (See Upload 2, below) To analyze the data in SPSS, the survey responses were coded into a total of 127 variables. )The Needs Assessment Report was completed in Microsoft Word with excel tables. The completed Needs Assessment Report, along with a copy of the survey questionnaire was sent to the organizations listed above, along with an offer to “go back into the data” if they would like additional analyses. The organizations were also told they could have a copy of the mailing list used in the survey. SEMAP has requested the mailing list.

All aspects of the GIS component of the project were handled by the GIS staff at SRPEDD (Southeast Regional Planning & Economic Development District), the regional planning agency serving Rehoboth. Excel files were developed by the Project Leader to the GIS staffer’s specifications for conversion to GIS. Because both SRPEDD and the Rehoboth Agricultural Commission are public agencies, all mapping and supporting documentation would be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. Because of this, the Project Leader made the decision to somewhat reduce the original planned scope of the mapping so as not to disclose location and acreage information of the survey respondents, 62% of which had indicated that they did not have an individual or family member lined up to take over the farm when the present owner retired. Regrettably, housing developers in our area have a history of acquiring agricultural land for their developments, and certain mapping could have

provided them with too much useful information!

4 members of the Agricultural Commission staffed the Brochure Subcommittee to make decisions on brochure content and format. A glossy, color, folding map style brochure was selected. The Project Leader was responsible for brochure content. For the brochure, the Project Leader interviewed farmers and the town historian, and read historic documents. Photographs were taken around town and a few photographs were used with permission from Rehoboth farms' websites. Farms engaged in direct marketing were identified from existing information, drives around town, and a search of the internet. Rehoboth has 165 permitted stables, and the decision was made to include that only "equestrian centers" offering a variety of services would be included in the brochure. The SRPEDD GIS staffer provided a base street map in suitable format for this project, and a professional graphic designer (Sandra Connor Art Direction) used this, along with texts and photographs supplied by the Project Leader, to create a spectacular brochure, of which the Agricultural Commission is very proud. The graphic designer was also in charge of bidding out the printing and print supervision, which resulted in 11,000 copies of a very high quality product. She knew which printing companies would give us the most for our money! As a bonus, Ms. Connor created a digital copy of the brochure formatted to be printed on home computers.

Brochure distribution is being handled by the Agricultural Commission. Brochures have been provided to all participating farms, libraries in the area, town hall, area churches, convenience stores, and real estate offices. SRPEDD and Pilgrim RC&D have posted it on their websites. SEMAP is distributing it at functions they attend. The brochure has been sent in email form by Irene Winkler of Pilgrim RC&D to Massachusetts Agricultural Commissions, and hard copies of the brochure were handed out to all participants at the second annual Massachusetts Agricultural Commission Conference held in Worcester in March 2010.

All activities associated with brochure distribution are not yet complete. The Agricultural Commission website is still under development and the brochure has not yet been posted there. Once the "printer friendly" brochure is available on the Agricultural Commission website in late April ([www.Rehobothagcom.com](http://www.Rehobothagcom.com)) the Project Leader will launch a media blitz in area papers.

- [Training Needs ranked by Mean Score — All Respondents](#)
- [Annotated copy of Survey Questionnaire](#)
- ["Heads Up" postcard sent prior to survey](#)
- [SPSS Variable names used to code survey questionnaires](#)
- [Prioritized Farms Needs by Mean Score - subset of respondents: only those deriving income from the farm](#)
- [Survey Questionnaire](#)
- [Cover letter for survey questionnaire](#)

Research results and discussion:

- **OUTCOMES OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT:** No comprehensive listing of Rehoboth Farms existed prior to this study. 267 Farms were identified and contacted in the Needs Assessment component this project. In the Survey, farms were asked to rank 40 different skills/knowledge areas with regard to need for additional information and training. Likert scale responses

facilitated development of mean scores for each subject, and a ranked list was created. This list has been printed and laminated and is part of the Agricultural Commission's travelling display, along with a complete copy of the Survey Report. It has been useful as an attention-getting piece of information in promoting the study. The Right to Farm Bylaw was ranked first in importance with farm enterprises in this list. Because of this, the AgCom included a special information panel in the color brochure to educating readers about this regulation.

Project Leader June House presented the Survey Project at a statewide Massachusetts Ag Com conference, in January 2009, "Making a Difference in Our Communities."

The report, along with mailing list of Rehoboth farms, was distributed to the following Ag Agencies and nonprofits: USDA Farm Service Agency Bristol County, MA; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Bristol County Conservation District; Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership; Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District; Pilgrim Resource Conservation & Development Program, the Rehoboth Land Trust; and the Trustees of Reservations.

Aside from providing answers to questions pertaining to their Ag operations, respondents were offered the opportunity to participate in future AgCom Initiatives. Of 67 respondents:

27 were willing to provide information and/or photographs to assist in the color brochure

24 requested to be included in the direct marketing brochure

25 would like to be listed on the AgCom website currently under development

37 are interested in participating in future agricultural public events in Rehoboth

46 provided email contact information so they can receive information and updates from the AgCom and other agencies

8 women-owned enterprises are interested in forming a group with other women farm operators.

**OUTCOMES OF GIS DATA PROJECT.** SRPEDD created several GIS maps with data submitted as part of this project. This included:

An updated map of Chapter 61A Agricultural Lands. A copy submitted to MASSGIS to update their information

Parcel based "Prime Agricultural Soils"

Rehoboth Farms engaged in direct marketing

Because of the limited number of survey respondents, it was deemed inadvisable to reveal by any means parcel specific information collected in the survey. Rehoboth faces great residential development pressure and, regrettably, past experience suggests that parcel specific research findings might be accessed and used by developers seeking property for potential future developments.

**OUTCOMES OF BROCHURE.** The brochure was designed with 2 primary purposes. The first is to educate the public regarding Rehoboth's agricultural heritage and to help them understand what they see when they drive through our agricultural landscape. The second is to assist local farms with direct marketing taking place on the farm. It has been well-received by the public and by participating farms. Later this summer, the Project Leader will collect anecdotal information from participating farms to assess whether they have seen an increase in farm visits that can be attributed to the brochure.

31 farm enterprises are listed and mapped in the "Visit Rehoboth's Farms" brochure. 11,000 copies of the brochure were printed. In addition, a "printer friendly" version of the brochure has been developed so that persons accessing

the brochure via the Rehoboth AgCom website (currently under development) will be able to print it out on their home computer.

## **Participation Summary**

### Education & Outreach Activities and Participation Summary

#### **PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:**

Education/outreach description:

This SARE project involved the creation of 2 publications relating to Rehoboth farms, a Needs Assessment Report and an educational/direct marketing brochure. Once the technical issues have been resolved, both will be posted on the Rehoboth Agricultural Commission website, [www.rehobothagcom.com](http://www.rehobothagcom.com).

A 7-page farms' needs assessment survey questionnaire was developed to collect the information summarized in the needs assessment report. This document is available in Microsoft word digital format so that it can be edited to suit others' information collecting needs. The Project Leader welcomes SARE's assistance in promoting the availability of the survey questionnaire so that others do not have to "reinvent the wheel" when the time comes to collect information about their agricultural communities. The survey will also be made available through the Pilgrim RC&D website which offers resources to Massachusetts agricultural commissions.

The Project Leader regrets the omission of a grant budget line item for printing needs assessment reports. Because the Agricultural Commission cannot afford the printing, we have not been able to widely distribute hard copies of this document.

The Agricultural Commission has a multi-faceted display which is used at agricultural fairs and other public events. The display now has a section devoted to the Farms Needs Survey and its findings. A large copy of the prioritized list of farms' needs (as identified in the survey) is presented, along with a copy of the needs assessment report.

A PowerPoint presentation was developed to present the SARE project at the 2009 Massachusetts Agricultural Commission conference. The presentation, created prior to the completion of the survey, focuses upon the issues facing Rehoboth agriculture and the process involved in creating the survey questionnaire, which was complete and incorporated into the PowerPoint presentation.

- [Needs Assessment Report summarizing survey findings](#)
- [Needs Assessment Report Appendix](#)
- [Rehoboth Brochure formatted for home printers](#)
- [Rehoboth Brochure formatted for commercial printing](#)
- [Survey Questionnaire in Word for Downloading/Use by others](#)

# Project Outcomes

## Project outcomes:

The Milestones as identified in the Grant Application were all accomplished although several of the dates were significantly later than anticipated. This is because Project Leader June House became employed full time (with a long commute!) subsequent to the submittal of the grant timeline, leaving little-to-no weekday time for working on the SARE grant.

MILESTONE: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND RECIPIENT LIST FINALIZED AND READY TO GO. Anticipated date September 30, 2008. Actual date February 6, 2009.

MILESTONE: COMPLETED SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES IN HAND. Anticipated date February 29, 2009. Actual date March 13, 2009.

MILESTONE: GIS-COMPATIBLE DATABASE SUBMITTED TO SRPEDD. Anticipated date April 30, 2009. Actual date May 18, 2009.

MILESTONE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT DISTRIBUTED TO AG SERVICE PROVIDERS. Anticipated date May 30, 2009. Actual dates spread from April through December 2009.

MILESTONE: COLOR BROCHURE READY FOR ROLL-OUT. Anticipated date August 30, 2009. Actual date December 21, 2009.

MILESTONE: ROLL OUT OF BROCHURE AT ANNUAL REHOBOTH BLOCK PARTY. Anticipated date September 2009. Actual Date: No Block Party Rollout. Brochure distribution begun December 2009 and ongoing. Since the 2008 death of the Block Party, organizer (and major civic cheerleader) Larry Procopio we have found foot traffic at this event to be disappointing.

- [GIS map of agricultural land in Chapter 61A](#)
- [GIS map of prime agricultural soils used for AgCom displays](#)

## Assessment of Project Approach and Areas of Further Study:

### Potential Contributions

Several products of this SARE project can be replicated by organizations working in support of agriculture, including agricultural commissions:

- The Farms Needs survey questionnaire
- The Needs Assessment Report can be used as a template for others wishing to write up their survey findings

The educational/marketing brochure will both educate the public about Rehoboth's agricultural heritage (and its continued importance), and will help lead potential customers to farms offering goods and services. It is anticipated that it will contribute to increased farm income from direct marketing.

- [thankyou letter from farmer](#)
- [letter from Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District](#)
- [Conference Presentation - Rehoboth's SARE Grant & Survey Project. \(presented just after surveys mailed out to farms\)](#)
- [letter from MA Dept Agricultural Resources](#)

## Future Recommendations

1. Future initiatives of Rehoboth Agricultural Commission. The findings of the Rehoboth Farms Needs Survey project have already been put to use in designing the content of the educational/promotional brochure in this SARE grant. The high importance placed on Right-to-Farm led to a much greater emphasis on this topic in the brochure. This, and other hot-button topics identified in the study, will also be the focus of future guest speakers and workshops organized by the Agricultural Commission.
2. It is our hope that the survey questionnaire used in this project can be adapted and used by other Agricultural Commissions and organizations. In January 2009 the Project Leader presented 2 workshop sessions about the survey project at the Statewide Massachusetts Agricultural Commission Conference held in Worcester. A conservation organization working in Cape Cod requested a digital copy of the survey to use in their area. The survey questionnaire has been provided to SARE in digital format along with this final report and it is hoped that SARE can promote its availability within a wide geographic area. Locally, the Project Leader will work with Irene Winkler of Pilgrim Resource Conservation & Development Area Council to promote the survey among Massachusetts Ag Commissions.
3. Delve deeper into the survey data. When the Needs Assessment Report was sent to agricultural organizations the Project Leader invited them to contact her to perform additional specialized research using the needs assessment database. The fact that the data is in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) makes it relatively simple to break the data down into smaller specialized groups for analysis and comparison. No one has taken her up yet on this offer, which still stands. (The Project Leader loves to crunch data.)
4. Expansion of client group served by agricultural organizations. When the Needs Assessment Report was sent to agricultural organizations the Project Leader indicated that the mailing list used for the survey would be sent to them upon request. The Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP) has taken advantage of this offer.
5. GIS. All GIS aspects of the project were handled by SRPEDD, a regional planning organization with offices 1/2 hour away. A finite number of (20) hours were available for the project. Communication was via email. Emails and requests to the GIS person did not always receive a response. The Project Leader's inability to use GIS, the fact that the GIS technology and staff were in a different location, and that the GIS specialist functioned more as a technician than a researcher proved to be a significant barrier to realizing the dynamic research potential of GIS in this project as originally envisioned.

The Project Leader also reduced the scope of the GIS component of the project in order to protect the anonymity of farms participating in the survey, because of fears of Public Information requests by real estate developers eager to buy farm land. Loss of agricultural land to residential development is an ongoing problem in Rehoboth.

If the needs assessment survey and resultant database were replicated by a private sector researcher or team competent in both survey analysis and GIS, and not impacted by the Freedom of Information Act, exciting GIS analysis could be conducted with the data. This would make for a terrific Masters or PhD project.



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