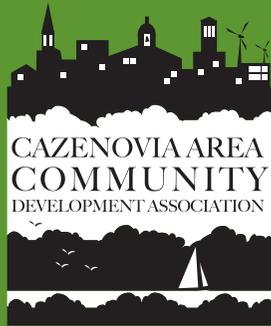


# LOCAL FARMS RESOURCES WORTH PROTECTING





CAZENOVIA AREA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, INC. (CACDA) WAS INCORPORATED AS A 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION IN 2005 WITH THE PURPOSE OF ENHANCING ECONOMIC VITALITY AND PRESERVING THE RURAL, HISTORIC CHARACTER OF OUR REGION THROUGH EDUCATION, CONSENSUS-BUILDING AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION.

SINCE INCEPTION WE HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN LEVERAGING MORE THAN \$2.77 MILLION FOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES. WITHOUT CACDA'S FULL-TIME ASSISTANCE, THESE MONIES WOULD HAVE GONE TO ANOTHER COMMUNITY. **FOR EACH \$1 OF INDIVIDUAL INVESTMENT, CACDA FACILITATED \$26.28 IN PROJECTS – A 2628% RETURN ON INVESTMENT!**

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**EDUCATE • BUILD CONSENSUS • IMPLEMENT**

Spring 2009

Agriculture has long been the #1 industry in Central New York. In addition to providing a stable economic base, everyone enjoys the intrinsic rural scenery and character that accompany active farm enterprises. However, due to a rapidly globalizing food system and evolving land use patterns, regional farming is facing an uncertain future.

Over the last several years, CACDA has completed several initiatives in support of agriculture and farmland preservation. We facilitated implementation of the NYS Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in Madison County, which has protected approximately 600 acres of quality soils to date. CACDA also worked with residents to enact a local Right-to-Farm law.

This book is our next step toward building upon what has already been achieved. We encourage you to read the information in this publication and access the references provided in the appendices to learn more about how you can support this important industry, and enhance opportunities for building a more sustainable community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Henderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Henderson  
Executive Director  
Cazenovia Area Community  
Development Association, Inc.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Publication of this booklet was made possible in part by a donation from the Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF) Faith T. Knapp Memorial and General Funds. CNYCF connects the generosity of donors with community needs by making grants to organizations working to enhance the quality of life of those who live and work in Central New York. The Community Foundation annually makes more than \$5 million in grants and provides leadership support in the fields of art and culture, community and economic development, education, environment, and health and human services. Founded in 1927, the Community Foundation strives to inspire philanthropy in Central New York.

*Special thanks go to:*

David Haight, New York State Director, American Farmland Trust

Judy Wright, Farmland Protection Consultant, American Farmland Trust

Karen A. Baase, MPS, PAS, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Madison County

Scott Ingmire, Madison County Planning

Becca Jablonski, Madison County Agricultural Economic Development Specialist

Steven Durfee, Chair, Madison County Farmland Protection Board

Sincere appreciation is gratefully extended to the many local farmers and agricultural business owners in Madison and Onondaga Counties that took time from their busy schedules to share their thoughts and experiences with us.

The book was researched and written by Eric Johnson, with project management by Susie Johnson, Johnson Communications.

Design and layout was professionally provided by Kevin Mann, Camp Design.

Project administration was handled by CACDA staff.

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# SAVING A PLACE FOR THE FARMS AROUND US

This is a booklet about farms, farmers, and farming in Central New York. Its intent is to inform residents about the benefits of farming and farmland protection to areas in which development—residential, commercial, and industrial—threatens to overwhelm farms large and small.

The agricultural industry contributes substantially to the economy of New York State and Central New York. The money that farmers spend to raise, harvest, and distribute crops or livestock is overwhelmingly spent locally, whether for a \$300,000 combine, diesel fuel, groceries, building supplies or even a night out for a movie or dinner when there is time. The “multiplier effect” of farming on an area’s economy is higher than almost any other type of enterprise. At the same time, the burden that agricultural land places on local taxing districts has a small impact when compared to residential properties. As the old saying goes, “Cows and corn don’t go to school.”

Tens of thousands of farmland acres in the Syracuse area have been lost to poorly planned development. The loss of that agricultural bounty has permanently removed some of the most fertile soil in the state from production. In addition, it is causing land prices to rise so high that new farmers, or existing farmers who want to expand, could not expect a reasonable payback on the land even if they could afford to buy it.

There are environmental benefits of keeping land agriculturally productive. Development covers land with driveways, roofs, and other impervious surfaces that can lead to untreated runoff of storm water into streams and lakes. Many farmers use advanced methods designed specifically to prevent runoff and erosion. Says one farmer, “The last thing I want to do is see my topsoil end up in a creek or on my neighbor’s land. It’s too valuable an asset. Our goal is to disturb the land as little as possible.”

There also are less concrete reasons why we prize the rural landscape. There is something soothing and restorative in our urban/suburban world about taking a drive along country back roads. Our pulse slows, muscles relax, and the clutter evaporates from our minds as we take in the bucolic sights along the way.

Dairy cattle grazing on pasture, all of them roughly aligned north and south, define carefree. Checkerboard fields of head-high corn marching in strict rank and file with their tassels bent in a warming breeze tell us there’s something right

with the world. Mown alfalfa, like so many gray-green jackstraws drying in the late summer sun, awaits the farmer's rake and baler. The gathered hay speaks of the future when it will nourish the dairy cattle in the winter to come.

Farm stands sprout like welcome weeds inviting us to stop with offers of sweet corn, beans, fresh tomatoes, and, later in the season, eggplant, and more squash varieties than we knew existed. Small or large, the stands boast an entrepreneurial spirit with a sub-plot of hard work in the open air. Somehow, the produce tastes a lot better when we know it was grown a few miles from home rather than 1,500 miles away.

No wonder urban and suburban dwellers prize open space and will pay dearly for their little patch of the country. There is a lot to cherish, but what about the view from the other side?

There are some very real challenges that farmers face in their quest to turn a decent profit, support their families, and create a retirement nest egg while preserving the land that is at the core of their enterprise. Even larger farms, with their economies of scale, shudder under the increasing costs of equipment, fuel, labor, and compliance with state and federal regulations. As costs rise, market prices on their products seldom keep pace, thereby narrowing profit margins. The scenario wouldn't be complete, of course, without factoring in

unknowns like drought, hundred-year storms, hail, and killing frosts.

Although faced with a variety of challenges, Central New York farmers are making a living or supplementing their income from the land in a growing variety of ways. Dairy farms predominate, but there are large and small vegetable growers, fruit and tree farms, those who farm row crops, those who raise beef, chickens, turkeys, pork, sheep, and alpacas, those who board and train horses, and those who do many of the above without the use of pesticides, antibiotics, or hormones. It is a fascinating mix of men and women, all of whom share a reverence for the land and animals, and a sometimes indescribable passion for making their living from the soil.

It is important for every community to protect the valuable farmland that remains. Without doubt, the most sensible way of doing that is to make sure that farming remains a profitable business as well as a fulfilling way of life. It is possible but, like farming itself, not always easy.

**THE U.S. LOSES  
TWO ACRES OF  
FARMLAND  
EVERY MINUTE,  
OR 890,000  
ACRES A YEAR.  
THAT'S ALMOST  
THREE TIMES ALL  
THE FARMLAND  
IN MADISON  
AND ONONDAGA  
COUNTIES  
COMBINED.**

# FARMING HISTORY

Farming certainly is the oldest “industry” in Central New York, probably beginning with the forebears of the five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy—the Oneidas, Onondagas, Senecas, Cayugas, and Mohawks—with their staple crops of corn, beans, and squash. The ability to grow anything is anchored in geologic time as at least three glaciers in succession ground their way south, and buried even the highest hilltops, before retreating north for a final time about 10,000 years ago.

Glaciers left behind the ingredients for today’s soil mixes with current names like Palmyra, Honeoye, Lansing, and Cazenovia. In the valleys the soils are thick, well-drained, and so nutrient rich they can easily support many crops. On the hilltops, soils are thinner and rockier, but still support a variety of grasses. In the flatlands of northern Madison and Onondaga counties, the melting glaciers formed a lake, the forerunner of present-day Oneida Lake. Aquatic plants thrived in the shallow water and built up thick, rich organic deposits. As the water continued to recede it formed an alluvial swamp with great potential for future agricultural pursuits.

Early Central New York farmers concentrated on crops of corn, flax, wheat, and hops. Next into the mix were small dairy farms, and acreage sown with vegetables. Flax and wheat slowly dropped out of favor, but corn continued both as feed for livestock and as the raw material for distilleries.

Hops were first introduced around 1808, but by the mid-1800s, New York had become the country’s largest producer and three counties—Madison, Oneida, and Otsego—led the state. The dried flowers of the hops plant were essential to the production of beer because they contained a bitter oil that kept the brew from being overwhelmingly sweet. Several hop barns with their characteristic truncated pyramid chimneys still exist in the area. Because of disease and competition from other areas, hop production began to decline and had essentially disappeared by the 1930s.

Central New York soils and climate were well suited to apple growing and the area became a center for both cider and vinegar. In fact, Samuel R. Mott began his cider mill in Bouckville in 1842 with a horse-powered mill to crush the fruit

and a man-powered press to extract the juice. Mott was shipping 1,000-case lots of cider and vinegar to California during the 1870s, and exhibiting at the 1889 Paris Exposition. This local name still lines grocery store shelves throughout the country.

The dairy industry started slowly in Central New York. While various crops peaked and then fell out of favor for many reasons, dairying was growing gradually in the background. In the early 1800s, many farm families kept a cow or two for milking or meat. Ayrshires from Scotland stood up to cold New York winters, and shorthorns from England were dual-purpose animals providing both milk and meat.

The first recorded import of the now familiar black and white Holstein-Friesian cattle was made in 1795 when the Holland Land Company sent six cows and two bulls to their agent in Cazenovia, John Lincklaen. His attempt to breed the cows was not

successful. It would be another 72 years before Dudley Miller shipped Holstein-Friesians (now just called Holsteins) from Europe to his brother, Gerrit Smith Miller, in Peterboro. The original Holstein herdbook in use today, a “family tree” for cattle, includes some of the animals imported by Miller in 1867. Holsteins, which produce the greatest volume of milk of any breed, are now at the center of the area’s dairy industry.

The focus of the fledgling dairy industry in the 1840s was on milk processing for butter and cheese. In 1875, the local American Dairymen’s Association reported 65 cheese factories in Madison County alone. With competition from Canada and the American Midwest, cheese production faltered in the 1880s as farmers began to concentrate on supplying raw milk.



*(Vintage calendar courtesy of Wm. Morford Auctions)*

Improvement of area roads and rail facilities allowed access to more remote markets, including New York City.

With ample supplies of meat, milk, cheese, grains, and fruit, Central New Yorkers could have a locally grown balanced diet, especially when they included the vegetables that made up the last wave of agricultural production—the vegetables grown on the mucklands. Those mucklands left behind by the ancient shallow lake on the edges of Madison and Onondaga counties offered the richest soil imaginable, but only if they could be drained. Beginning about 1850, the state's first attempts to dig drainage canals were not that successful. The work was completed over the next 50 years, opening up nearly 2,500 acres (about four square miles) to cultivation, primarily of onions, celery, and potatoes.

The first “muck farmers,” as they were called, were from the Canastota area. In the early 1900s Italian immigrants, used to the poor soils of their native Sicily, established small farms of 15 acres or so and gradually turned the area into the “Onion Capital of the U.S.” Production fell in the mid-1940s, but the mucklands still grow an ample supply of onions for export to much of the country.

Various vegetables are grown in the southern parts of Madison and Onondaga counties. In the early 1900s, more than 50,000 acres of Madison County farmland was given over to green beans, wax beans, string beans, and peas. Beans are still an important cash crop that is shipped in bulk for processing.

Today, however, agriculture's historical importance to Madison and Onondaga counties is sensed more than being clearly evident. With expanding residential, commercial, and industrial growth on the fringes of urban centers, and growth exhibited in even some rural hamlets, we have to drive farther to get an idea what the landscape was like 100 years ago. During the early 1900s, 90 percent of Madison County—almost exactly 400,000 acres or 623 square miles—was under cultivation. That percentage has continued to decline.

Although the land area under cultivation has decreased, the economic, environmental, cultural, and even national security aspects of farming are becoming more and more important.

**89,100 ACRES  
OF PRIME NY  
FARMLAND WAS  
LOST BETWEEN  
1992 AND  
1997, A RATE  
141% FASTER  
THAN THE  
PREVIOUS FIVE  
YEARS.**

# PROTECT FARMLAND? WHY?

## BY THE NUMBERS

Driving by a single farm at a time, it's impossible to appreciate how much farming means to New York overall and to Central New York in particular. When you hold the 92-page book of New York agricultural statistics for 2006 and 2007 in your hand, however, the numbers tell the story and they are sliced, diced, and served up every way you can imagine. Add the statistics from other sources and you begin to get a clearer image of what farming means to the Central New York economy.

Exactly who are the farmers? They are a diverse lot. According to 2002 data from the most recent agricultural census, 16 percent of farmers are 65 or older. They own about 16 percent of the state's farmland and generate 19 percent of farm sales. The largest percentage of New York farms (43 percent) are owned and operated by farmers who have not reached 65 and who rely on farming for their primary income. These farmers hold nearly 60 percent of the state's farmland and are responsible for 72.5 percent of farm sales. About 39 percent are residential/lifestyle farms, defined by the Census of Agriculture as properties owned by men or women who report an off-farm job as their primary source of income. These farms produce only 8 percent of the state's crops and livestock, but own or lease 20 percent of New York farmland.

For statistical purposes, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website defines a farm "as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products (crops and livestock) were sold or normally would have been sold during the year under consideration." All those farms add up to a significant total impact.

Cash receipts for all crops and all livestock sold from New York State farms totaled \$4.45 billion in 2007, a healthy increase from \$3.48 billion in 2006. But when you subtract farmers' high costs of doing business—everything from fuel and seed to interest on costly equipment—the overall value added to the New York economy by agriculture in 2006 (the last year for which these statewide data are available) was about \$870 million.

Central New York—the counties of Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and Otsego—was responsible for sales of nearly \$820 million in 2007. Narrow it down further and Madison County was responsible for nearly \$88 million in sales and Onondaga County \$117 million.

Of the state's 34,200 farms active in 2007, 675 were in Madison County and 665 were in Onondaga County. Central New York alone had 1.54 million acres under cultivation with 164,800 acres in Madison County and 153,100 acres in Onondaga County. Significantly, however, in 1950 there were 2,360 farms in Madison County on a total of 317,000 acres. Today's Madison County farms are larger, but there are a third as many of them on half the land that was once under cultivation.

There is good news and bad news concealed in the numbers. The good news is Central New York farmers have dramatically increased their productivity by producing more crops and livestock on less land. Productivity, however, can improve only so much, and when it peaks, production will inevitably decline as new development reduces the total number of acres under cultivation.

**IN THE LAST  
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ACREAGE PER  
PERSON FOR  
NEW HOUSING  
IN THE U.S.  
HAS NEARLY  
DOUBLED.**

## **FARMERS: THE ORIGINAL ENVIRONMENTALISTS**

Too often we hear about threats to the environment created by farmers. The complaints are familiar: pesticide and fertilizer in runoff, the rape of the soil through continuous plantings of the same crops and overzealous tilling methods, release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, wetland destruction. . .in isolated cases they are no doubt true, but casting such a wide net ignores years of evidence and ordinary common sense. The fact is that a farmer who abuses the soil, or mistreats the animals that supply his or her livelihood, doesn't last very long.

Talk to successful, respected farmers in Central New York and you will find a deep reverence for the land, livestock, and the environment. This respect, combined with a willingness to apply the latest agri-technology,

is manifested in many ways that help improve a field's productivity while reducing possible pollution of nearby lakes, rivers, streams, and the air.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent voluntarily by farmers to reduce the size of their "footprint" on the land and the environment. Each year, scores of farmers in Madison, Onondaga, and surrounding counties take part in the state's Agricultural Environmental Management program as they develop and then implement customized plans to conserve soil and water resources.

The process begins by identifying potential environmental concerns on the farm, such as areas in which polluted runoff might flow into a stream. Working with paid consultants, the farmer develops solutions to prevent the

runoff. It may be a relatively simple "fix" such as planting a buffer strip of vegetation that can absorb any runoff before it reaches the stream. It might also be as complex and expensive as building a manure storage system, or a system to control silage leachate, the waste liquid that drains from the bunk silos that are filled with the chopped corn kernels, stalks, and leaves that make up part of a dairy cow's diet. The effectiveness of these "Best Management Practices" is monitored regularly, as well. Although both state and federal grants may be available as incentives to help defray the cost of these systems, the program is voluntary and still reduces a farmer's 'bottom line'.

The area's larger dairy farms already adhere to strict guidelines set for what the Environmental Protection Agency calls CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding

Operations). Often using hired consultants, farmers are required to develop "nutrient management plans" whose purposes are to:

- Manage the production, handling, storage and/or treatment of animal manure and organic byproducts generated in the area(s) of animal concentration and fertilizers;
- Manage the amount, source, form, placement, and timing of the application of these materials to the land; and
- Manage soil erosion.



*New York's agricultural bounty was illustrated in this 1905 stone lithographed seed packet.*

“We’re required to document everything we do with manure, including where we spread it, when we spread it, how much we spread, even where we don’t spread,” says one dairy farmer, adding “We also pay attention to it for our neighbors’ sakes. It’s not required, but when we move a load of manure to a field, we retrace our route and clean up any manure drips we may have left along the way because we have quite a few bicyclists passing by.”

Keep in mind that a farmer may spend anywhere from \$5,000 to \$20,000 a year out of pocket to keep the plan current.

Tested techniques, like no-till or zone-till farming, which help reduce soil erosion and reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, have caught on in Central New York. Since these methods require fewer passes across the field, the farmer also reduces soil compaction, fuel usage, equipment wear, and time. Some researchers have said that if every farmer in the U.S. were to adopt no-till farming methods, crop rotation, and the use of cover crops during the off-season, we could keep 60 million metric tons of carbon dioxide sequestered in the soil rather than releasing it into the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas.

Farmers also have been able to cut down on the amount of agricultural chemicals such as herbicides and pesticides used. These chemicals previously were measured in terms of pounds per acre, but are now used in ounces per acre.

It is a continuous process to take care of the land as the land takes care of them, and although they seldom speak of it unless pressed, many farmers admit an almost palpable relationship with the earth.

“When we moved to this farm the house was in horrible shape and the barn needed repairs, too,” says one farmer. “But my husband said we could always rebuild the house or the barn; it was the land he prized. He was right. It has provided us with so much. The fact is that no one actually owns the land, we’re only passing through, so we’ve got to preserve it for those who come after us. It’s the best legacy we can leave behind.”

**LESS THAN 20  
PERCENT OF  
U.S. FARMLAND  
IS CONSIDERED  
“PRIME” AND IT  
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DEVELOPMENT AT  
A RATE 30 PERCENT  
FASTER THAN  
NON-PRIME.**

## AND STILL MORE REASONS TO PRESERVE FARMLAND

The economic and environmental contributions of farming should be more than enough reason for the non-farming public to wholly embrace what is both a difficult business as well as a chosen way of life. There are even more aspects of farming that demand notice.

- Next time you pay your local property taxes, be sure to consider the services you're getting for them. It is generally accepted that urban and suburban residential development does not generate enough tax income to pay for the community services it consumes. Farms, on the other hand, generate a significant *excess* of tax income compared with the services they consume. On a national basis, the median cost to provide services to residential areas is \$1.15. The median cost to provide community services to working land, such as farms, is 36¢. Looking at it another way, if you lived in a town with solid residential development, your taxes would almost certainly be higher than if the same town had mixed residential housing and farmland.

- Madison and Onondaga counties both attract paying tourists that are anxious to see and sample the area's agricultural bounty. It is well documented that these tourists patronize other businesses during their visits—part of the multiplier effect that agriculture brings with it. Those same tourists are sometimes attracted to rural communities and the rural landscape simply for the sake of briefly escaping the urban landscape's hurry-up rush and clutter.
- Food security is a term that is gaining currency in today's world for many reasons, so there is something to be said for knowing the source of our food. There is no doubt that locally grown food tastes better, and, according to experts, is probably better for us. Central New York farm stands are expanding to carry local meat and dairy products as well as fruits and vegetables—some of them organically grown. Retail outlets now specialize in value-added products made from locally milled grains, fruit, honey, maple syrup, milk, or wool from sheep and alpacas. Preparing an entire meal from locally grown and made products used to take some doing unless you were good friends with a farmer. In some cases, farmers also are direct marketing their products. So today it is much easier and as *fulfilling* as it is *filling* to “eat local.”
- New York has a long agrarian heritage. If we go back far enough, most of us are likely to find a farmer in our genealogy. Farmhouses, barns, open fields of grain, and grazing livestock are a part of that heritage that younger generations deserve to see.

# FARMERS TODAY

The farming diversity within Central New York is staggering. With New York ranking third in the nation for milk production it's no wonder that dairy farms predominate. They can be categorized as small (99 cows or fewer), medium (fewer than 300 cows), or large (more than 300 cows). Most rely on the familiar black and white Holsteins, but there are Ayrshires, Brown Swiss, and a few Jerseys and Guernseys, which, as their name implies, are originally from the Channel Islands between England and France.

Beef cattle are raised, too, and they include Angus, Hereford, Simmenthal, and rarer breeds such as Belted Galloways. Other livestock includes chickens, turkeys, lamb, and pigs as well as llamas, alpaca, and sheep for wool. Many of the field crops that feed these animals—alfalfa, corn, oats, barley, and soybeans—are grown locally. If you're looking for vegetables, the list is long: arugula, beets, beans, basil, bok choy, broccoli, carrots, cabbage, cucumbers, eggplant, kale, lettuce, onions, pumpkins, peas, rutabaga, summer and winter squash...all the way to zucchini. Fruits include apples, blueberries, raspberries, black raspberries, blackberries, and watermelon. Christmas trees, cheese, honey, maple syrup, eggs, and flowers are all local farm products. Organic farmers raise dairy and beef cattle, sheep, vegetables, and various field crops.

The equine business is blossoming with boarding, breeding and training operations, lessons for riders, and international competitions. On a statewide basis, the equine segment brought in \$704 million in 2000. Five years later, that had more than tripled to \$2.3 billion. There are approximately 4,100 horses in Madison County and 5,400 in Onondaga County.

So what are these farm operations like? Each is different, but visits to several provide composite views that give some idea of the hard work involved, and the joys that are harvested along with the woes.

## Moo-o-o

There is nothing more soulful and placid than the limpid eyes of a Holstein milk cow. But when you have anywhere from 400 to 800 pairs of those silver-dollar-sized eyes following your every move, and making more demands than a two-year-old, you've got your hands full.

A dairy farm is a 20- to 24-hour-a-day operation that requires its owner, or owners, to have the combined skills of a CEO, chief financial officer, human resources director, purchasing agent, mechanical engineer, time management guru, nutritionist, gambler, veterinarian, chemist, building contractor, geneticist, environmentalist, farmer, friendly neighbor, meteorologist, economist, commodities trader, and politician, not to mention loving spouse and parent. There can be anywhere from one to thirty valued employees, plus outside experts, but not everything can be delegated.

At any given time, three-fourths of the dairy cows are “fresh” (lactating)



A DAIRY COW  
SPENDS ABOUT  
SIX HOURS A  
DAY EATING  
AND ANOTHER  
EIGHT HOURS  
CHEWING  
HER CUD.

and must be milked two or three times daily. The “dry” cows are waiting to have their new calf so they start their milk cycle production again, and the heifers (young cows that have not yet had a calf) are eating their fill even though they will not produce a squirt of milk for 18 to 24 months. Calves (a new one arrives almost daily on larger farms) remain with their mother for a day to get their fill of colostrum, the protein-rich milk that also transfers immune agents from cow to calf. After that, each one is treated to its own white plastic hutch to shelter it from the elements.

Milking cows generally spend around six or so hours a day eating, and another seven or eight hours chewing their cud,

a polite term for chewing regurgitated, partially digested food from the cow's four-chambered stomach. Each cow consumes more than 100 pounds of feed daily that may consist of ground dry corn, hay, corn silage, haylage, a mineral supplement, cottonseed, and canola. Some cows, on the other hand, are mostly grass fed. The cows' diets vary based on their state of lactation. Growing heifers receive different diets depending on their age. Many dairy farms have a nutritionist on staff or on call. To wash it all down, each cow drinks about 40 or 50 gallons of water every day.



*The equine business in Central New York wears many hats. This young rider, as well as her horse, is being trained to conquer higher and higher jumps. Stables also board horses for owners who don't have the necessary space.*

Two or three times a day the cows require milking. Their udders are disinfected with an iodine scrub and attached to an automated milking machine that requires about 15 minutes to complete the painless milking process. An electronic necklace can be used on each cow to automatically keep track of how much milk it delivers as well as other metrics.

Every time the cows are milked, their living areas are cleaned. They return to dry, clean bedding material (sometimes home grown wheat straw) and relax on heavy canvas cushions filled with wood chips or perhaps shredded rubber.

“Our animals supply the livelihood for several families,” says one dairy farmer. “You bet we treat ’em well.”

Farmers spend a good deal of their time and money growing the crops that keep their own cows healthy so they are able to produce between 75 and 90 pounds (8-10 gallons) of milk daily per animal. The largest farms in the area may grow forage crops on rented land and then sell those crops to other dairy farmers who do not have enough land to support their own small herds. They sometimes do custom planting and harvesting for other farmers who have enough land, but have chosen not to invest huge amounts in farm implements. With tractors costing \$100,000 or more; combines costing as

much as \$250,000, plus another \$50,000 for each cutting head; \$25,000 or more for a disk implement that breaks up the soil; and close to \$30,000 for a seed drill for planting, it's clear that equipment utilization rates must be kept high. Of course, that also requires a full-time mechanic to keep everything functioning and fuel to keep things running.

"Keep in mind that we consume 5,000 to 6,000 gallons of diesel fuel during the high seasons," says one large dairy farmer. "The price of milk has not escalated nearly as much as the price of fuel."

With production prices higher and the price of milk still hovering around \$20 for 100 pounds, dairy farmers have become experts at conserving energy. For instance, milk leaves the cow at about 100° Fahrenheit and must quickly be cooled. It is immediately piped through a small heat exchanger that is

cooled by regular well water at about 50 or 55 degrees. This "free cooling" lowers the milk temperature before it goes through a refrigeration machine that cools it to 40° or lower. The heat extracted from the milk isn't wasted. In another heat exchanger the well water is heated to 100° or more so that when the water finally reaches the barn's high-efficiency water heater less propane is needed to raise the water's final temperature.

"Our days and nights are busy," says one young dairy farmer. "Between feeding animals, bedding animals, milking cows, breeding cows, delivering calves, doing minor surgery, any electrical, plumbing, or heating chores, overseeing construction, maintenance

of all the tractors and equipment, we've also got the field work, and all the paperwork that goes with it making sure we're abiding by all the rules and regs that go along with this business."

"And we do all that while trying not to spend any money because milk futures look weak," he adds.

Owners are often up and around by 5:30 a.m. and the phone rings until 8:30 or 9 at night. But, they say, it's a life they love or they wouldn't be in farming.

**AN AVERAGE  
HOLSTEIN  
DAIRY COW  
WEIGHS ABOUT  
1,500 POUNDS,  
BUT PRODUCES  
MORE THAN  
10 TIMES HER  
WEIGHT IN MILK  
ANNUALLY.**

## GREEN, GREEN, GREEN

Farmers are, above all else, optimists. That is especially true of those who start from scratch every year growing grains, vegetables, and fruit. If everything goes according to plan, the peas will be in the ground by the end of March, with other vegetables and grain following, until everything is planted by the middle of July.

Up until the middle of June when the strawberry harvest begins, everything has been one huge, costly gamble—a true leap of faith. The ledger book is filled with red ink as farmers spend thousands to prepare, plant, and nurture the crops until harvest, protecting them against insects, fungus, and the uncontrollable element—weather. A summer hailstorm can wipe out a season's work in minutes.

The diversity of farms operating within Central New York is great. Some part-time farmers till an acre of vegetables and sell them at local farmers' markets. They are small, but they still meet the USDA definition of a farm since they sell \$1,000 worth of products. Others actively farm nearly 1000 acres, both owned and rented. With an operation that size they can afford to diversify and spread the risk as they market their crops through several outlets.

Much of the land in the area is devoted to corn and cabbage, the two largest cash crops. Nearly all of the corn is dried and sold to a local feed company, with a small portion being sold to an ethanol plant. Soybeans also go to the feed dealer. Unlike nearly anything else we buy, the farmer doesn't determine the market price of that corn or soybean crop. Prices are set more than 700 miles away on the trading floor of the Chicago Board of Trade that sells futures contracts and options. It adds yet another skill—commodity trading—to those already required to run a successful farm.

One area farmer hauls cabbage, 120 tons daily during the peak of the fall harvest, in two farmer-owned tractor-trailer trucks to a western New York company that makes sauerkraut. Some glorious heads of cabbage that look as if they belong in a sculpture gallery will be sold from the family's farm stand.



*The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food security as access by all people at all times to enough nutritious food for active, healthy life. It also has come to mean an ample, locally grown food supply.*

That same pair of tractor-trailer trucks will have already hauled tons of the farm's green beans to a Central New York food processor for use in canned and frozen form under well known brand names.



**NY IS RANKED  
1ST NATIONALLY  
FOR CREAMED  
COTTAGE CHEESE,  
LOW-FAT COTTAGE  
CHEESE, AND  
SOUR CREAM.**

**2ND FOR APPLES  
AND CABBAGE**

**3RD FOR MILK,  
WINE, GRAPE JUICE,  
AND CAULIFLOWER**

**4TH FOR SWEET  
CORN, PEAS  
CHERRIES, AND  
PEARS**

Their soft red winter wheat will go to a miller near Buffalo to be sold as pastry flour and perhaps used in cookies or piecrusts that come back to Central New York. The farm also supplies fresh snap beans, wax beans, cranberry beans, flat Italian beans, green peas, snow peas, sweet corn, green and yellow summer squash, four kinds of winter squash, pumpkins, Brussels sprouts (on the stalk, no less) and even popcorn.

“You need to try our popcorn,” the farm stand manager—who also happens to be the farmer’s wife—says. “The stuff you get nowadays in the microwave bags just doesn’t compare to the *real* popcorn.” (She’s right.)

The farm stand has at least quadrupled in size since this farmer’s grandmother started selling vegetables. Today a team of eight operates the outlet seven days a week during the summer and fall. The farm itself has three full-time employees, but hires as many as 30 people during the season because many of the vegetables are harvested by hand. Hand harvesting also applies to strawberries, raspberries, black raspberries, and blackberries. Finding local help to do

battle with the raspberry’s thorns is not always easy.

The farmer speaks with reverence of one tireless worker that’s been with them for 17 years and never complained—their pea sheller.

“We bought it in 1991 and it has never failed us,” the farmer says. “If you’ve ever shelled peas by hand you know what a task it is, but this little old machine can shell a bushel of peas in three minutes, and we get eight to 10 pounds of peas per bushel. We sell them in the stand by the bushel and in one-pound bags, and any we can’t sell immediately we truck to terminal markets in New York or Boston.”

Grain and vegetable growers have an easier schedule in the winter, but there is still equipment repair and maintenance to do on aging equipment

like combines, tractors, trucks, and various harvesters. They say they would love to put the farm to bed by Thanksgiving, but admit that it is not always possible.

“At least we don’t have to milk cows year-round like our dairy farmer friends,” one says.

But there is wintertime paperwork and planning to be done for the next planting and growing seasons. Farmers have some help on this aspect of the operation, thanks to combines equipped with onboard computers that keep track of which fields are being mowed, how many acres have been harvested, and the yield per acre. The farmer’s hand-held computer can be programmed with data from the combine’s computer as well as cost figures to determine just how profitable each field has been.

Another element of planning that can’t be known ahead of time, besides the weather and the future price of corn, is the farmer’s cost of doing business. It’s that single unknown that occupies the farmer on Central New York’s cold dark winter nights.

“The cost of fertilizer two years ago was \$150 to \$200 a ton,” one farmer said. “This year it was \$900 a ton, and expected to go up considerably. Fuel costs have been as high as \$5 a gallon, and our usage is approaching 30,000 gallons a year. We’ve expanded our farm by buying other land, but the land I bought six years ago for \$1,000 an acre would now cost up to \$2,500 an acre. The math is simple.”

Equipment costs have gone up, too. A new combine sells for around \$250,000. The ‘heads’, one for harvesting grains, the other for corn, are \$50,000 each. A 250-hp, four-wheel-drive tractor would cost \$300,000 to replace. Each one has six tires and a set would cost \$9,000. A pair of combine tires sells for about \$7,000.

“That’s why I buy only used equipment and machinery, but even that’s not cheap,” he adds.

Farming’s cost structure has forced some families to supplement their income with non-farm income.

“It’s sad that we’ve had to look at non-farm income to help us keep this business going, but with prices rising like this, we have to take advantage of every option. It’s not like we can begin charging \$10 for a dozen ears of sweet corn. Our neighbors have tried to be understanding when we had to raise prices at the farm stand this season. If fertilizer and fuel costs continue to go up, and commodity prices go lower, I’m afraid a lot of people are going to be out of business.”

The farm, he and his wife say, still has many advantages. It has helped put four children through college with another about to enter. They don’t have



*Farmers' markets  
are favorite summer  
weekend destinations  
for many Central  
New Yorkers.*

to drive to work each day, and they like the independence of being in charge, making their own decisions, shaping, so far, their own destiny.

“It’s in your blood and you’ve got to love it,” he added. “It is very fulfilling when what you’ve planted in the spring is harvested. It’s a rewarding sense of accomplishment. And when your customers compliment you on the quality of the food we produce, it’s very gratifying. Like I said earlier, we’re still the original optimists.”

## **AGRITOURISM – COME ON IN!**

Agritourism is often described as the crossroads where agriculture and tourism meet. Given the fact they are two of New York’s largest industries, a growing number of Central New York farmers are choosing to combine the two in a wide variety of ways.

Look at it this way, why buy just a pumpkin at the supermarket in the fall when you can take the whole family for a drive in the country for the day. You’ll buy the pumpkin, of course, but there’s also the opportunity to:

- pet a goat or a cute little calf;
- spend 45 minutes finding your way out of a corn maze (*Hmmm, would that be a maize maze?*);
- pick your own apples;
- see the awed looks on your kids’ faces as they watch an antique cider press turn bushels of apples into mush and gallons of juice;
- take a hayride;
- ride a pony;
- show the kids where milk *really* comes from;
- and to cap off the day, do something *you* always wanted to do—launch a ripe pumpkin from a home-made catapult!

Throughout Onondaga and Madison counties thousands of local residents and out-of-county visitors are providing fun for their families and a new

income stream for farmers willing to take a step outside the box and invite the public onto their farms.

“We’re not just selling Christmas trees, or pumpkins, or apples, or maple syrup,” says one agritourism convert, “we are selling a day of entertainment and family fun. It has become a place where people like to hang out for a few hours on weekends in the spring, fall, even in the winter.”

Says another who runs a U-pick berry operation: “It goes much deeper than just selling berries. Our customers could buy their berries in the grocery store, but the berries are just as likely to be from South America as they are from Upstate New York. This way, our customers know exactly where their berries are grown, and who grows them. We’re their neighbors, and we know many of them, and their children or grandchildren, on a first-name basis. Besides, it’s fun to take a couple of hours out in the sunshine in search of the ‘perfect’ berry.”

Some local apple growers with agritourism operations have diversified and opened wineries that offer varietal apple and fruit wines to complement sales of hard cider. The attraction (beyond the taste, of course) is knowing where the wines originate and being able to buy a unique local product.

Agritourism is not for everyone, however. First of all, it is farming with all of farming’s risks, uncertainties, and hard physical and fiscal work. When farmers encourage the public to visit their farms and bring their families it introduces a whole different set of challenges at several different layers.

Questions to be answered include the ordinary *How do I make the farm a safe places for visitors?* And the not-so-ordinary *Where am I going to park anywhere from 25 to 600 cars, depending on the size of my operation, and make sure they don’t create backups on the road that are going to create safety problems or upset my neighbors?*

Farm visits and direct sales to the public are seldom the only income stream in an agritourism operation. While pumpkins are of great interest to families around Halloween, and attract local visitors to farms, they are expensive to grow because they take a lot of space, so growers depend on wholesaling them to surrounding states. And while hundreds of local families turn their selection of a Christmas tree into a half-day event, farmers rely on out-of-area and out-of-state sales of both cut and ball-and-burlap trees to sustain their business. They also sell seedlings grown from seeds they have collected in the wild.

Even though many agritourism operations are small and do not supply a farmer’s total income, they are still important contributors to the area and state economy. The next time you pick a pumpkin or a peck of apples, keep in mind that you’re contributing to what has become a multi-million dollar industry in New York State.

## ORGANIC

Organic farmers raise many of the same crops and livestock as conventional farmers, but do so with detailed attention to natural biological processes. They use no synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, nor genetically engineered seeds. No antibiotics or growth hormones can be administered to livestock. During the growing season the livestock must graze on pasture, and the grains and hay they eat when they are unable to graze must also be certified as organically grown. Each farm is inspected annually by a United States Department of Agriculture-accredited agency to make sure the farmer is following USDA organic regulations.

Organic farming is sophisticated, yet at the same time represents a step back in time to more traditional methods that existed before the advent of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides.

Says one organic farmer who raises hay, grasses, and small grains primarily for local organic dairy farmers, “We concentrate on soil health and productivity by depending on crop rotation and naturally occurring chemicals like lime or rock phosphates.”

When the yield of a field that has been in hay and mixed grasses for a few years begins to decline, the farmer plants winter rye in the late fall as a cover crop that keeps weeds to a minimum and keeps the soil friable. The rye is harvested and sold in the first part of August and another crop of rye is planted in September. Instead of harvesting it the next August, however, in April the farmer plows the juvenile rye plants back into the soil, fertilizing the field with what farmers call “green manure.” The cycle begins again with the planting of grasses.

Although many organic farmers say they just plain don't like the thought of synthetic chemicals and their effects on the environment, there are strong economic reasons as well. Small grains and hay, says one organic farmer, sell for anywhere from 50 to 75 percent more than conventionally produced crops. Likewise, the price of organically produced milk may fetch nearly twice the price of conventionally produced milk. There's one organic farmer who even sells his rye at a premium to a New York distillery producing organic whiskey. Prices are demand driven and the demand for organic products is rapidly growing as consumers exhibit a willingness to pay more for them.

The higher prices that organically farmed crops and milk bring have another advantage, too. They can help keep smaller farmers in business. Says a farmer who sells much of his crop to dairy farmers: “With organic milk or organic meat, a small farmer can make a go of it with fewer head of livestock. The same is true for smaller field crop and vegetable growers, as well.”

**“HOWDY, NEIGHBOR.  
IS THAT A HEREFORD  
OR A HEIFER?”**

**“BOTH.”**

Drive the rural areas of Onondaga and Madison counties some weekend afternoon and you might be surprised at the number of new homes that have been built on five or ten acres of land. Many of them are surrounded by lawn or a mix of lawn and woodland—some, of course, abut working farms or acreage planted in corn, soybeans, or alfalfa.

The growth of these so-called “farmettes” on what used to be agricultural land is part of a phenomenon many call “sprawl without growth.” Residential lots deposited in agricultural settings are often not the result of a growing population relentlessly driving the suburban edge ever outward, but result from a desire by owners to enjoy the perceived benefits of life in the country—open spaces, inspiring views, quiet, and a sense of freedom.

This non-farm development on agricultural land has several possible side effects on farmers’ ability to farm.

Residential lots in rural areas tend to raise the price of nearby undeveloped land. Higher land costs can stop existing farmers from expanding if they need to, and can drive land out of a new farmer’s price range. When residential lots are created at random it can cut up what once used to be a large field into smaller blocks that make it difficult or uneconomical to farm. One dairy farmer tells of new homes fairly close to the road that have cut off convenient access to some of his land that is under cultivation. Fertile soils, especially in Central New York, are a finite resource. Residential development on prime land removes that fertile soil from the “bank” from which farmers draw.

Says that same farmer: “There’s nothing wrong with planting houses in the country, as long as the builder or owner doesn’t plant them in valuable soil best used for growing crops.”

Residents who move to agricultural areas are sometimes surprised at what comes along with their little patch of the country. These surprises can sometimes create conflict between farmers and non-farming neighbors.

Farms are businesses, but unlike most businesses their schedules are set

by nature. The expression, ‘make hay while the sun shines’ still applies, so non-farming neighbors may sometimes be affected by these odd schedules. When conditions are right, farmers harvest—even at night. Combines, like giant diesel-powered digestive systems on wheels, often create noise and dust when operating, so if the wind is right, non-farming neighbors may notice the effects.

Today’s dairy farms are nearly round-the-clock operations since some cows are milked three times a day. The process is fairly quiet, but bright indoor and outdoor lights may occasionally disturb some neighbors’ sleep patterns. With the size of milk tankers growing, rural residents can expect there will be some daily truck traffic.

And then there are those barnyard smells. Farm livestock produces manure that is usually spread on fields as fertilizer for grass and grain crops that in turn are either fed to livestock or sold. Depending on which way the wind blows, you may smell it. It can be fairly common to find yourself at some point driving behind a slow-moving manure spreader on area roads.

Other farm implements also move slowly. They are geared for power, not speed, so it makes sense to lower your speed as you approach one either from the back or front. Machinery sometimes takes up more than a single lane, as well. If there is a safe place to pass, be considerate and give the farmer a wide berth. There are a growing number of Amish farmers in Central New York who use horse-drawn vehicles for transportation or farming. When you encounter them, slow down, give them ample space, and avoid using your horn.



*Residential development in primarily agricultural areas is increasing in Central New York and, under most circumstances, co-exists nicely.*



*The number of these signs is steadily growing on local roads as hard-working Amish farmers find their way to Central New York. Ironically, many of these farmers were driven to find new farmsteads by the very things this book highlights. Young farmers just starting out and established farmers wanting to expand were forced to look elsewhere because few could afford the rapidly increasing land prices fueled by residential development on prime agricultural land.*

These interactions between working farmers and non-farming residents are not unlike the lyrics from Rogers & Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma*:

*The farmer and the cowman should be friends.  
Oh, the farmer and the cowman should be friends.  
One man likes to push a plough, the other likes to chase a cow,  
But that's no reason why they can't be friends.*

Deadly range wars existed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries between ranchers that wanted unfenced land on which to graze beef cattle, and farmers seeking to protect their fields with fences and restrict water rights. The federal government tried to end these conflicts by passing the Taylor

Grazing Act, which established grazing districts on unused federal land. All fifty states have now created agricultural districts and right-to-farm laws that protect farmers' rights to operate their businesses.



**NEW YORK  
PRODUCED  
322,000  
GALLONS OF  
MAPLE SYRUP  
IN 2008,  
SECOND ONLY  
TO VERMONT.**

In Onondaga County there are four agricultural districts encompassing 176,000 acres of land in parts of every town except Geddes and Salina. In Madison County, there are 13 agricultural districts covering 153,000 acres. The right-to-farm laws protect farmers from local anti-nuisance ordinances and unreasonable controls on their farming operations. These laws also enhance their legal position should neighbors sue them for creating a private nuisance. In essence, right-to-farm laws put non-farmers on notice that various farming practices, like spreading manure or switching on security lights at dusk, are to be expected when people are living in an agricultural district. When new residents move into an agricultural district, realtors are supposed to let them

know about some of the activities they may encounter.

Perhaps the best way to minimize conflicts is to get to know nearby farmers, and understand their practices and the principles behind them. Nearly all farmers are anxious to be understood and are often willing to give tours of their farms while explaining why they do what they do, and when.

# SAFEGUARDING AGRICULTURAL LAND

There's a tendency to take farms and farmers for granted. We presume they have always been around, so why worry about them now? The numbers tell us otherwise.

Many local farms are slowly being taken over by non-farm development. It's difficult to see, however, because of the leisurely pace at which such development moves. If some sort of satellite time-lapse photography covering the last 40 years in a minute or two were available, the transformation would have been much more dramatic and might have shocked us into action before now.

Existing farmland needs protection, but the reasons why bear repeating:

- Farms are local businesses that create jobs and contribute to the local economy through purchases of goods and services. It is worth remembering that agriculture is Upstate New York's largest industry.
- In repeated cost-of-services studies, farms have been shown to generate more local tax revenue than they require in services, and that helps keep a lid on taxes for non-farm residents.
- Not only do farmers spend locally, they attract visitors to the community who also spend locally. Agritourism is a rapidly growing source of farm-generated income for Central New York communities.
- Farmers have always been known as the first environmentalists, and modern soil management practices help guard waterways and protect aquifers that supply drinking water to non-farm users.
- Communities with access to farmers' markets and farm stands enjoy the freshness and health benefits of locally grown meat, dairy, fruits, grains, and vegetables. This is a great benefit in itself but, on a far more serious level, keeping local agriculture vibrant contributes to the nation's long-term food security. Industry insiders predict times when more and more of Central New York's food and fiber will be grown locally—providing, of course, there is still enough farmland on which it can be grown.

It's hard to argue with the reasoning behind farmland protection. Yet it is readily apparent looking at the decline in the number of acres devoted to local

farming over the past few decades, that an active—not passive—approach to farmland protection is necessary if we want to put the brakes on the gradual disappearance of our agricultural bounty. It requires thoughtful, active planning and vigorous follow-through to achieve results that satisfy each constituency’s diverse goals. The key is convincing farm and non-farm community leaders and policy makers to act before it’s too late.

While the reasons behind the need for planning are obvious and easily understood, the planning process and various farmland protection tools themselves are more complicated and require understanding, dedication and participation by both farm and non-farm communities. There is help.

The American Farmland Trust, a national, not-for-profit organization

**BETWEEN 1950  
AND 2003,  
FARMLAND IN  
ONONDAGA  
AND MADISON  
COUNTIES WAS  
CUT IN HALF,  
FROM 652,400  
ACRES TO  
324,200 ACRES.**

whose goals are to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote environmentally sound farming practices, has published a detailed *Guide to Local Planning for Agriculture in New York*. The 62-page guide offers a thorough digest of how communities throughout the state, including Central New York, have used a variety of planning approaches and tools to achieve their diverse farmland preservation goals. Above all it emphasizes that, given the staggering diversity of New York’s towns and agricultural profiles, no two situations are likely to be the same, although these *general* principles that support planning for agriculture will fit nearly every community.

- First is an understanding and appreciation of the economic, tax, environmental, historical, and quality-of-life aspects that farms provide local towns.
- Municipalities must also work to provide a positive business climate for farming through policies and regulations that support opportunities unique to agriculture.
- Tax policies can also boost farm profitability, thereby improving chances that farms will remain economically viable for their owners. Cost-of-services studies prove that farms, unlike residential development, yield a net property tax profit to communities because they pay more in taxes than they receive in services.
- Not all farmland is the same. New York State’s intent with its agricultural

districts and other tools is to protect large parcels of prime lands and keep them in production. Towns are also encouraged to identify prime land for protection.

- Protecting prime farmland doesn't mean that towns must say "no" to non-farm development. Town leaders, however, can guide the appropriate location of new non-farm development so it does not conflict with good farmland.

## **FARMLAND PROTECTION TOOLS: NO TRACTORS OR COMBINES HERE**

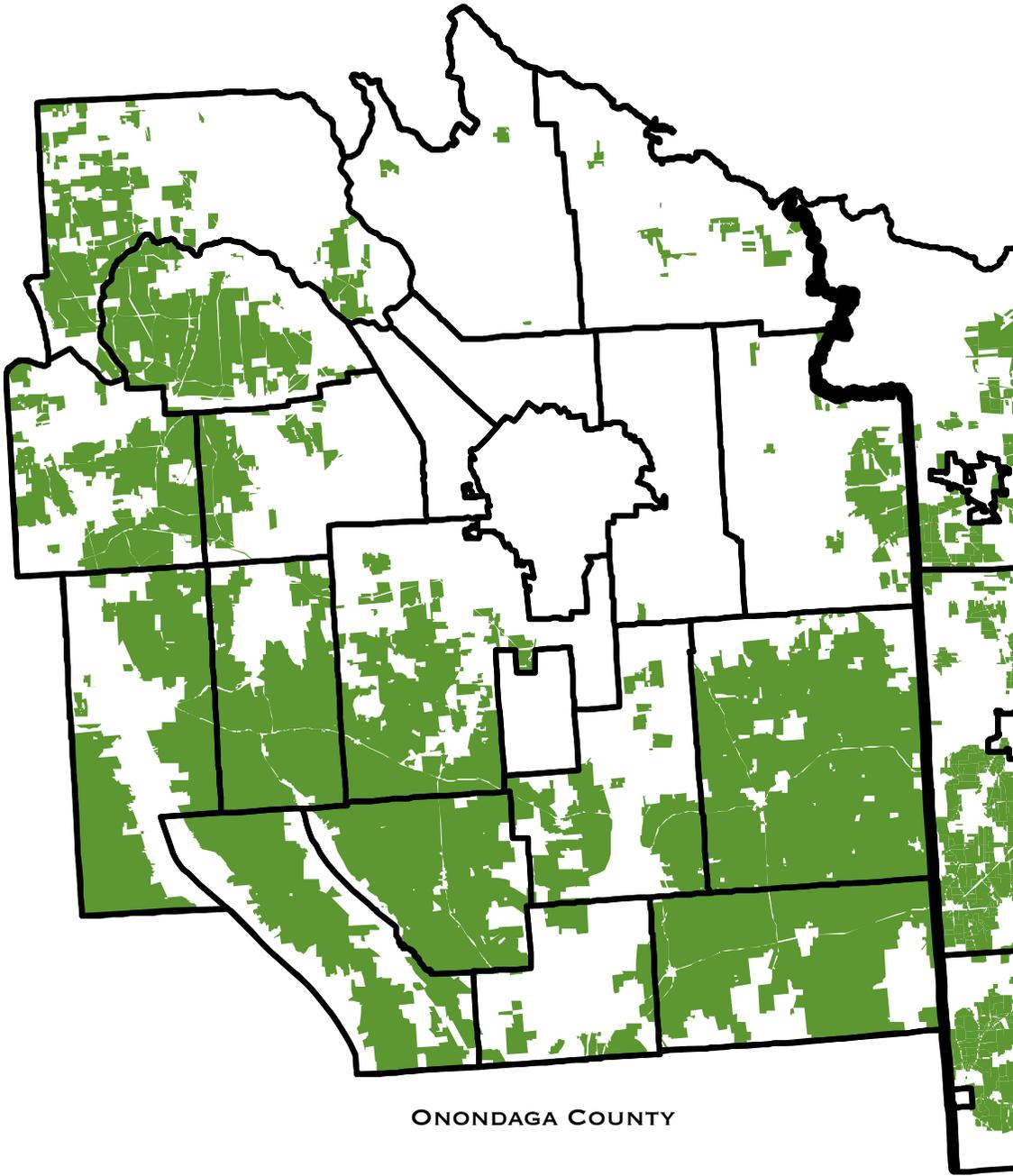
Individual farmers, groups of farmers, and communities that recognize the value of preserving farmland have a variety of tools available to help them achieve their goals. However, just as more than one tool might be needed to complete a job, different strategies can be utilized for specific objectives.

**Agricultural Districts** are probably the most widely used tool, both nationwide and in New York State, to make it easier for farmers to survive in areas in which non-farm development threatens. According to the latest figures available, New York has 341 agricultural districts containing about 21,500 farms and 8.6 million acres of land—about 30 percent of the state. Locally, there are four agricultural districts in Onondaga County covering 176,000 acres, and 13 districts in Madison County containing 153,000 acres. Onondaga County recently consolidated its districts to reduce administrative efforts and Madison County is considering a similar move.

Agricultural districts are intended to encourage farmers to keep their land in agricultural production. When a farmer applies and meets the criteria to be included in an agricultural district they are automatically eligible for incentives that create a more favorable operating climate. The district can also protect them from excessively restrictive local laws or lawsuits from their non-farming neighbors regarding farm practices.

The "carrot" portion of this law allows farmers to receive real property tax assessments based on the value of their land for agricultural uses rather than on its development value. According to the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, farmers statewide save about \$70 million annually under this provision. Farmland value is based on soil types, and typically ranges from \$31 to \$1,240 an acre.

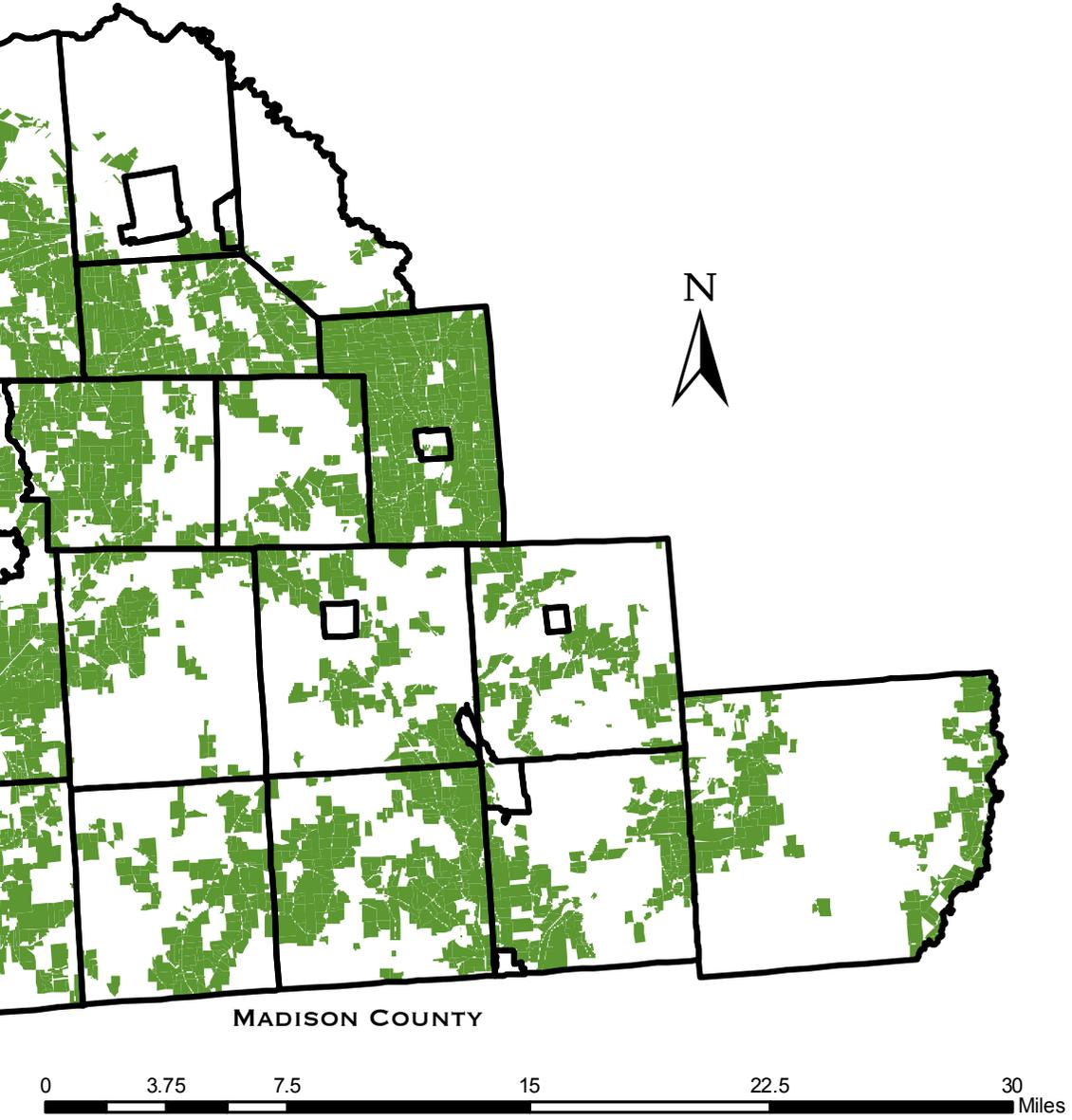
The agricultural district law protects farmers from local laws that unreasonably restrict their farming operations. The Department of Agriculture and Markets works with municipalities to modify any laws that are considered unreasonably restrictive. State and local government



ONONDAGA COUNTY

# MADISON AND ONONDAGA COUNTIES AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS

Map Prepared by the Madison County Planning Department



agencies are required to give advance notice and avoid adverse impacts on farming whenever they are planning a project within an agricultural district. Additionally, anyone selling a property within an agricultural district must provide the prospective buyer with a disclosure notice warning about possible noise, dust, and odors that might arise from nearby farming operations.

While the state's agricultural district law contains several "carrots" for farmers, it's not without "sticks." If any portion of the land that has been placed under agricultural assessment is converted to non-farm use within a set time period, the farmer may be required to repay a portion of the taxes that would have been collected had it been assessed on a full market value basis.

**Town Level Right-to-Farm laws** are often enacted to supplement the protections offered under the state's Agricultural District law. According to the American Farmland Trust, right-to-farm laws "document the importance of farming to the town and put non-farm rural residents on notice that generally accepted agricultural practices are to be expected."

Both the agricultural district law and town-level right-to-farm laws go a long way toward creating a favorable operating climate for farmers, and giving them an incentive to keep their land in agriculture. The main drawback, however, is that it does not prevent the land from being converted to a non-farm use.

Other aspects of community planning—such as comprehensive plans, zoning and subdivision ordinances—can contribute to farmland protection in many ways. Comprehensive plans can sketch an overall view that identifies the best areas in which agriculture, as well as non-farm development, make the most long-term sense. For instance, it would be counterproductive to encourage residential or commercial development on sites with the best agricultural soils.

Once a comprehensive plan that recognizes the importance of retaining farmland is created, more focused zoning and subdivision regulations can be used to promote creative opportunities for residential or commercial development, while still respecting the need for working farms on the best soils. Although zoning and subdivision rarely offer farmland permanent protection from conversion to non-farm uses, there are tools that do.

**Purchase of Development Rights**—commonly called PDRs—protect farmland permanently and keep it under private ownership. PDRs, which include a conservation easement, offer farmers a one-time payment in exchange for permanently giving up their right to develop their land for any purpose other than agriculture. Conservation easements traditionally "run with the land" and remain attached to the property regardless of how many

times it is sold. PDRs are popular because they allow owners to take equity out of their farm that can be used for a variety of purposes. Some farmers have used the proceeds from PDRs to purchase more land. Other farmers use proceeds from a PDR to pay off debt so that increased cash flow can be utilized for other purposes. Farmers nearing retirement age view PDRs as a way to fund their retirement while keeping the cost of the farm affordable for sons, daughters, or young farmers just starting out. Still others do it for more subtle, emotional reasons. They are so committed to the land that they want to insure that whatever they leave behind is going to be permanently protected.

How does a PDR work? Payment that will be made to the farm's owner is generally determined by subtracting the appraised value of the farm for agricultural uses from the farm's fair market value if sold to a developer. If, for example, the property could be sold to a developer for \$1 million, but its value as a farm is \$200,000, then the farmer might receive \$800,000 for extinguishing the land's development rights. The New York State Farmland Protection Program currently funds the purchase of development rights at the 75 percent level, so the state would pay \$600,000 of the \$800,000 appraised value of the development rights.

The remainder would be funded by a third party or, as is often the case, donated by the farmer. If the value of the development rights was pegged at \$800,000, the farmer would donate 25 percent, or \$200,000. By the time the farmer pays fees and other costs associated with the PDR, his final check would amount to about \$550,000. In some cases, municipalities anxious to preserve important parcels of agricultural land may bond the entire project. In others, real estate transfer taxes have been used to fund the remainder.

The state invites proposals annually and, not surprisingly, demand for PDRs is greater than the money available to fund them. In 2008, 68 proposals were submitted to protect agricultural land across New York State. Those proposals totaled about \$80 million; \$30 million was available in state funding.

PDRs can be time consuming. Farmers can expect to wait six months before they learn whether or not the state has approved their proposal.

**BUYING LOCAL  
FOOD IS A  
BETTER VALUE.  
YOU PAY FOR  
FRESHNESS  
AND FLAVOR,  
NOT PACKAGING,  
FREIGHT, AND  
REFRIGERATION.**

After that, it might take two or three years before they receive a check. It is a very complicated real estate transaction.

Once a PDR has been granted, it must be monitored to make sure all requirements of the agreement are met. A municipal body can do the monitoring, but most have neither the expertise nor the personnel, so a common arrangement is for a land trust to work with a municipality to “hold” the easement and provide the necessary follow-up and monitoring actions. Land trusts can be local, regional, national, or international in scope and are important partners in preserving productive agricultural lands.

**Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)** programs allow landowners to sever the development rights from a particular piece of property and sell them. Purchasers are usually other landowners who want to increase the density of their developments. Local governments may also buy development rights in order to control price, design details, or restrict growth.

There are several other ways to protect farmland either permanently or temporarily. The first step toward preserving farmland is to develop a community consensus that agricultural activity is important for economic, environmental, food security, and aesthetic reasons. When that happens, an important part of the battle has been won, even though much of the hard work of choosing the correct farmland protection tool and applying it has just begun.

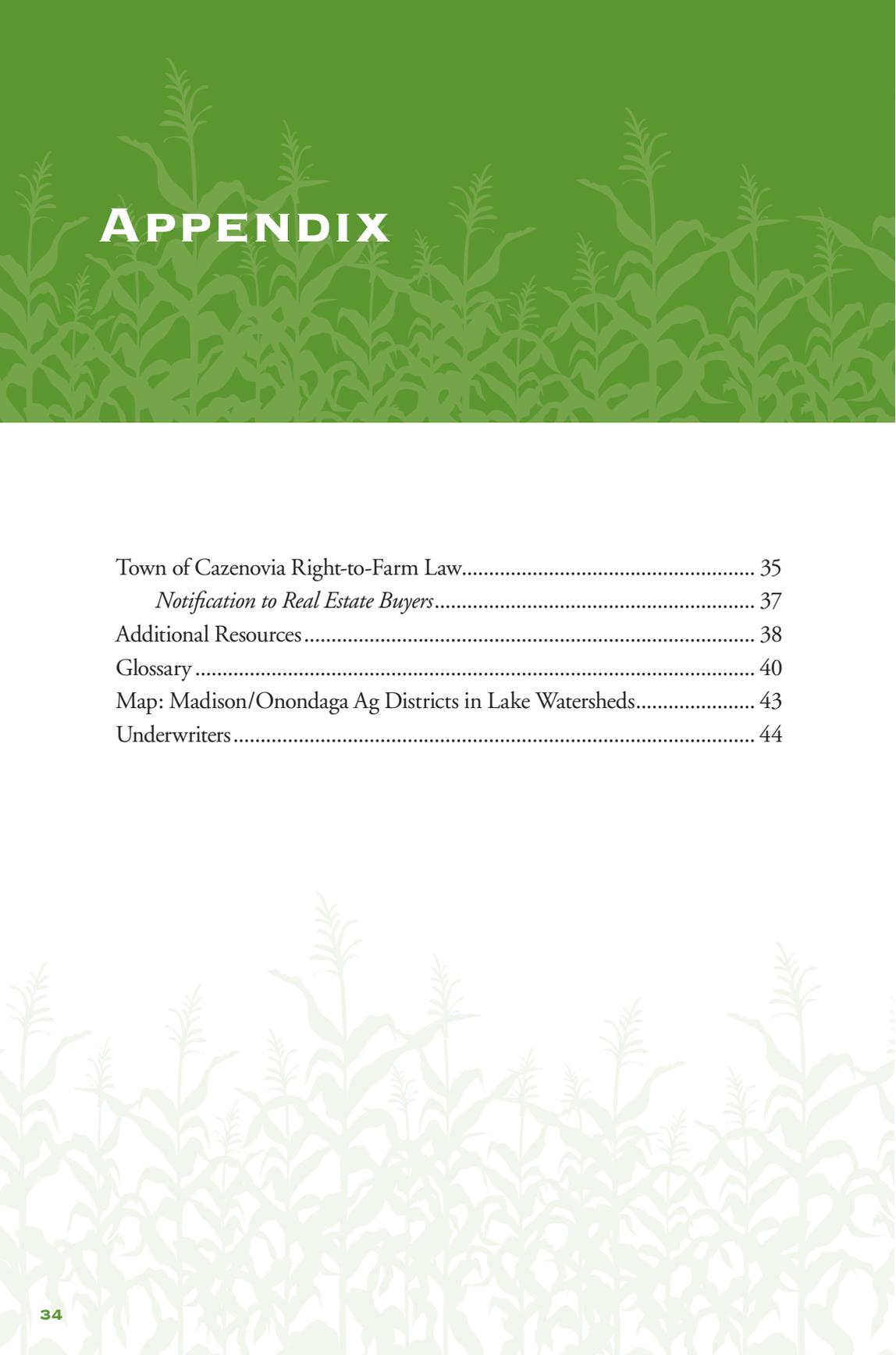
# TAKING THE NEXT STEP

At first glance, there appears to be a real chasm between farmers and those of us who hardly know the difference between a Holstein and a Hereford. We use a different vocabulary. We wear different clothes to work. Some of us work regular schedules, while time for some of us is regulated more by nature than the watches on our wrists. The fact is, however, that we share far more similarities than differences.

Whether we drive a Chevy or a John Deere to work, we're all seeking the opportunity to earn a living wage to care for our families and provide some of the extras that make life a little more enjoyable. We're all hoping there will be enough assets left over in retirement to carry us through our "golden years" and perhaps some to pass along after we're gone.

While we have chosen to follow different paths, we chase the same goals. Farmer and non-farmer depend on each other to reach those goals in the end. The problem is simple. We are slowly but surely losing the farms and farmland on which we grow the food and fiber that nourishes us all.

The solution is far more complex. Whatever solutions we choose (and there are many) they will start by understanding each other's needs and then working together to plan ahead for the preservation of prime agricultural land *and* the development we need to sustain the non-farm elements of our economy. One thing is for sure: if we don't first understand the need for a strong, local agricultural economy and then actively plan for its future, the cycle will continue as it has been. None of us can afford to let that happen.

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of corn plants in various shades of green. The top half of the page has a darker green background, while the bottom half is white with a lighter green pattern.

# APPENDIX

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# Town of Cazenovia's Right-to-Farm Law

## Local Law No. 7 2007

### Section 1. Legislative Intent and Purpose

The Town Board recognizes that farming is an essential enterprise and an important industry that enhances the economic base, natural environment and quality of life in the Town of Cazenovia. The Town Board further declares that it shall be the policy of the Town to encourage agriculture and foster understanding by all residents of the necessary day-to-day operations involved in farming so as to encourage cooperation with those practices.

It is the general purpose and intent of this law to maintain and preserve the rural traditions and character of the Town, to permit the continuation of agricultural practices, to protect the existence and operation of farms, to encourage the initiation and expansion of farms and agri-businesses, and to promote new ways to resolve disputes concerning agricultural practices and farm operations. In order to maintain a viable farming economy in the Town of Cazenovia, it is necessary to limit the circumstances under which farming might be deemed to be a nuisance and to allow agricultural practices inherent to, and necessary for, the business of farming to be able to proceed, and to be undertaken free of unreasonable and unwarranted interference or restriction.

### Section 2. Definitions

1. "Farmland" shall mean land used in agricultural production, as defined in section 301 (4) of Article 25AA of New York State Agriculture and Markets Law.
2. "Farmer" shall mean any person, organization, entity, association, partnership, limited liability company, or corporation engaged in the business of agriculture, whether for profit or otherwise, including the cultivation of land, raising of crops or raising of livestock.
3. "Agricultural products" shall mean those products as defined in section 301 (2) of Article 25AA of New York State Agriculture and Markets Law including, but not limited to:
  - a. Field crops, including corn, wheat, rye, barley, hay, potatoes and dry beans
  - b. Fruits, including apples, peaches, grapes, cherries and berries
  - c. Vegetables, including tomatoes, snap beans or peas, cabbage, carrots, beets and onions
  - d. Horticultural specialties, including nursery stock, ornamental shrubs, ornamental trees and flowers

- e. Livestock and livestock products, including cattle, sheep, hogs, goats, horses, poultry, llamas, ratites such as ostriches, emus, rheas and kiwis, farmed deer and buffalo, fur-bearing animals, milk and milk products, eggs, furs. and poultry products
  - f. Maple sap and sugar products
  - g. Christmas trees derived from a managed Christmas tree operation whether dug for transplanting or cut from the stump
  - h. Aquaculture products, including fish, fish products, water plants and shellfish
  - i. Short rotation woody crops raised for bio-energy, and
  - j. Production and sale of woodland products including, but not limited to, logs, lumber, posts and firewood.
4. “Agricultural practices” shall mean those practices necessary for the on-farm production, preparation and marketing of agricultural commodities. Examples of such practices include, but are not limited to, operation of farm equipment, proper use of agricultural chemicals and other crop production methods, and construction and use of farm structures.
5. “Farm operation” shall be as defined in section 301 (11) in the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law.

### **Section 3. Right-to-Farm Declaration**

Farmers, as well as those employed, retained or otherwise authorized to act on behalf of farmers, may lawfully engage in agricultural practices within this Town at all times and all such locations as are reasonably necessary to conduct the business of agriculture. For any agricultural practice, in determining the reasonableness of the time, place and methodology of such practice, due weight and consideration shall be given to both traditional customs and procedures in the farming industry as well as to advances resulting from increased knowledge, research, and improved technologies.

Agricultural practices conducted on farmland shall not be found to be a public or private nuisance if such agricultural practices are:

1. Reasonable and necessary to the particular farm or farm operation
2. Conducted in a manner that is not negligent or reckless
3. Conducted in conformity with generally accepted and sound agricultural practices
4. Conducted in conformity with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations
5. Conducted in a manner that does not constitute a threat to public health and safety or cause injury to the health or safety of any person, and

6. Conducted in a manner that does not reasonably obstruct the free passage or use of navigable waters or public roadways.

Nothing in this local law shall be construed to prohibit an aggrieved party from recovering damages for bodily injury or wrongful death due to a failure to follow sound agricultural practice, as outlined in this section.

#### **Section 4. Notification to Real Estate Buyers**

In order to promote harmony between farmers and their neighbors, the Town requires land holders and/or their agents and assigns to comply with section 310 of Article 25AA of New York State Agriculture and Markets Law, and provide notice to prospective purchasers and occupants as follows: “It is the policy of this state and this community to conserve, protect, and encourage the development and improvement of agricultural land for the production of food and other products, and also for its natural and ecological value. This notice is to inform prospective residents that the property they are about to acquire lies partially or wholly within an agricultural district, or partially or wholly adjacent to areas where farm operations take place, and that farming activities occur within the district and within these other areas. Such farming activities might include, but not be limited to, activities that cause noise, dust and odors.” This notice shall be provided to prospective purchasers of property within an agricultural district or on property with boundaries within 500 feet of an agricultural district or a farm operation that might be located outside a designated agricultural district.

A copy of this notice shall be included by the seller or seller’s agent as an addendum to the purchase and sale contract at the time an offer to purchase is made.

#### **Section 5. Severability Clause**

If any or part of this local law is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such decision shall not affect the remainder of this Local Law. The Town hereby declares that it would have passed this local law and each section and subsection thereof, irrespective of the fact they any one or more of these sections, subsections, sentences, clauses or phrases may be declared unconstitutional or invalid.

#### **Section 6. Precedence**

This Local Law and its provisions are in addition to all other applicable laws, rules and regulations.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**American Farmland Trust**

<http://www.farmland.org>

**Cazenovia Preservation Foundation**

[www.cazpreservation.org](http://www.cazpreservation.org)

**Environmental Protection Agency**

[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

**FarmLink**

<http://www.nyfarmlink.org>

**FarmNet**

<http://www.nyfarmnet.org>

**“Farms, Communities, and Collaboration:  
A Guide to Resolving Farm-Neighbor Conflict.”**

[http://www.cdtoolbox.net/agriculture\\_economic\\_development/000169.html](http://www.cdtoolbox.net/agriculture_economic_development/000169.html)

**Finger Lakes Land Trust**

[www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org)

**Madison County Agricultural Economic Development**

<http://www.madisoncountyagriculture.com>

**Madison County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan**

<http://www.madisoncounty.org/motf/ExhU.pdf>

**Madison County Office of Cornell Cooperative Extension**  
<http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/madison>

**Madison County Soil & Water Conservation District**  
<http://madisoncountyswcd.org>

**New York Agricultural Land Trust**  
[www.nyalt.org](http://www.nyalt.org)

**NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets**  
<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us>

**NYS Farmland Protection Program**  
[www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/farmlandprotection.html](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/farmlandprotection.html)

**Oneida Lake Watershed Agricultural Program**  
<http://www.cnyrpdb.org/ONEIDALAKE/programs/ag.asp>

**Onondaga County Office of Cornell Cooperative Extension**  
<http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/onondaga>

**Onondaga County Municipal Reference for Land Use Planning**  
[http://www.cdtoolbox.net/government\\_policies/000205.html](http://www.cdtoolbox.net/government_policies/000205.html)

**Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District**  
<http://www.ocswcd.org>

**Save The County Land Trust**  
[www.savethecounty.org](http://www.savethecounty.org)

**Southern Madison Heritage Trust**  
[www.smht.org/index.html](http://www.smht.org/index.html)

**United States Department of Agriculture**  
[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

# GLOSSARY

**Agricultural district**—Widely used tool both nationwide and in New York State to make it easier for farmers to survive in areas in which non-farm development threatens. Farmers must apply and meet the criteria to be included in an agricultural district; incentives may include reduced taxes and protection from excessively restrictive local laws or lawsuits from their non-farming neighbors about farming practices.

**Agritourism**—The practice of attracting travelers or visitors to an area or areas used primarily for agricultural purposes. Like eco-tourism, it is often small-scale, low-impact, and education-focused.

**CAFO**—Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, administered by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, requires farmers to develop nutrient management plans to manage land application of byproducts and chemicals, and to manage soil erosion.

**Calf**—Very young cow or bull of domestic cattle.

**Certified organic**—Producer who has met requirements that involve a set of standards for growing, storage, processing, packaging, and shipping. Includes avoidance of most synthetic chemicals, use of farmland that has been free from chemicals for a number of years, detailed production and sales records, and undergoing periodic on-site inspections.

**Combine**—A machine that *combines* the tasks of harvesting, threshing, and cleaning grain crops. Also known as a thresher.

**Conservation easement**—A legally enforceable land preservation agreement between a property owner and a government agency or land trust.

**Cover crop**—Plantings used to manage soil fertility, soil quality, water, weeds, pests, diseases, and wildlife.

**Cow**—Adult female, grass-eating quadruped, raised as a farm animal for milk it produces or for breeding.

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**—A federal agency whose task is to lead the nation’s environmental science, research, education, and assessment efforts. Since 1970, the mission of the EPA has been to protect human health and the environment.

**Farm**—An area of land, including various structures, devoted primarily to producing and managing food or livestock.

**Farmer’s Pledge™**— Farmers who choose not to become “certified organic,” but who still demonstrate a commitment to ecologically sound farm practices, responsible labor practices, and local marketing, may take this pledge administered by the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA).

**Farm Stand/Farmers’ market**—Sometimes called greenmarkets, are markets, usually held out-of-doors, in public spaces, or on private farms where farmers can sell their products to the public.

**Food security**—Traditionally refers to the availability of food and one’s access to it; a household is “food secure” if they do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. Today’s definition has also come to mean understanding where your food is grown and that it is safe to eat.

**Fresh cow**—One that has recently calved and is able to give milk.

**Heifer**—A young cow, especially one that has never had a calf.

**Organic**—Relating to or employing agricultural practices that avoid the use of synthetic chemicals in favor of naturally occurring pesticides, fertilizers, and other growing aids. “Certified organic” means that food products are grown according to U.S. Department of Agriculture organic regulations.

**PDR**—Abbreviation for purchase of development rights, a legal instrument used to protect farmland permanently and keep it under private ownership. PDRs often include a conservation easement and offer farmers a one-time payment in exchange for permanently giving up their right to develop their land for any purpose other than agriculture.

**No-till**—Method of growing crops from year to year without disturbing the soil by plowing or turning it. Also call zero-tillage.

**Right-to-farm**—Laws, traditionally approved at the town or local level, that limit the circumstances under which farming might be deemed to be a nuisance and that allow agricultural practices necessary for the business of farming to be undertaken free of unreasonable and unwarranted interference or restriction.

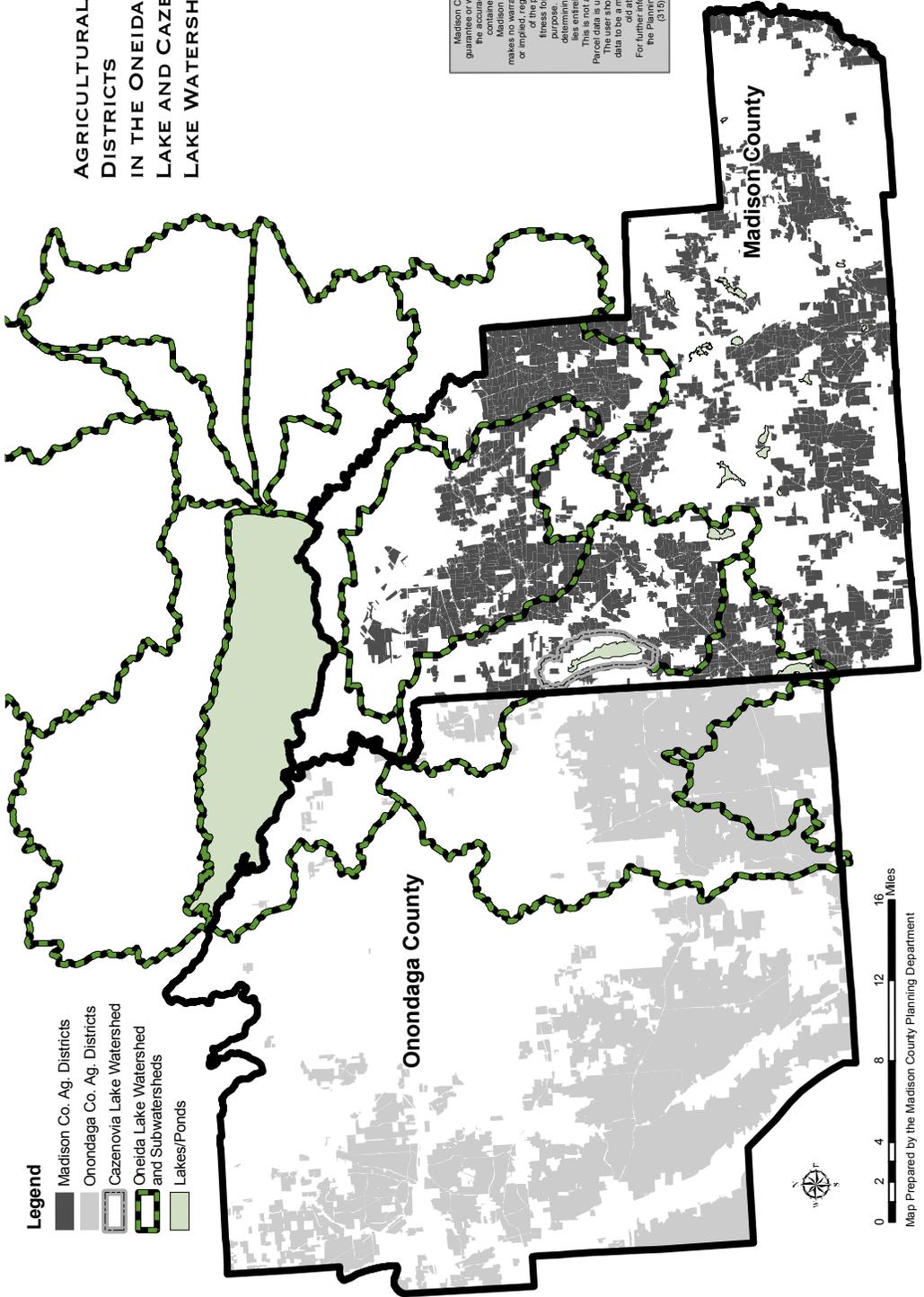
**TDR**—Abbreviation for a land-protection tool, transfer of development rights. TDR programs allow landowners to sever the development rights from a particular piece of property and sell them. Purchasers are usually other landowners who want to increase the density of their developments. Local governments may also buy development rights in order to control price, design details, or restrict growth. In urban areas, air space above a 10-story building, for instance, can be purchased by a developer wanting to build a 40-story building when only 25 stories are allowed.

**United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**—A federal agency with broad resources for farmers, including education and outreach, food and nutrition, laws and regulations, marketing and trade, natural resources, and research.

**Winter wheat**—A cereal grain planted in the fall and harvested in the summer. “Hard” winter wheat used for yeast breads has higher protein and gluten content than “soft” spring wheat, used mostly for flours.

**Zone till** — A reduced tillage method that limits soil disturbance to the planting row without disturbing the areas between the planting rows. Conventional plowing that disturbs more soil has been blamed for the loss of organic matter, and pollution of waterways due to runoff.

# AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS IN THE ONEIDA LAKE AND CAZENOVIA LAKE WATERSHEDS



- Legend**
- Madison Co. Ag. Districts
  - Onondaga Co. Ag. Districts
  - ▭ Cazenovia Lake Watershed
  - ▭ Oneida Lake Watershed and Subwatersheds
  - Lakes/Ponds

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Map Prepared by the Madison County Planning Department

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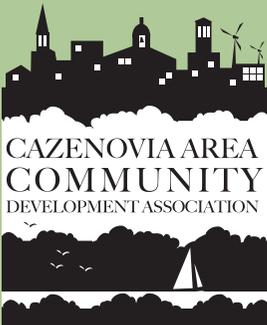
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