

Fulton County, New York

**Agricultural  
Development and Farmland  
Protection Plan**



**Fulton County Agricultural  
and Farmland Protection Board**

**2002**

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### **Executive Summary**

Farming in Fulton County involves some 176 business locations that generated sales of \$9,625,000 in 1997. The average value of land, buildings and equipment used in these businesses was \$294,646 for a total investment of approximately \$51,858,000. Many nonagricultural businesses also supply the needs of farmers. Fulton County farmers, for example, own and must maintain and replace 130 mower/conditioners, 119 balers, 252 trucks and 449 tractors. They also purchase: \$332,000 of electricity; \$317,000 of petroleum products; \$679,000 in repairs and maintenance; \$546,000 of hired farm labor; \$568,000 of seed, fertilizer and chemicals; \$1,719,000 of feed; and approximately \$2,180,000 of other products and services. Agriculture, as a result of this recirculation of income, contributes a total of approximately \$22,000,000 annually to the Fulton County economy.

Fulton County farmers paid almost \$600,000 in property taxes in 1997. The industry typically produces \$1.00 in tax revenue for every 15¢ to 40¢ of town and school expenditures it generates, whereas residential development costs \$1.09 to \$1.56 per \$1.00 of taxes gathered. Farms also contribute to Fulton County's largely rural character and protect open spaces essential to the quality of life for both permanent and seasonal residents. They help support the County's 24 lodging facilities. They provide urban residents of the County, as well as visitors, with locally grown fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers. The presence of three operating farmers markets in Montgomery and Fulton Counties (two in Amsterdam and one in Gloversville) combined with the large increases in sales of these products demonstrate the importance of this activity (sales of fruits and vegetables increased by 167% between 1987 and 1997).

The County's base of both small and mid-sized farms provides a foundation for exploring of new opportunities for added-value ventures and development of still more niche businesses. There is much growth potential. Sales of agricultural product, in fact, increased by 12% between 1987 and 1997. Vegetable sales gained 224%, fruits sales were up 133% and hay and silage crops grew by 97%, all major expansions in activity. Grain sales expanded 20% and nursery, greenhouse and other crops gained 35%. Crop sales as a whole increased by 66%. Dairy product sales increased by 15%. Key strengths of Fulton County for agriculture include the following:

- Its role as the "Gateway to the Adirondacks" offers an advantage in marketing to tourists and a basis for branding of agricultural products.

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- Farm agency, governmental and community support of agriculture is strong.
- It is advantageously located to market agricultural products both within and outside the area, including the immense New York City metropolitan market.
- It offers large areas of farmland available for use at reasonable prices.
- It offers a quality water supply in generous quantities to support farm and agricultural processing enterprises.

This Plan sets out several major goals for building on these strengths. Fulton County, through its Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board and other cooperating agencies, should:

1. Coordinate and focus the efforts of all agencies involved in promoting agriculture.
2. Diversify Fulton County agriculture and establish new markets for all farm products.
3. Increase public awareness of agriculture as an economic resource and valuable career path.
4. Support farm investment by the private sector.
5. Create and use economic incentives to develop agricultural enterprises, particularly local suppliers of farm support services.
6. Encourage farmers to manage farm woodlands for additional profit as secondary crops.
7. Protect the rights of farmers to use sound agricultural practices.

These goals are supported by detailed objectives that, together, lay out a comprehensive program for agricultural economic development and farmland protection in Fulton County. A number of agricultural policies employed in other areas to meet these goals are reviewed in Chapter V, "Policy Options." Farmland preservation is useless and irrelevant unless there is profit in farming and, therefore, the thrust of this Plan is to address means by which agriculture as an industry can be further developed to increase economic returns. Chapter VIII, "Recommendations" identifies those particular policies most appropriate for Fulton County and

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lays out several major agricultural initiatives. These include the following:

1. Create an Agricultural Economic Development Specialist.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Fulton County should work with Montgomery County and Cornell Cooperative Extension to offer the services of a shared agricultural development specialist to the farm community. This individual should be assigned both economic development and education responsibilities. The dual responsibilities are essential to highlighting the value of agriculture to the local economy and further integrating the industry into the County's economic development program.

2. Pursue agricultural added value initiatives.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Fulton County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should work with the Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, if such a position is created, and use the staff resources of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton and Montgomery Counties to develop those opportunities that exist to add value to agricultural products produced in the County. These include on-farm dairy processing, Kosher and Halal products, maple products, organic foods and woodcraft.

3. Develop a Mohawk Valley farm recruitment program.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Fulton County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should work with other Mohawk Valley counties and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to recruit new farmers to region. The New York State Thruway (I-90) makes it a highly visible area and provides easy access from other regions and urban areas. This asset, combined with fertile soils, makes the Mohawk Valley an appealing location for farmers relocating from New England for reasons of taxes and congestion.

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4. Promote agricultural tourism.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Fulton County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should assist the Fulton County Chamber of Commerce in developing an agricultural tourism initiative around the Gateway to the Adirondacks theme, including packaging of bus tours and Bed & Breakfast promotions. These need to be marketed to nearby urban regions. The initiative also needs to include assistance to farmers in the development of new agricultural tourism attractions as additional sources of farm income.

5. Establish Right-to-Farm policies.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Right to farm laws should be encouraged in all Fulton County towns with significant agricultural activity. Members of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should meet with local officials of these towns on an individual basis over the next two years to explain the benefits of agriculture and advocate the adoption of a Right-to-Farm law. Other towns with particularly significant individual agricultural enterprises should also be encouraged to consider Right-to-Farm policies.

6. Promote agricultural education and public awareness.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Fulton County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should work with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton and Montgomery Counties to develop an ANNUAL newspaper insert publication that continually promotes Fulton County farms and the strength of agriculture as a foundation of the County economy. It should include a map, farm descriptions, farm facts and invitations to participate in other agricultural awareness programs.

This mission will demand a proactive Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board capable of providing leadership on agricultural policy issues and initiating projects to implement this Plan.