

Fulton County, New York

Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan

VIII - Recommendations

Agriculture is always in transition and farming will remain healthy as an industry if it continually adapts to these changes and evolves. New markets, new products, new ways of doing business and new partnerships are needed. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board has an opportunity to lead this effort and if it does so, there can be substantial payoffs in tourism, quality of life and the long-term growth of the Fulton County economy. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should make implementation of the recommendations that follow its primary mission over the next 3-10 years.

Accomplishing this mission will demand a more proactive Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board than now exists. The Board needs to meet regularly (no less than quarterly) and demonstrate leadership on Fulton County agricultural policy issues. It should serve as the oversight body for an Agricultural Economic Development Specialist position, if one is created, and provide continuing advice to the Board of Supervisors. It should be the lead agency on all projects recommended in this Plan.

A number of the goals and recommendations set forth in this Plan also demand an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board willing to take a lead role in initiating projects by simply bringing the right people together, asking the right questions, posing actions that might be taken and supporting the efforts of cooperating agencies. This Plan provides the opportunity for a continuing effort along this line and the Board needs to seize it. It can do so by using the Plan as a form of checklist, taking the recommendations one by one and soliciting the help of those parties needing to be involved in each by inviting them to its meetings.

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. Preserving farmland and the right to farm are also essential. The following measures are recommended:

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1. CREATE 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.

Background

Approximately 25% of the counties throughout upstate New York and several other states (e.g. Maryland, Virginia) have, over the last decade, appointed agricultural development specialists to help farmers with product development, marketing and related assistance. These are, typically, new positions with shared responsibilities to County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Boards, Cornell Cooperative Extension and economic development or planning agencies. Some are located within Cornell Cooperative Extension and others are part of county government. Nearby counties with such positions include Montgomery and Schoharie. The role of agricultural development specialists, however, has been distinctly more entrepreneurial than educational or governmental.

General Responsibilities:

Responsibilities of agricultural development specialists typically include:

- Promoting a positive image of the agricultural industry through a variety of media efforts.
- Communicating the advantages of counties to commercial agricultural industry representatives, industrial prospects (agricultural processing) and real estate brokers.

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- Improve the economic prospects of local farmers through diversification, niche product development and direct marketing.
- Working with economic development agencies to assemble financial resources and capital for the production, marketing and processing of agricultural products.
- Representing a county's agriculture industry before local restaurateurs, industries, schools and government institutions to increase use of locally grown and processed products.
- Representing the agricultural industry within groups focused on economic development, business retention and workforce preparation.
- Serving as a resource to Agricultural and Farmland Protection Boards in implementing economic development aspects of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans.

Specific Responsibilities:

Agricultural development specialists in other areas have been responsible for working with individual farmers, agri-businesses and other agricultural entrepreneurs in an advocacy role to develop and successfully implement marketing strategies and business plans. These responsibilities typically include assisting these entrepreneurs with the following tasks:

- Gathering market data that will assist them in exploring who the potential consumers of their product are.
- Researching the industry and the business environment connected with the product including government policies and regulations, technological changes and industry trends.
- Investigating products and services, price ranges, reputation, promotional activities and successes of the competition.
- Developing product or service ideas based on the information from the consumer

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and industry research.

- Identifying profitable target markets based on consumer behavior and business trends
- Testing the market potential.
- Determining specific and measurable marketing objectives relating to sales, net profits and market share.
- Selecting marketing strategies such as product differentiation, market segmentation, diversification and other alternatives to accomplish objectives.
- Evaluating the need for complementary services such as packing, grading, storing, and inventory management.
- Developing distribution plans that fully addresses product delivery systems, hours of operation and number of locations.
- Creating promotional campaigns that include a variety of advertising, public relations, and sales promotion activities.
- Identifying and soliciting available project financing from both private and public sources.
- Developing implementation programs for who will be responsible, what tasks they are responsible for and when the tasks are to be completed.
- Monitoring, evaluating and modify the business/marketing plan, including setting up performance standards to monitor sales, costs, net margin and customer satisfaction.

Required Skills:

Agricultural development specialist are typically required to be skilled in communications and marketing and possess a working knowledge of the agricultural industry. Experience in

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advertising, sales and/or marketing, ability to write effectively and work well in both professional and nonprofessional environments are necessary capacities. Negotiating skills and the ability to act as a forceful marketplace advocate in promoting both a county's agricultural industry as a whole and the interests of individual entrepreneurs are critical.

Options:

There are a number of options for Fulton County in offering the services of an agricultural development specialist to the farm community. These include the following:

- 1) The specialist could be employed as a staff member with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton County, or
- 2) The specialist could be employed as a staff member of the County Planning Department, or
- 3) The specialist could be hired as a consultant by any one these organizations, or
- 4) The specialist could be shared with an adjoining Montgomery County which already has a half-time specialist on the Cornell Cooperative Extension staff.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton and Montgomery Counties is the most logical location for an agricultural support mission because of the extensive resources available and the contacts Extension has established with the industry. Extension already has a person in this position assigned to Montgomery County (see Appendix 4 for details). It is recommended this position be given additional shared responsibilities for Fulton County.

Cornell Cooperative Extension is, by its very nature, concentrated on educational goals. Advocacy, negotiation and entrepreneurship are not roles that Extension agencies are traditionally comfortable in assuming. Therefore, the specialist must have clearly defined responsibilities apart from the educational and governmental missions of Extension. The position will be of no benefit to the industry if the person taking the job is, for reasons of Cornell or Fulton County policy, unable to freely engage in economic development initiatives on the part of farmers and agri-businesses.

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It is recommended that the Agricultural Economic Development Specialist be assigned specific responsibilities to both economic development staff and Cornell Cooperative Extension as a resource person. The dual responsibilities are essential to highlighting the value of agriculture and forestry to the local economy and further integrating agriculture into the County's economic development program. This endeavor could be approached at the outset as a demonstration project, with the objective of transition, over the long-term, to a private and self-supporting endeavor on a fee-for-service or cooperative basis. It may also be possible to secure grant funds from larger agri-businesses and State or Federal sources to help launch the project. Additional ongoing funding for this position could come from a variety of sources including producer and agribusiness contributions and the County.

Implementation Period: 1) Startup 2003
2) Demonstration period 2003-2006

Responsible Parties: 1) Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton County
2) Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board

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2. 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.

One of the key functions of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should be to identify and stimulate the development of those opportunities that exist to add value to agricultural products produced in the County. This function should be pursued using the Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, if such a position is created, and the staff resources of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton and Montgomery Counties. Extension's resources are limited but it can effectively encourage added-value initiatives through educational programs, as many other counties have done (Greene County's Agroforestry program being a good example). An Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, nevertheless, could focus additional energies on specific initiatives.

The mini-dairy concept is an excellent example of these opportunities. Cornell Cooperative Extension should take the lead in educating dairy farmers on this subject by conducting a seminar on the possibilities. The Agricultural Economic Development Specialist and Extension together should assist interested farmers in further exploring the possibilities, identifying financing and helping to get a demonstration project going.

The best opportunity may exist with cheeses for which the proximity of the trendy New York City market and the ports for export could be a distinct advantage. Small Vermont cheese producers are now successfully selling to both the New York City and European markets and there is no reason a small to medium sized commercial cheese plant couldn't be done. New York cheeses are among the best in the world and need to be marketed in the fashion of its wines.

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A Mohawk Valley label on cheese could be an asset if there is effective work done to build on and market this image. Other opportunities exist in Kosher and Halal products, pastured livestock and poultry, maple syrup products and specialty crops and livestock. Each of these should be approached in the same manner - start with a seminar, follow with a working group, identify financing, promote and continue with technical assistance through startup. Pricing of products is one of the areas where such technical assistance could pay great benefits.

Implementation Period: 2003-2006

Responsible Parties:

- 1) Agricultural Economic Development Specialist
- 2) Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- 3) Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton County

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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.

There are parts of New York State that are gaining large numbers of farmers. Yates County is a powerful example. Its growth stems from its popularity among Mennonite farmers who see it as a good farm area with reasonable taxes (see Appendix 1), limited development pressure and opportunities to direct market farm products. Fulton County and the Mohawk Valley offer similar advantages, particularly with New England farmers being squeezed out by urban growth, higher taxes and lack of agricultural support businesses. Moving west to the Mohawk Valley is appealing to these farmers because they can still sell into New England using the I-90 access. They also face less development pressure but, by remaining relatively close to urban markets, ensure they will gain property values over time.

These advantages and a strong agricultural support network have motivated Oneida County, New York to develop an excellent program to solicit new farmers, entitled "The Mohawk Valley - The Agricultural Edge." Lewis County also has an excellent program. Oneida's program is managed by their Agricultural Economic Development Specialist and a special subcommittee of their Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board. The Fulton County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should piggyback onto the Oneida program by working with it and other surrounding counties to develop a Mohawk Valley farm recruitment program. Fulton County offers a good alternative within the region for those farmers seeking to direct market to urban residents and Adirondack tourists.

Implementation Period: 2004

Responsible Parties:

- 1) Ag & Farmland Protection Board
- 2) Agricultural Economic Development Specialist

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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.

Fulton County is a natural location for additional agricultural tourism businesses. There is an opportunity to build on the Gateway to the Adirondacks theme already employed on County welcome signs to promote new agricultural tourism enterprises such as farm tours and fruit and vegetable stands.

Packaging of bus tours and Bed & Breakfast promotions with these agricultural tourism attractions is the key to successful marketing outside the region. Additional signage, using the Gateway to the Adirondacks theme in the context of a tourism trail, is also needed. New York's successful wine trails provide an illustration of how this can be accomplished. The signage not only leads tourists from attraction to attraction but also reinforces the advertising theme and serves to promote the County itself as a tourist area.

A two-year demonstration project to develop and market bus tours centered around agricultural, historical and Adirondack attractions is appropriate. Incentives should also be created for the development of additional agricultural tourism ventures such as fruit and vegetable stands, corn mazes, farm tours, u-pick operations and the like.

Implementation Period: 2005

Responsible Parties:

- 1) Ag & Farmland Protection Board
- 2) Fulton County Chamber of Commerce
- 3) Agricultural Economic Development Specialist

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5. AGRICULTURAL POLICY - RIGHT TO FARM

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.

Right-to-Farm laws are intended to complement the New York State Agricultural District Law and provide a means for resolving farm-neighbor conflicts. They do so by protecting the rights of farmers using sound agricultural practices to continue those practices and to grow and expand within the community. They establish a policy which recognizes agriculture as a priority land use and puts the burden of proof that a farm practice constitutes a nuisance squarely upon those who would oppose such practices.

Fulton County's major agricultural should have such laws. These towns include Broadalbin, Ephratah, Johnstown, Mayfield, Oppenheim and Perth - the southern tier of farming communities bordering the Mohawk Valley.

A model Right-to-Farm Law is attached as Appendix 3. It establishes specific criteria broadly defining the nature of sound agricultural practices and make it extraordinary difficult for such practices to be declared nuisances. The real strength of such laws, however, is that they create a mechanism to discuss problems, educate the parties and resolve conflicts on a local level. They also set forth a statement of town policy which, it is hoped, will carry over to other aspects of local government.

Implementation Period: 2003-2005

Responsible Parties:

- 1) Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- 2) Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton County
- 3) Fulton County Planning Board
- 4) Fulton County Planning Department

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6. EDUCATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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.

Creating public awareness of the important role of agriculture in the County economy is essential to marketing initiatives geared toward buying local. Maintaining this public awareness also promotes greater appreciation and tolerance of farm practices, thereby reducing farm and neighbor conflicts.

An annual publication similar to Saratoga County's "Saratoga Farms" resource guide to farms in the County should be developed to map Fulton County farms and promote agriculture in general. It can be published as a newspaper insert. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board together with Cornell Cooperative Extension should develop such a publication on an annual basis as the vehicle for agricultural promotion.

This "Fulton Farms" publication should include not only the map but also economic data on agribusinesses and farming, excerpts from this Plan, descriptions of all significant farms in the County by category and promotional material. The goal should be to use this annual publication for education of both the farm and non-farm community and to instill pride among members of the industry.

There should also be increased efforts to get this type of information and agricultural vocational training into BOCES and local high schools. The "Feed the Green Machine" video is one place to start and there are several similar curriculum programs. A program of seminars and, eventually, courses should also be developed, particularly in the areas of agricultural diversification and specialization, with the Community College as an active partner.

These programs need to be heavily promoted in the non-farm community. Annual "farm

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and city" events are also appropriate. Sullivan County's "Down on the Farm Day" is an excellent example.

Implementation Period:

1) "Fulton Farms"	2004
2) Presentations	2005
3) Seminars, Courses & Events	2006

Responsible Parties:

- 1) Cornell Cooperative Extension of Fulton County
- 2) Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- 3) Farm Bureau