

**Town of Warwick, Orange County, New York**  
**Agricultural Business Retention & Expansion Plan**

---

## **2.0 Warwick Agricultural Industry Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

A workshop session was conducted in January, 2003 with twelve farmers representing a cross-section of Warwick agriculture. Those present included beef, dairy, equine, farm market, nursery, onion and sod industries. A portion of the meeting was dedicated to identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with retention and expansion of the agricultural sector within the Town of Warwick. The results of those discussions were combined with other research to yield the following analysis.

### **2.1 Strengths of Warwick's Agricultural Industry**

- 2.1.1 The muck land ("black dirt" also once known as "drowned land") provides an outstanding growing medium for a variety of agricultural products. The large amount of such land that exists within the Town, combined with its undevelopable nature, ensures a continuing agricultural base. It also supports a core agribusiness infrastructure that farmers require to remain competitive.
- 2.1.2 The Town of Warwick is located immediately adjacent to the massive, sophisticated and relatively wealthy New York City market, in the heart of a metropolitan region of 21,200,000 persons. There is no larger or more ethnically diverse market of comparable wealth anywhere in the world. The Town offers easy access to and from this market via Routes 17, I-84 and I-87 (among others).
- 2.1.3 The Town also possesses large acreages of fertile upland soils suitable for the production of forages, fruits and other crops, as well as animal agriculture.
- 2.1.4 The large amount of new home construction in the region generates demand for lawn and garden power equipment that, in turn, helps to maintain a critical mass of farm equipment dealers.
- 2.1.5 The Town of Warwick's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, combined with its agricultural/conservation zoning and innovative intermunicipal annexation policy, assure a future land base for agriculture. Much of this open space is available for farming on a rental basis.
- 2.1.6 The Town of Warwick attracts many tourists to events such as the Applefest and the weekly Farmers Market. It also possesses a large permanent population base. Together, these factors provide a firm foundation for local marketing of agricultural products.

## **Town of Warwick, Orange County, New York** **Agricultural Business Retention & Expansion Plan**

---

- 2.1.7 The Town's great diversity of farms (dairies, onion farms, horse farms, wineries, sod growers, etc.) provides an excellent basis for marketing of its agricultural products and promoting agricultural tourism.
- 2.1.8 There is a high level of awareness of agriculture and its importance at the Town government level and among residents that ensures attention to the needs of farmers and supports innovative programs such as PDR.
- 2.1.9 High land values within the Town of Warwick provide equity in the form of collateral for capitalization of new farm ventures.
- 2.1.10 There are numerous younger to middle-aged farmers with higher educations in the Town who are capable managers with potential to grow and succeed.

### **2.2 Weaknesses of Warwick's Agricultural Industry**

- 2.2.1 While there is a core agricultural infrastructure in the Town of Warwick, certain specific services have become much more difficult to access. These include veterinary service (100± miles distant), compressor repair service and other specialty services.
- 2.2.2 The cost of services required by farmers are often higher within the Town of Warwick than many others of New York State, due to the generally higher cost of living prevailing within the metro area.
- 2.2.3 Rapid growth has produced heavy competition for land and higher prices that make it difficult for the Town to purchase development rights or farmers to pay enough for land to secure it for agricultural purposes. This growth also makes it difficult for the Town to act quickly enough to be a force in the market.
- 2.2.4 The Town's somewhat isolated position with respect to major highways makes it difficult for trucks to access farm areas without going through congested villages and hamlets.
- 2.2.5 There is limited availability of labor with the skills for machine operation or the motivation to engage in the physically difficult and dirty work associated with some aspects of agriculture.
- 2.2.6 Price competition is severe in vegetables and many other farm products. High fixed costs make it difficult to compete in commodity lines. Niche marketing,

## **Town of Warwick, Orange County, New York** **Agricultural Business Retention & Expansion Plan**

---

while a potential solution to these problems, requires high-end products to compete with the convenience and low pricing of commodities. The opportunities for such high-end niche lines of business exist but are somewhat limited and constantly changing.

- 2.2.7 Lack of farm innovation, particularly at the small farm level, has made it difficult to compete with larger, more efficient producers from outside the State and region. Warwick farmers, however, have been more successful than most in innovating.
- 2.2.8 There is limited availability, within the Town of Warwick, of custom agricultural services that would reduce the equipment costs of smaller farmers or make possible the development of new farms and enterprises.
- 2.2.9 Rapid growth has created constant development pressure and brought new neighbors not fully appreciative of agriculture or even aware of it as an industry. This, in turn, leads to conflicts in life-styles that can make farming difficult.

### **2.3 Opportunities for Warwick's Agricultural Industry**

- 2.3.1 Education of farm neighbors and consumers regarding the importance of agriculture as an economic sector and protector of open space could create opportunities for agricultural tourism (e.g. farm tours) and direct marketing of farm products.
- 2.3.2 A Warwick Valley "buy local" program emphasizing freshness and good taste could increase the volume of demand for local farm products and offer opportunities to reduce the costs of distribution, producing higher margins for both farmers and retailers.
- 2.3.3 A central processing or marketing location for Warwick Valley farm products could provide a more efficient distribution system for those products, increase margins, attract new buyers and increase agricultural awareness within the Town.
- 2.3.4 Remaining dairy farms are potentially of increased interest to a growing population of suburbanites unfamiliar with farming. Combining this with a local on-farm dairy processing venture could create opportunities for tours and direct marketing of dairy products.
- 2.3.5 The very successful Warwick Farmers Market could be expanded to include additional space and vendors, thereby increasing its appeal to visitors and growing the market for Warwick farm products.

## **Town of Warwick, Orange County, New York** **Agricultural Business Retention & Expansion Plan**

---

- 2.3.6 There is a market for raw milk that could be exploited by local dairy farmers if State laws were changed to allow such sales.
- 2.3.7 The higher cost of living in the metro area could also allow for higher farm products prices on high quality and niche lines of products, particularly nonessential items for which consumers are typically willing to pay more.
- 2.3.8 The increasing wealth of the area as new higher income households move into the region offers an opportunity to finance PDR/TDR programs to maintain farmland as open space.

### **2.4 Threats to Warwick's Agricultural Industry**

- 2.4.1 Even if the farmland itself is preserved through PDR/TDR, zoning and other measures, agriculture could lose its critical mass if not profitable, making it difficult for remaining farmers to survive.
- 2.4.2 Competition from other communities employing similar measures to protect their agricultural industries could make it difficult for Warwick farmers to capture sufficient markets or obtain the higher price margins desired.