

Broome County Agricultural Economic Development Plan Results of Public Hearing on Draft Goals

Three public hearing were held in July, 2001 by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County and the Broome County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board to gather public input for the assembly of recommendations to be included in the County Agricultural Economic Development Plan. Farmers, agri-businesses, local officials and the general public were invited to attend the meetings. Each was preceded by a review of preliminary findings and a presentation of draft goals and objectives. The following is an outline summary of the comments received:

Binghamton Hearing - CCE Auditorium July 11, 2001 - Approximately 12-15 attendees

- 1) The Town of Kirkwood has updated its Comprehensive Plan to provide for additional agricultural uses. Local officials indicated the Town wants to preserve its rural character and would like to see agriculture expand with additional farms stands and other enterprises.
- 2) There is a need to zone towns so that small greenhouses can be established in otherwise residential areas.
- 3) Broome County has already achieved considerable success in developing niche agricultural businesses. One example is a garlic grower marketing over the Internet.
- 4) Networking new smaller agricultural enterprises with resources such as Cornell Cooperative Extension is important both to assist them and to gain an understanding of the depth and breadth of the industry.
- 5) The Kirkwood I-81 rest area presents a tremendous agricultural marketing opportunity with its 6,000 daily visitors. Establishing a market there and making more use of this resource to distribute information on Broome County agricultural enterprises should be a major recommendation of the Plan.
- 6) The Cornell Cooperative Extension botanical gardens provide an example of successful agricultural tourism that can be expanded upon.
- 7) The Town of Union has a landowner interested in establishing a greenhouse and bark chipping operation in an area properly zoned for such enterprises but which is also experiencing high-valued housing development. The residential neighbors are very opposed to the project and making it difficult to secure some variances needed for some aspects of the operation. This is an illustration of the conflicts that can develop and the need for more education of local officials and general public on the nature of agriculture and how to handle these issues.

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- 8) Another town wanted to require 200' setbacks for farm fences, providing further illustration of the need for agricultural planning education for local officials, another potential major recommendation. These officials need help in understanding the industry, how to provide for it and how to protect the rights of farmers.
- 9) IBM divestitures of open spaces near residents who thought they would be "forever wild" has exacerbated residential concerns about development, but may also help to illustrate the role of farms in preserving open space.
- 10) The on-going relationship between agricultural and residential uses is a critical issue in general for Broome County. It needs constant work.
- 11) A local banker and agricultural appraiser indicated that most of Broome County farm transfers in the last 15 years represented situations where the farms stayed in agriculture as compared to other counties where more farms went into non-agricultural uses upon transfer.
- 12) A greenhouse operation in the Town of Maine faced local opposition at first but has become well accepted as people have learned about the operation and how nice it is. This illustrates the value of agricultural awareness programs.
- 12) The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should be encouraging all towns to use Comprehensive Plan updates as opportunities to plan where and how to allow for growth of new and expanded agricultural enterprises.

**Colesville Hearing - Town of Colesville Town Hall
July 17, 2001 - Approximately 10-12 attendees**

- 1) There have been problems in some towns (including Colesville) with respect to barn heights exceeding building height limits in local zoning laws, illustrating the need for more planning education on agricultural issues.
- 2) Many New York City and New Jersey in-migrants to the area want the farm environment but not the associated smells and other problems.
- 3) The Town of Fenton has developed a local agricultural notice program targeted to builders and realtors. This may be an appropriate major recommendation in the Plan.
- 4) It is important to get towns to support agriculture, giving the industry the ability to grow

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- in size and compete with the outside world.
- 5) A local bank employee indicated the general public is ignorant about what agriculture involves and this needs to be addressed. The emphasis needs to be on the changing nature of agriculture, using the County's two large dairy farms as examples of evolving high technology in the industry.
 - 6) The Johnson City School District has been working with local cider producers to market more local products, develop new flavors and export these concepts to new areas. It is a very successful program that should be emulated.
 - 7) Federal regulations prohibit schools from restricting their purchases to New York State grown crops.
 - 8) More young people need to be directed to agricultural job opportunities and emphasis needs to be placed on raising the image of agriculture as a career opportunity.
 - 9) Agriculture needs to be afforded more of the same tax abatements, energy breaks and job credits that other industries get in New York State. Empire Zone benefits, particularly in the labor category, also need to be extended to farms and agricultural enterprises.
 - 10) A Town of Fenton strawberry grower has faced conflicts with neighbors over spraying, noise from irrigations pumps and dust, illustrating some of the conflicts that need to be managed.

**Whitney Point Hearing - Whitney Point Village Hall
July 18, 2001 - Approximately 12-15 attendees**

- 1) The County has both organic garlic and organic pig producers.
- 2) Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County believes the agricultural economy is underestimated due to large numbers of small and unidentified producers, the real sales number being approximately \$30,000,000 per year.
- 3) Town of Lisle representatives state that they are getting pressure from residential homeowners to the effect that banks don't like lending in agricultural zones and would prefer residential zoning for mortgage purposes.
- 4) There is a great need to educate local officials about proper techniques of agricultural zoning. Example and illustrations are needed.

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- 5) Several attendees commented that they had not appreciated the breadth, depth and economic importance of agriculture until hearing the presentation.
- 6) A Town Board member expressed concerns with agricultural tax exemptions that might get extended to things like sawmills.
- 7) Conflicts (real or imagined) exist among Lisle officials and farmers as to the proper amount of agricultural zoning in the Town.
- 8) More communication between the farm and non-farm communities is needed and more education to deal with agricultural issues. Planning boards need education and support from the industry. Agricultural awareness is critical.
- 9) An Agricultural Planning Guide for local officials (on the order of Schoharie County's but tailored to Broome County) is needed to address the challenges of providing for small diversified agricultural businesses. This should be a major recommendation.
- 10) The Town of Fenton agricultural notice program, which tells residents "you'll see cows" is a good model.