

# SCHENECTADY COUNTY



## AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

Prepared For:  
Schenectady County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board

Prepared By:  
Schenectady County Department of Planning

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

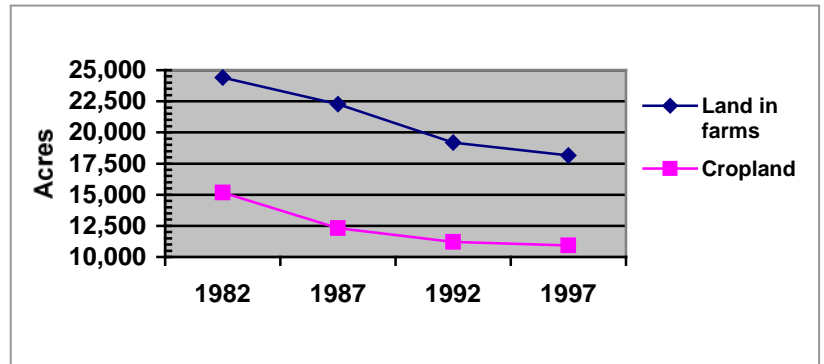
**This plan’s purpose is to recommend goals and actions that promote the maintenance and expansion of lands in active agricultural use in Schenectady County. It was developed through a broad public participation process.**

## Brief Profile of Schenectady County Agriculture

Farms in Schenectady County are very diverse, with annual gross sales ranging from less than \$2,500 to over \$500,000. However, most can be characterized as small part-time farms with 73 percent reporting annual sales of less than \$10,000 and 61 percent reporting a principal occupation other than farming (part-time farms). These farms produce over \$6 million each year in sales, spend an additional \$4.8 million on production expenses, and are responsible for creating many full or part-time jobs. Perhaps most significantly, as an industry farms still represent the largest land use in the County utilizing over 15,000 acres (approximately 11 percent) of the land base within the County.

**Figure 1. Land in Farms/Crops**

Similar to farms across the state and nation, Schenectady County farms face increasing challenges and the number of farms and farm acreage has been declining in recent years. Over the 15-year period between 1982 and 1997 the number of farms in Schenectady County decreased 28 percent from 209 to 151 and the amount of land in farms decreased 26 percent (6,237 acres) from 24,405 acres to 18,168 acres. Total cropland has declined 28 percent (4,233 acres) from 15,171 acres in 1982 to 10,938 acres in 1997. While the decline in farms and cropland over this 15-year period is significant, the rate of decline has decreased and the loss of farms and farmland may be stabilizing.



Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

## Opportunities & Challenges

Schenectady County’s proximity to the Capital Region’s urban areas presents both opportunities and challenges to farms within the County. For some forms of agriculture, such as the County’s growing nursery and greenhouse operations and vegetable farms, nearby urban markets can be advantageous due to the number of consumers and the potential to develop more direct marketing outlets. The cultural diversity of urban areas also provides opportunities to identify and serve niche markets. However, farms in urbanizing areas experience increasing development pressures, conflicts with non-farm neighbors, higher land prices, rising property taxes, and an overall increase in production costs. In addition, low commodity prices, lack of skilled labor, and local zoning ordinances that hamper farm business expansion also provide challenges.

Looking toward the future there is renewed interest in agriculture's place in the local landscape. In a recent statewide poll of New Yorkers sponsored by Cornell University, there was overwhelming agreement with the statement that “efforts should be made to preserve high quality farmland for future food production.” There were similar sentiments favoring

efforts “to preserve open space for scenic or recreational uses.” These statewide public opinions were reinforced by a local survey conducted as part of this planning process where the vast majority of respondents agreed that keeping farms viable in the Capital District is important. Local citizens also responded overwhelmingly that they would “be willing to pay slightly more for locally produced agricultural products if doing so would help farms stay in business” and that they would “buy more local/state/regional produce if it was labeled as such.” Such public sentiment combined with the growing public interest in the source of food and how it was produced would appear to indicate that additional market opportunities are available. With people beginning to demand a healthier, more environmentally friendly diet, local farmers could capitalize on consumers’ realization that such a diet may only be a pleasant country drive away!

## Goals

There are many factors beyond local governments’ and individual farmers control that have been contributing to the decline in the farm industry and under existing circumstances farm operations will continue to be challenged. However, there are some steps that can be taken to assure a positive environment for farm enterprises. This Plan recommends some such steps to help sustain this vital part of the community. The planning process has resulted in the establishment of five general goals:

- ***Increase the competitiveness and profitability of the food and agriculture industry.***
- ***Retain the viable agricultural land resource (prime/important farmland) for agricultural purposes and ensure that public policy is protecting, promoting, and sustaining agriculture.***
- ***Increase public recognition and support of agriculture and foster a better understanding of farm issues by non-farmers.***
- ***Expand the availability of and access to services important to farmers today and improve the connections between agricultural producers and the community.***
- ***Diversify and broaden the agriculture economic base and attract new people to farming ventures.***

This Plan identifies numerous objectives and recommends activities that can be taken to achieve these goals. Key players are also identified. These actions address three major areas: marketing, economic development, and education. The Plan also lists the measurements/milestones to assess achievement of the goals.

Immediate implementation of all recommendations in the Plan is a difficult task due to limited staffing, changing economic climate and the evolving agriculture industry. However, 13 “rapid response” projects are identified for implementation over the next 2 years. These rapid responses are outlined under three main categories: improved marketing, enhanced economic development initiatives, and education for both the non-farming public and producers.



## Rapid Response Implementation Actions

### IMPROVED MARKETING

***Explore sites for permanent farmers' markets and apply for a Farmers' Market Development Grant to assist with physical improvements to the market, including assistance for architectural design.***

While many successful farmers' markets have been established around the state and region, in Schenectady County the farmers' markets do not have a prominent community presence and are limited to seasonal tailgate operations. There is a need to provide overall assistance to a farmers' market program in Schenectady County. Among other things, to be successful, farmers' markets need an attractive infrastructure and setting.

***Develop a promotional campaign for the existing Schenectady Farmers' Market***

Aside from the need to attract farmers to the market, farmers' markets need to reach out to the public to be successful. While sales have been increasing steadily at both market locations, the market will now allow producers to participate on a weekly basis during the 2002 season. The downtown market location should also be able to capitalize on the additional foot traffic created by the opening of the new MVP office building and the pending development of the NYSDOT office building. The location at St. Luke's should ultimately benefit from a proposed reconstruction of State Street in the vicinity that will create a more pedestrian-friendly and visually appealing environment. As the market setting improves and the available products expand, increased promotion should follow.

***Work with local producers to assess the opportunities and barriers to participating in the local farmers' market.***

Of the 53 respondents to the County producer survey that indicated they participate in some form of direct marketing, only 6 (11 percent) said they participate in a farmers' market indicating that farmers' markets are not currently utilized as a marketing mechanism for most farms in the County. However, responses to the producer survey indicate that there is some interest from local farmers to participate in a downtown Schenectady market. Expanding participation of local farmers is critical to the success of the farmers market.

***Develop a marketing brochure/tour map of local farms, farm stands and markets and develop a page(s) for the County web site.***

Of the 53 respondents to the County survey that indicated they participate in some form of direct marketing, 23 (43 percent) said they have a roadside stand or pick your own operation. While direct sales are an important source of revenues for County farmers, they appear to offer a largely untapped market potential. The cultural diversity of the Capital Region creates opportunities for niche marketing and the proximity to metropolitan centers can allow for the development of more direct marketing outlets. With people beginning to demand a healthier, more environmentally friendly diet, local farmers could capitalize on consumers' realization that such a diet may only be a pleasant country drive away!

***Explore the feasibility of creating a local (Capital District) product label for both edible and non-edible agricultural products. Consider participating in the ongoing "Produced in the Mohawk" marketing campaign and encourage local producer participation in the "Pride of New York" marketing campaign.***

When surveyed as part of this planning effort, local consumers responded overwhelmingly (79 percent) that they would "be willing to pay slightly more for locally produced agricultural products if doing so would help farms stay in business." They also responded affirmatively (86 percent) that they would "buy more local/state/regional produce if it was labeled as such."

### ENHANCED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

***Help to develop and promote local farms participation in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).***

None of the respondents to the County agriculture producer survey indicated that they have developed a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise. However, CSA has been successful elsewhere in the region and appears to have a great deal of potential as an additional marketing approach.

***Work with the Schenectady County Micro-enterprise Program (SCMP) to actively market the program's small business services to the farming community.***

In today's market place, aside from being skilled producers, farmers must be well versed in financial planning, human resource management, risk management, and market development in order to survive in an extremely competitive environment. The food and agriculture industry has not utilized traditional economic development programs due to both a lack of awareness on the part of the producer and understanding of lenders.

***Compile a directory of organizations, agencies and individuals that can provide business development services to farmers.***

Many farmers are unaware of the myriad of assistance programs that are available to them. There are many programs and policies in place to assist the agricultural community and this Plan should create better awareness among the agricultural community of these programs and services.

#### **EDUCATION FOR BOTH THE NONFARMING PUBLIC AND PRODUCERS**

***Conduct focus groups/study circles to better determine what services and support the small farm sector and beginning farmer needs.***

Smaller farms may hold the key to the continuance of agriculture in the County. In 1992, small farms represented 52 percent of County farmland. In 1997, they represented 61 percent having increased 1,024 acres (10 percent). Over this same time period, acreage in commercial farms decreased by 2,054 acres (22 percent). Small farms can also represent new agricultural enterprises and future growth opportunities for the industry. However, as some respondents to the County agricultural producer survey mentioned, most agricultural assistance programs are not geared toward the beginning farmer or new small farm enterprises.

***Develop an educational display on local agriculture that can be shown at various community events.***

Consumers and decision makers need to be more aware of the social, environmental and economic contributions made by the food and agriculture industry as well as the ways to foster its viability. It is very important to educate the public about issues meaningful to the farming community, and the significant role local consumers can play in maintaining farmland.

***Establish an agricultural education field day on the farm that offers students and the non-farm community opportunities to experience the local food and agriculture industry first hand.***

American consumers are not aware of the source of their food or what it takes to bring food to their tables. In our schools, busy curricula allow little time to present information on the agricultural industry. Establishing convenient and meaningful educational opportunities for teachers and children is necessary to any public education efforts.

***Hold regular training workshops for local assessors and other government officials regarding farm assessment and farm business needs.***

There have been many recent changes in the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law that affect the assessment of agricultural operations. Each municipality has its own local assessor that needs to be updated in relation to regulation changes that impact agriculture.

***Develop a producer recognition program.***

The agricultural industry has a significant positive impact on the County's economy, environment and quality of life. Agriculture preserves and protects important environmental resources and open space. The industry also provides fresh produce and quality horticultural products for our residents. Farmers that use best management practices, are environmentally responsible, and produce quality products for local consumers are an asset to Schenectady County and should be recognized for their hard work and dedication.



# INTRODUCTION

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## Benefits of Agriculture

Maintaining agricultural land protects high quality soils, retains open space, limits urban sprawl, provides recreational opportunities and maintains air and water quality. In short, the agriculture industry contributes to the community in many ways and in recent years has taken on a new significance as indicated by the continuing discussion of quality communities and suburban sprawl and the statewide popularity of farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA). Local farms provide a dependable source of safe and fresh food and quality horticultural products. They also maintain the County's attractive countryside adding to the quality of life for residents. Numerous studies also show that as a land use agriculture consistently generates more in taxes than it requires in services. Therefore, retaining agricultural uses can also help maintain the fiscal health of a community.

## Purpose of Plan

The plan's purpose is to establish programs and strategies that promote the maintenance and expansion of lands in active agricultural use in Schenectady County. This broad purpose can be accomplished by creating awareness in community leaders and the general public about the significance and economic benefits of local agriculture and explaining the challenges the industry faces. While local government cannot alter the global marketplace for wholesale agricultural products, it can better recognize the many benefits local agriculture provides and foster a farm friendly business environment that promotes this important local industry.

Implementation of the plan will also create better awareness in the agricultural community about existing federal, state, and local programs and policies and foster improvements and expansions of those services. Building upon the strengths of those programs and ensuring that the agricultural community participates in the more traditional economic development channels is a primary task. The plan also identifies potential new markets for local producers, including opportunities available locally.

In addition to highlighting the importance of the local agricultural industry, another outcome of this plan is to foster a greater understanding of the critical link between local consumers and farmers. While suburban growth has created some challenges for the local agricultural industry, it also affords an opportunity for people to re-connect with agriculture and thus provide vital economic support to the industry.

The plan provides an overview of the County's agricultural industry and highlights trends over the past 15 years. Goals and objectives are identified along with actions necessary to implement the plan. Detailed information on important soils, farm locations, development trends, etc. is also included.

## Planning Process

With financial support from the Schenectady County Legislature and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets the Schenectady County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) initiated the development of this Agriculture and

Farmland Protection Plan in 1998. The County Department of Planning, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schenectady County, and the Soil and Water Conservation District provided staff support.

The plan was developed through an extensive public participation process. Public outreach and data obtainment began during February/March of 2000 by mailing a survey to all agricultural producers in the County. Two public meetings were also held during this time, one in the Town of Duanesburg and another in the Town of Glenville, to gain input from agricultural producers and encourage responses to the survey. A general public survey was conducted in August 2001 at the Altamont Fair and the Corn Festival in Schenectady's Central Park. This survey was expanded to include senior citizens participating in two nutrition programs. Finally, a survey regarding the Schenectady Farmers' Market was given to participants in the Woman, Infant & Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC)<sup>1</sup> to help establish how a segment of customers feel about the market. The public hearing mandated by the state was held on August 19, 2002.

In addition to the AFPB, an advisory group made up of farmers, agency staff, conservation and agricultural organizations, and community members from both Schenectady and Albany Counties met regularly. Utilizing Cornell University's Agricultural Industry Development, Enhancement & Retention (AIDER) Program, this two county advisory group convened two public meetings where experts presented information on economic development, land use issues, marketing, and farm/neighbor relations. Using the data and comments obtained through the various surveys and public meetings, this advisory group developed the goals, objectives and actions to enhance farm viability and promote the maintenance of lands in active agricultural use.

Development of the plan has already spurred actions aimed at preserving and enhancing agriculture in the County as demonstrated by the distribution of over 3,000 copies of the first Schenectady County Farm Resource Guide during the summer/fall of 2001.

The following section discusses recommended goals, objectives and actions to maintain lands in active agricultural use. Supporting each goal is a brief discussion of the situation that led to the establishment of the goal, the objectives to be accomplished, and the recommended actions. Finally, the key players that will be involved in implementing the actions and the measurements/milestones to assess achievement of the goals and objectives are identified.

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<sup>1</sup> One program in the County that provides support for the farmers markets is the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). As part of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Women, Infant & Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC), the FMNP has expanded the awareness and use of farmers markets by WIC participants by providing \$20 worth of farmers market coupons to each participating family annually.

# GOALS, OBJECTIVES & RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO PROMOTE THE MAINTENANCE OF LANDS IN ACTIVE AGRICULTURAL USE

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***Goal: Increase the competitiveness and profitability of the food and agriculture Industry.***

Changes in organizational structure and operating procedures in the food and agriculture industry are resulting in a loss in profitability within many agriculture related businesses. Because international and national forces largely drive this restructuring, local decision-makers are unsure what can be done at their level to assist the industry. Finding the right course of action is contentious considering the competitive nature of the businesses and the difficulty of providing an incentive to grow the industry and at the same time not show favoritism to any individual or group.

Specific issues identified by producers that threaten the profitability of Schenectady Agriculture businesses include high production costs (taxes, land), the lack of skilled labor, lack of local markets, and local zoning ordinances that hinder farm business expansion and retention. The failure of the food and agriculture industry to participate in the traditional economic development channels due to a lack of awareness worsens the situation.

One way producers can increase profits is to bypass the middleman and sell directly to consumers. This benefits consumers since they can obtain a wide variety of otherwise unavailable locally grown farm products. Direct sales are predominantly generated through farm stand sales and farmers' markets. Longstanding farm operations with optimal locations can readily establish roadside farm stands to directly market farm products. There are a number of such well-established farm stands in Schenectady County that account for the bulk of direct sales. On the other hand, while many successful farmers' markets have been established around the state and region, in Schenectady County the markets do not have a prominent community presence and are limited to seasonal tailgate operations. While some producers in the County participate in farmers' markets within the region, most producers do not utilize farmers' markets as a marketing mechanism.

Some producers in Schenectady County have penetrated the larger retail grocery stores in the area. This can be a difficult market since it is very competitive. To access this market it generally takes a large farm to produce the consistent quantity and quality required by the large retail markets. Farms need to capitalize on economies of scale and produce high volumes since profit margins are smaller when dealing with large markets. Alternatively, smaller farms could work together to produce necessary volumes or work with smaller independently owned grocery stores. However, given the apparent increasing public demand for locally produced and/or organic and "natural" products, grocery chains may be more amenable to working with local producers and providing shelf space. Local residents

responded overwhelmingly (85 percent) to the County survey that they would purchase more local/state/regional products if they were identified as such. They also would be willing to pay slightly more for locally produced agricultural products (79 percent) if doing so would help farms stay in business (Appendix B). Further, according to market research, sales of organic and natural products have been growing 15 to 20 percent annually—the fastest growing segment of the retail food industry.

While pursuing increased access to retail grocery chains makes sense, another opportunity may be to increase marketing to local restaurants since a tremendous volume of product is not needed. The Schenectady County Community College’s Culinary Arts program may be one such opportunity.

**Objectives:**

- Improve agricultural producer awareness and access to traditional business development programs.
- Promote direct consumer marketing of farm products.
- Increase the number of vendors and varieties of products available at the local farmers’ market.
- Increase local producer participation in the Schenectady Farmers’ Market.
- Enhance the knowledge of local residents about the availability of locally produced food and the high quality of locally grown products.
- Identify strategies to improve local producer access to regional wholesale and retail food marketing channels.

**Recommended Actions:**

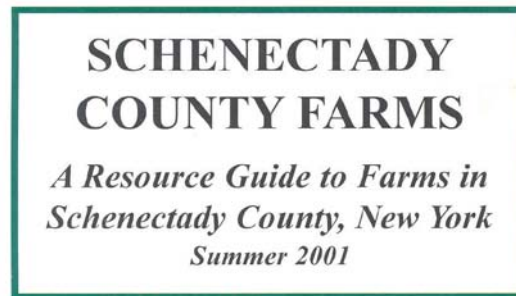
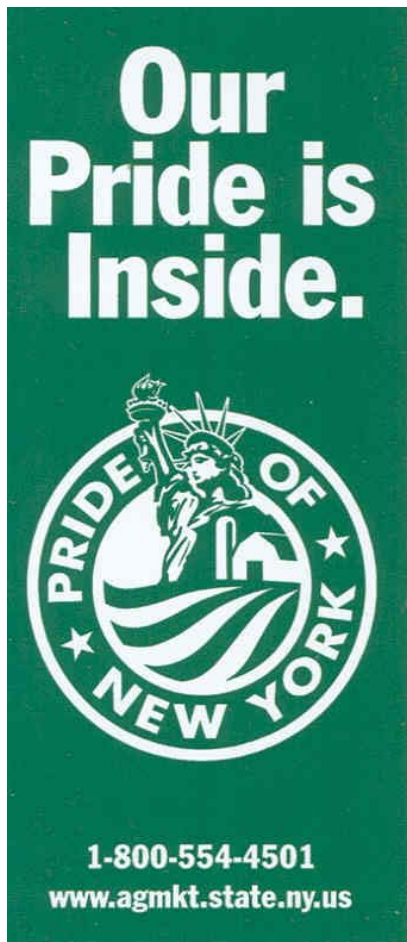
1. Explore sites for permanent farmers’ markets and apply for a Farmers’ Market Development Grant to assist with physical improvements to the market, including assistance for architectural design.
2. Develop a promotional campaign for the existing Schenectady Farmers’ Market.
3. Work with local producers to assess the opportunities and barriers to participating in the local farmers’ market.
4. Distribute nutritional information and provide cooking demonstrations at the farmers’ market.
5. Develop a marketing brochure/tour map of local farms, farm stands and markets and develop a page(s) for the County web site.
6. Explore the feasibility of creating a local (Capital District) product label for both edible and non-edible agricultural products. Consider participating in the ongoing “Produced in the Mohawk” marketing campaign and encourage local producer participation in the “Pride of New York” marketing campaign.
7. Encourage the Community College’s Culinary Arts program to develop a relationship with local producers and possibly restaurants to highlight local produce.
8. Conduct an extensive study of local wholesale and retail food marketing channels and identify strategies to improve their effectiveness for local producers and consumers.
9. Develop and promote Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).
10. Work with the Schenectady County Micro-enterprise Program (SCMP) to actively market the program's small business services to the farming community.

**Key Players:**

County Planning Department, Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce, SCMP, County IDA, Local Farmers' Market Association and NYS Farmers' Market Federation, City of Schenectady

**Measurements & milestones:**

- Establishment of a permanent farmers' market location in downtown.
- Expansion and increased customer patronage of the Schenectady Farmers' Market.
- Increased participation of local farmers in farmers' markets within the County and an increase in the number of farmers and diversity of products at the markets.
- Increase in census defined direct agricultural product sales (2007 Census).
- Increase in overall value of agricultural sales (2007 Census).
- Dedicated space in grocery chains for local products and the presence of more locally produced agricultural products in supermarkets.
- Local farms operating a CSA.
- Participation of agricultural producers in the Schenectady County Micro-enterprise Program (entrepreneurial education and loan programs).



Enjoy the scenic views and wide open spaces of Schenectady County.  
Buy local and help agriculture thrive in Schenectady County.

Four seasons of farming: orchards, nurseries, greenhouses, horse farms, maple syrup, farm raised meats, Christmas Trees.

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***Goal: Retain the viable agricultural land resource (prime/important farmland) for agricultural purposes and ensure that public policy is protecting, promoting, and sustaining agriculture.***

Retaining agricultural land is critical to maintaining a high quality locally produced food supply as well as maintaining the economic, social and environmental contributions the agricultural sector makes to the community. There must be enough incentive for agricultural producers to remain in business and/or landowners to maintain lands for agricultural purposes. Much of the prime farmland (soils) within the County remains outside of the County Agricultural District.

Despite the many positive attributes of agricultural land uses, many people still do not see agriculture as an important long-term land use or recognize agriculture as an important industry. Lack of an agricultural awareness and understanding is found in decisions and legislation passed at the local level that impairs the viability of businesses. Agriculture is a dynamic industry that constantly evolves. Public policy needs to be flexible enough to respond to the changing agricultural industry and not unreasonably hinder agricultural operations. Along with taxes, farmers within Schenectady County consistently cited local land use regulations as problematic. The impact of taxes is especially apparent with the smaller farm operations.

**Objectives:**

- Improve farm-related land use planning and better incorporate farming and farm-related industries into zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans.
- Clearly define agriculture/farming in local zoning ordinances and give appropriate flexibility to the industry.
- Encourage local governments to establish or participate in programs that promote the retention of farmland.
- Provide more opportunities for interaction between farmers and elected officials.
- Increase the support for and appreciation of the food and agriculture industry among elected and appointed officials.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. Provide training for town officials and landowners on techniques and tools available to protect farmland.
2. Hold regular training workshops for local assessors and other government officials regarding farm assessment and farm business needs.
3. Work closely with towns developing comprehensive plans to ensure identification and consideration of important farmlands.
4. Support continued expansion of protections provided in the NYS Agricultural Districts Law.
5. Encourage owners of farmland to enroll properties into the agricultural district.
6. Continue to allow small farms to enroll and idle or open property adjoining active farmlands to remain in the agricultural district.
7. Encourage the passage of local right-to-farm laws.
8. Organize farm tours for elected officials to highlight business features and economic impacts of agriculture.



**Key Players:** County Planning Department, Cooperative Extension, County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)

**Measurements & Milestones:**

- Increase in the number and diversity of farms and acreage within the County Ag. District (2004 review).
- Maintenance of identified high quality agricultural soils in agricultural use and expansion of the amount of prime farmland (soils) in the Agricultural District (2004 review).
- Attendance by town officials/individuals at training workshops.
- Increase in the number of farms (acres) receiving agricultural value assessment.

***Goal: Increase public recognition and support of agriculture and foster a better understanding of farm issues by non-farmers.***

The agricultural industry has a positive impact on the County's economy, environment and quality of life. Agriculture preserves and protects important environmental resources and open space. The industry also provides fresh produce and quality horticultural products for residents. Perhaps most significantly, local farms provide a dependable source of safe food. Numerous studies also show that as a land use, agriculture consistently generates more in taxes than it requires in services.

Despite the many benefits of agriculture and the general public support for agricultural preservation, there is clearly a disconnect between the consumer and farm and the important role local consumers can play in preserving nearby farmland. Consumers lack basic awareness of how food gets to their tables. Since these same consumers play a major role in shaping the food system through their purchases, demands for quality and participation in decision making that affects the viability of agricultural businesses, this is a significant problem.

In schools teachers may either not include concepts about food production as part of the curriculum or present information about the food system that does not accurately reflect the agricultural industry.

Many of the residential neighbors that surround Schenectady County's commercial farm enterprises do not understand farming practices. Farm/neighbor relations need to be enhanced to ensure amicable relationships in the future.

**Objectives:**

- Demonstrate the value of the County's agricultural industry and enhance its visibility.
- Improve/develop a relationship with the local media.
- Identify and reinforce the fiscal benefits associated with agriculture.
- Strengthen the connection between farms and local schools.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. Conduct a local cost of community services study to show how farmland benefits the tax base.
2. Develop an educational display on local agriculture that can be shown at various community events and farmers' markets.
3. Provide regular press releases for local agricultural events and invite elected officials to attend/participate.
4. Establish an annual farm tour breakfast or drive it yourself tour.
5. Develop a producer recognition program.
6. Produce a video that highlights the contributions that agriculture makes to the local community.
7. Conduct a public forum to discuss the importance of the agriculture industry and farming principles and practices.
8. Expand educational opportunities for teachers and children by establishing an agricultural education field day on the farm that offers students and the non-farm community opportunities to experience the local food and agriculture industry first hand.
9. Provide leadership training to producers on media relations and conflict resolution.

**Key Players:** AFPB, County Planning Department, Cooperative Extension, SWCD

**Measurements & Milestones:**

- Completed cost of community services study.
- Completed educational display and regular use.
- Number of farm tours conducted and/or drive-it-yourself brochure.
- Establishment of a producer recognition program and/or video highlighting the contributions that agriculture makes.
- Number of farms participating in special education events.
- Number of people attending agriculture education field days.



***Goal: Expand the availability of services important to farmers in Schenectady County and improve connections for agricultural producers to programs.***

In today's competitive market, farmers must be skilled producers and well-versed in financial planning, human resource management, risk management, and market development in order to survive. Many farmers are unaware of the range of assistance programs that are available and/or how to access them.

**Objectives:**

- Educate producers about new marketing opportunities and economic development strategies.
- Improve access to agricultural programs and services and enhance avenues of assistance.
- Continue to support Cooperative Extension and the Soil and Water Conservation District in providing direct services and resources to local agricultural businesses.
- Keep small farm operations viable.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. Provide grant-writing assistance to agricultural producers and agricultural-related businesses.
2. Compile a directory of organizations, agencies and individuals that can provide business development services to farmers.
3. Conduct classes for producers on tax and environmental laws and provide information on available assistance programs.
4. Explore the possibility of hiring an agricultural economic development specialist to undertake value-added initiatives, help identify and penetrate profitable markets and assume a leadership role in implementing the Agricultural Protection Plan. This might be a shared position with an adjoining County.
5. Conduct focus groups/study circles to determine the service and support needs of the small farm sector and beginning farmer.
6. Develop a Master Farmer Program similar to Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener Program.

**Key Players:** Cooperative Extension, SWCD, County Planning Department

**Measurements & Milestones:**

- Number of grants received by agricultural enterprises in the County.
- Creation and distribution of services directory.
- Establishment of value-added initiatives.

***Goal: Diversify and broaden the agriculture economic base and attract new people to farming ventures.***

Encouraging or assisting new farm enterprises is increasingly important since in 1997 the average age of a farmer in the County was 56. As reported in the 1997 census, 56 (37 percent) of the 151 farm operators in the County are 60 years of age or older and the average number of years on the current farm is 25.



Small farms represent new agricultural enterprises and future growth opportunities for the industry. However, as some respondents to the County agricultural producer survey mentioned, most agricultural assistance programs are not geared toward the beginning farmer or new small farm enterprises.

Farming and agribusiness deserves more attention as an engine for economic development and financing is needed for farm enterprise expansion and start-up operations.

**Objectives:**

- Support farm start-up operations.
- Expand the availability of capital to finance farming enterprises.
- Ensure that small part-time or start-up farming operations have access to services and information.

**Recommended Actions:**

1. Explore and support efforts to attract agricultural services/processing businesses.
2. Provide sales assistance to farmers interested in transferring farm properties to perspective new producers.
3. Conduct a “Farm Schenectady County” campaign similar to the Chamber’s Work, Live, Play campaign.
4. Establish an Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund (IDA) to help expand the availability of capital to finance agricultural enterprises.
5. Work with the Schenectady County Micro-enterprise Program (SCMP) to actively market the program's small business services to the farming community.

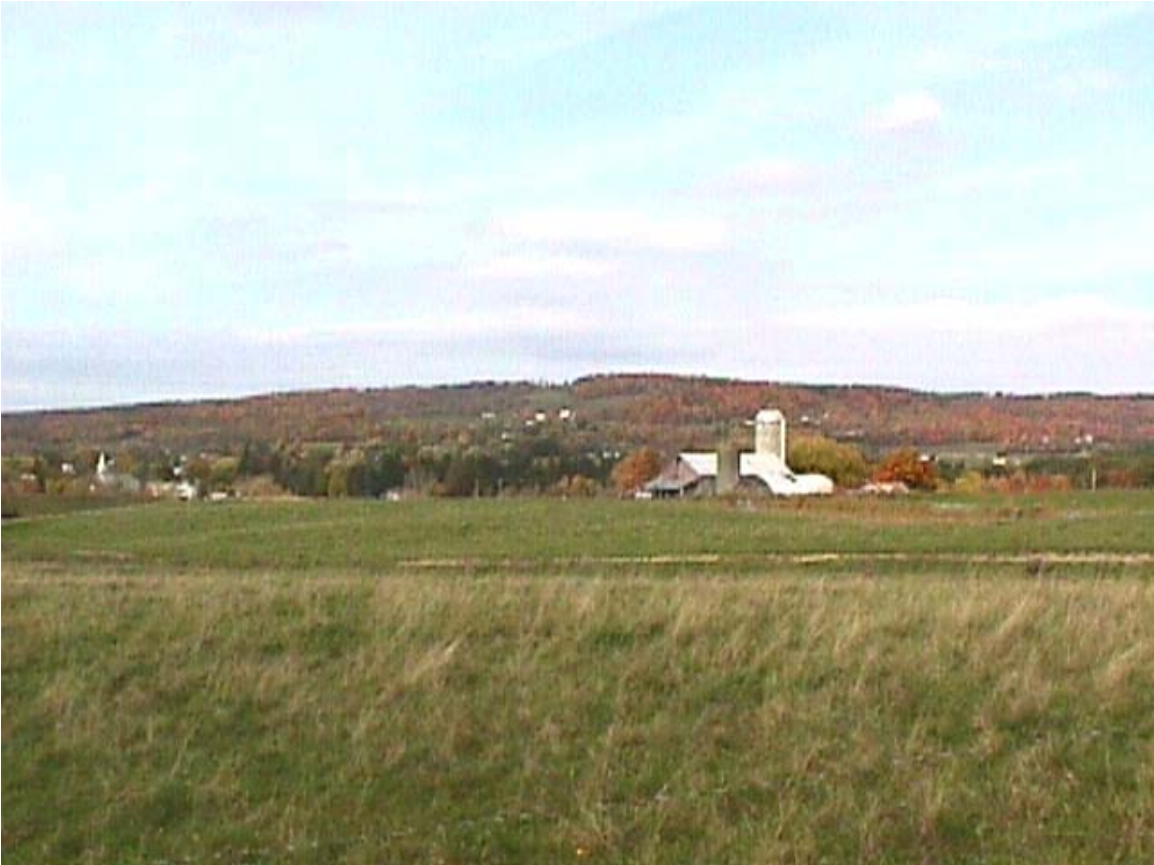
**Key Players:** Chamber of Commerce, County IDA, SCMP, Cooperative Extension

**Measurements & Milestones:**

- Additional agricultural service industry in county/region.
- Sales of farmland to new or expanding farm operations.
- Lower median age of farmers (2007 Ag. Census).
- Number of loans to agricultural enterprises.
- Participation in SCMP programs.

# BACKGROUND

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## SETTING

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Schenectady County occupies approximately 208 square miles or 129,800 acres in east-central New York State. It is the second smallest of the 57 upstate counties. Schenectady County is considered industrial with a traditionally heavy concentration of manufacturing. The County is relatively heavily populated with a population density of approximately 700 persons per square mile. Development is concentrated in the City of Schenectady and its surrounding inner suburban areas. Excluding the City of Schenectady, population density drops to approximately 435 persons per square mile. The County had a population of 160,979 in 1970. Population within the County has been declining and according to the 2000 Census is estimated at 146,555 representing a decline of 9 percent since 1970. The projected trend is toward a continuing decrease in urban population and a stable rural/suburban population.

The County lies within the Mohawk Valley physiographic province. The Adirondack Mountains are to the north and the Helderberg Escarpment, the northern edge of the Allegheny Plateau, lies to the south. The Mohawk River extends through the northeast corner of the County. Although the County is in a lowland physiographic province, variation in elevation is significant. Lands adjacent to the Mohawk River are nearly level. Farther away from the river the topography becomes somewhat rolling. Elevation ranges from 200 feet on the Mohawk River to a high of 1,426 feet in the west-central part of the County.

Most soils in the County are considered good to fair for farm crops. Prime agricultural soils are predominantly located on flat lands along the Mohawk River and Schoharie Creek. Additional concentrations of prime soils are found in westernmost Glenville along the Montgomery County line and along the Normanskill in Princetown (Map 1).

The climate of the County is humid continental. Currents in the upper atmosphere transport considerable moisture, resulting in much cloudiness and humidity. Winters are generally long and cold with an occasional season that is severe in terms of low temperatures, heavy snowfall, or both. Below-zero temperatures occur on about 10 to 15 days in winter. In most seasons the coldest temperature ranges from -5 degrees F to -15 degrees. Summers are warm with temperatures of 90 degrees F or higher occurring on an average of 8 to 12 days per year, mostly between early June and late August. Average daytime temperatures in summer range from the upper 70's to mid 80's.

The freeze-free season is approximately 165 days. The last freezing temperature in spring generally occurs between May 10 and 15 and the first freeze in fall occurs around October 10. Annual precipitation averages 35 to 38 inches throughout most of the County. Rainfall during the May to September growing season varies from 17 to 19 inches. The distribution of this rainfall is generally adequate for agriculture and maintenance of water resources. Serious droughts are rare, but in most growing seasons crop moisture is deficient for temporary periods.

# OVERVIEW OF SCHENECTADY COUNTY AGRICULTURE

## Number & Types of Farms & Farmland Trends

For United States Department of Agriculture Census purposes, a farm is defined as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, there are 151 “farms” in Schenectady County comprising 18,168 acres of land, or nearly 14 percent of the County’s land base. In the Capital District<sup>2</sup> approximately 18 percent of the land area is in farms while statewide approximately 24 percent of the land area is in farms.

The nursery and greenhouse sector is the most significant component of the County’s agriculture industry and leads countywide sales by a large margin as shown in table 1 below. While the number of nursery and greenhouse farm operations has not increased significantly in recent years, annual sales between 1987 and 1997 increased 310 percent and now comprise 54 percent of total agricultural product sales.

In the 1970s dairy was the main farming enterprise in Schenectady County. Following the statewide trend, since the 1970s the influence of dairy farming in the County has decreased. According to the Census of Agriculture, in 1982 there were 19 dairy farms producing annual sales of \$1,673,000 in Schenectady County. In 1997, there were 8 dairy farms with annual sales of \$958,000—a 58 percent decrease in farms and 43 percent decrease in sales. In spite of the decline, the dairy sector is still an important component of the County’s agricultural industry and has the second most annual sales.

**Table 1. Current Major Farm Sectors**

Farm Sector	No. of Farms	Annual Sales
Nursery & greenhouse	27	\$3,310,000
Dairy	8	\$958,000
Vegetables, sweet corn, & melons	17	\$567,000
Hay, silage, and field seeds	62	\$365,000
Livestock (other than dairy)	59	\$284,000

Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

Most of the farms (47 percent) within the County are located within the town of Duanesburg, followed by Glenville (25 percent), and Princetown (19 percent). There are no farms within the City of Schenectady and only 15 farms within the towns of Niskayuna and Rotterdam.

**Table 2. Farms & Farm Acreage by Municipality**

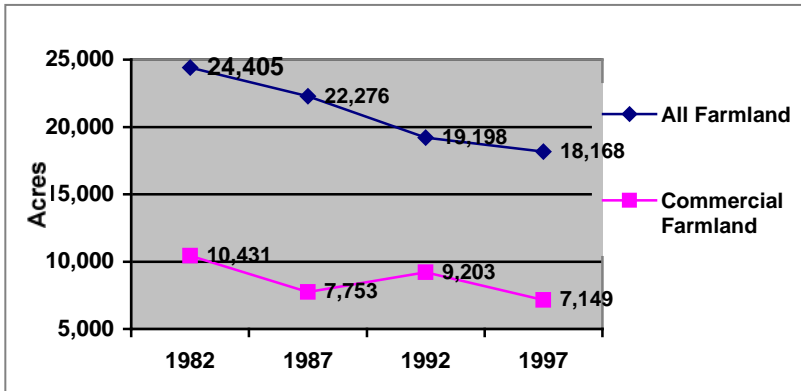
Municipality	Number of Farms	Land in Farms (Acres)	Percent of Municipality in Farms
Duanesburg	74	8,170	18
Glenville	39	2,746	9
Niskayuna	7	147	2
Princetown	29	3,433	23
Rotterdam	8	599	3
TOTAL	157	15,095	

Source: Schenectady County Department of Planning (1997 Ag. District Review Data)

<sup>2</sup> The Capital District is comprised of Albany, Saratoga, Schenectady, and Rensselaer Counties.



**Figure 1. Land in Farms/Commercial Farms**



Source: 1997 & 1987 Census of Agriculture

Over the 15-year period between 1982 and 1997 the number of farms in Schenectady County decreased 28 percent from 209 to 151. The amount of land in farms decreased 26 percent (6,237 acres) from 24,405 acres to 18,168 acres. Total cropland has declined 28 percent (4,233 acres) from 15,171 acres in 1982 to 10,938 in 1997. The rate of decrease in farms and farmland in Schenectady County since 1982 is slightly higher than the statewide trend where the number of farms decreased 25 percent and the amount of land in farms declined 21 percent.

Perhaps more significant than the overall decline in farms is the decrease in farms reporting annual sales in excess of \$10,000 (commercial farms). Over the 15-year period between 1982 and 1997, commercial farms decreased 37 percent in Schenectady County from 65 to 41. This rate of decline is much higher than experienced in the other Capital District counties of Albany, Rensselaer, and Saratoga that collectively had only a 13 percent decrease in such farming operations from 665 to 591.

The overall number of farms in the County stayed the same between 1992 and 1997, reversing the trend of the previous two census periods where the number of farms declined 13 and 17 percent, respectively. However, commercial farms continued to decline, decreasing 18 percent from 50 to 41—resulting in an estimated loss of market value of land and buildings of \$3.2M. For 1997, the estimated market value of land and buildings for commercial farms in Schenectady County was \$16.8M or approximately \$410,000 per farm.

Not surprisingly, as a land use, commercial farms are becoming less prominent. The Census reports that commercial farms comprised 7,149 acres (approximately 5 percent) of the County in 1997, down from 9,203 acres (7 percent) in 1992 and 10,431 acres (8 percent) in 1982. From 1982 to 1997 the County lost 32 percent (3,282 acres) of its commercial farmland.

**Table 3. Farms within County by Gross Farm Sales (1982 to 1997)**

Sales	Number of Farms			
	1982	1987	1992	1997
Less than \$2,500	68	74	55	56
\$2,500 to \$4,999	47	32	22	22
\$5,000 to \$9,999	29	25	24	32
\$10,000 to \$24,999	26	21	25	15
\$25,000 to \$49,999	14	14	8	4
\$50,000 to \$99,999	15	10	8	11
\$100,000 or more	10	6	9	11
	209	182	151	151

Source: 1987, 1992 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

**\$ Dollar Value \$**  
Throughout the Plan, dollar values are in current dollars and are not adjusted for inflation or deflation. In other words, reporting \$10,000 of sales in 1982 was more significant than reporting \$10,000 of sales in 1997 due to inflation.



### Farm Definitions

For purposes of this Plan, a *farm* is defined as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold during the year. Any place from which \$10,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold is considered a *commercial farm*. While \$10,000 in annual sales is a small farm, this threshold is used since it is consistent with the definition of “land used in agricultural production” found in the NYS Ag. & Markets Law. Such farm operations qualify for an agricultural assessment for local property tax purposes and right to farm protections found in the Ag. & Markets Law while operations with less than \$10,000 in annual sales may not.

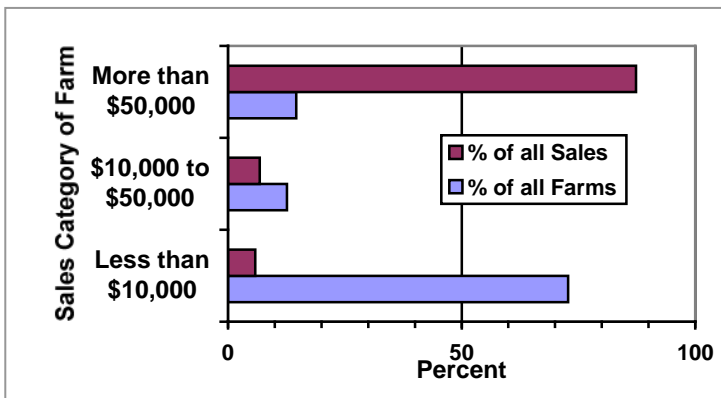
While the decline in farms and cropland since 1982 is significant, the most recent census data indicates that the rate of decline has decreased and the loss of farms and farmland in the County is stabilizing. Between 1992 and 1997, the number of farms in the County stayed the same, while the acres of land in farms

decreased 1,030 acres or 5 percent—much lower than the 14 percent decline in acres experienced for the previous 5-year census period. The local agriculture producer survey done as part of this planning effort supports the contention that the loss of farms and farmland is stabilizing since the vast majority of respondents (83 percent) indicated that they expect to continue farming over the next five years. Only 10 percent of respondents indicated that they expect to retire during this time period and just 3 percent indicated that they plan on selling any of their land for non-farm purposes. Additionally, 38 percent of full-time farmers anticipate the farm will expand or have an increase in capital investment within the next five years.

### Small Farms

Most farms in the County are small operations with 61 percent reportedly part-time and 73 percent having gross annual sales less than \$10,000 according to the 1997 Census. The percentage of small part-time farms in Schenectady County is substantially higher than statewide, where only 41 percent are part-time farms and 46 percent report annual sales of less than \$10,000. Within the other Capital District Counties approximately 49 percent are considered part-time operations and 56 percent of farms report annual sales less than \$10,000.

**Figure 2. Percent of Agricultural Sales by Farm Class (1997)**



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

While these non-commercial farms comprise 73 percent of the farms in the County, they account for less than 6 percent of the agricultural sales. The 41 commercial farms in Schenectady County contribute the bulk of annual countywide sales at \$5,751,000 or 94 percent. In fact, the 22 farms with sales in excess of \$50,000 are responsible for over 87 percent of all sales.

For many of these small non-commercial farms, income from farming makes up a modest portion of household income. However, despite the limited gross farm sales, a small farm can provide vital economic support to a family and contribute significantly to the agricultural industry. Conventional wisdom says that farmer’s net incomes generally run about 15-20 percent of gross sales. However, well-managed small farms can earn much more income per dollar of sales than conventional large farms since small farms are generally self sustaining

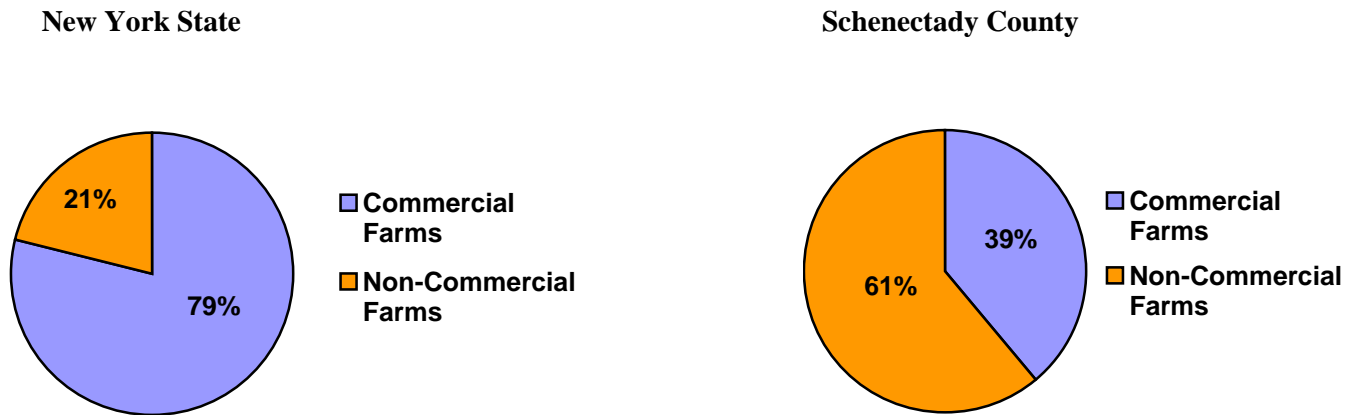


and not as reliant on purchased inputs. They are also typically niche-marketers catering to individual customers rather than producing bulk quantities for mass markets and thus reducing their susceptibility to low commodity prices.

The small part-time farms contribute significantly to the viability of the agricultural industry by helping to establish a critical mass of farms and a better farming environment. Smaller farms help neighboring commercial farm operations use their land to its best advantage by reducing the incidence of adjoining non-compatible uses. They also help preserve open space since many of the non-commercial farms contain substantial acreage. In addition to the small farmer, agricultural landowners that are non-farmers are also important to the continuance of agriculture since they can provide access to additional useable lands. Of the 151 farms in Schenectady County, 43 (29 percent) utilize 2,905 acres of rented land.

Recent farmland trends indicate that smaller farms may hold the key to the continuance of agriculture in Schenectady County. In 1992, small farms represented 52 percent of County farmland. In 1997, they represented 61 percent of farmland having increased 1,024 acres or 10 percent. Over this same time period, acreage in commercial farms decreased by 2,054 acres (22 percent) and now represents only 39 percent of farmland within the County.

**Figure 3. Percent of Acreage in Farmland by Farmland Class**



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

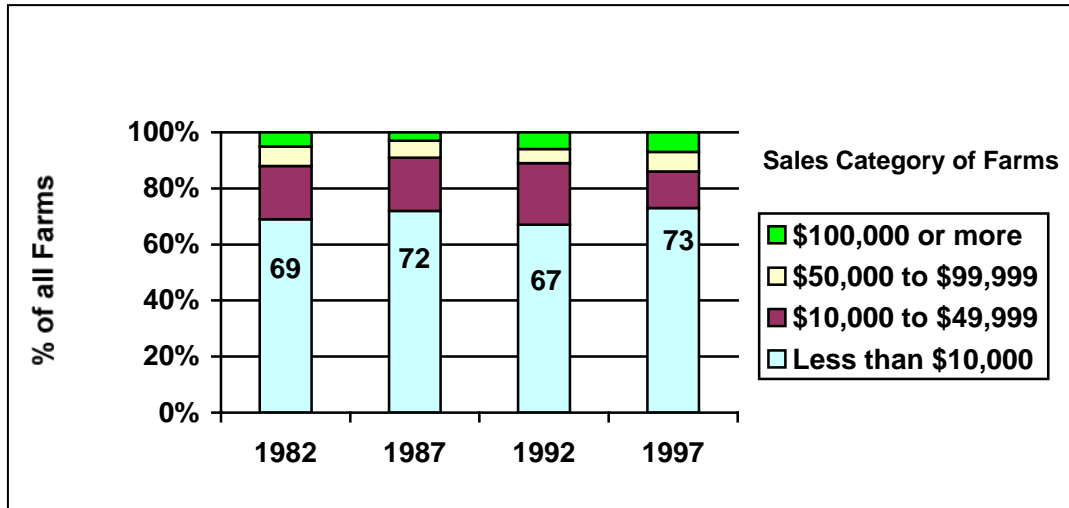
Small farms can also represent new start-up agricultural enterprises and future growth opportunities for the industry. And encouraging or assisting new farm enterprises may become increasingly important since the average age of a farmer in the County was 56 in 1997—an increase of 4 years since 1987 when the average age was 52 years. (As reported in the 1997 census, 56 (37 percent) of the 151 farm operators are 60 years of age or older and the average number of years on the current farm is 25.) However, as some respondents to the County agricultural producer survey mentioned, most agricultural assistance programs are not geared toward the beginning farmer or new small farm enterprises.

*“Your minimum rules exclude small guys from your financial programs and from property tax relief. It makes it almost impossible to expand or be successful.”* **Schenectady County Farmer.**

*“The farm income requirement for a tax break is impossible for us as “new farmers” to reach especially when full time employment is necessary to support the farm development.”* **Schenectady County Farmer.**

As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of non-commercial farms has remained relatively stable between 1982 and 1997 with non-commercial farms remaining around 70 percent of all farms in the County. Obviously, as custodians of the bulk of farm assets—including land—small farms are important in any continuing discussion regarding the County’s agricultural industry.

**Figure 4. Percentage of Farms by Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold (1982 to 1997)**



Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

### Agricultural Product Sales

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture the market value of agricultural products sold in Schenectady County was \$6,108,000, or \$40,447 per farm. This places the County 52<sup>nd</sup> out of 61 counties within the state in total agricultural product sales. The only counties in the state, outside of the New York Metro Area, that have lower total agricultural sales are Hamilton and Warren Counties in the Adirondacks. While total sales are comparatively low, they are more of a reflection of the relatively small size of the County than the industry’s

importance. The 1997 Census figures for agricultural sales per acre shows that at \$336/acre Schenectady County’s sales are 3 percent higher than the Capital District’s average of \$326/acre and 14 percent lower than the statewide average of \$391/acre.



**Newly Planted Nursery Stock in Schenectady’s Mohawk Valley**

A notable exception to the comparatively small agricultural product sales in the County is the sales of nursery and greenhouse crops where the County ranks 15<sup>th</sup> out of 61 counties statewide. With a 1997 sales value of \$3,310,000 nursery and greenhouse crops comprise 54 percent of total agricultural product sales in the County. Between 1987 and 1997 sales of this commodity group increased 310 percent and anecdotal observations since 1997 indicate that the nursery and greenhouse industry continues to expand locally.

Seventy-two percent (\$4,386,000) of Schenectady County’s agricultural product sales are from crops, including nursery and greenhouse. The remaining \$1,721,000 (28 percent) comes from the sale of livestock, poultry and their products. This sales ratio of crops to livestock is significantly different from the surrounding counties farm sales. As shown in Table 4 below, the surrounding counties derive much more of their farm sales from livestock than crops—essentially mirroring the statewide sales ratio where approximately 35 percent of sales are derived from crops and 65 percent from livestock.

**Table 4. Comparison of Regional County Farm Sales**

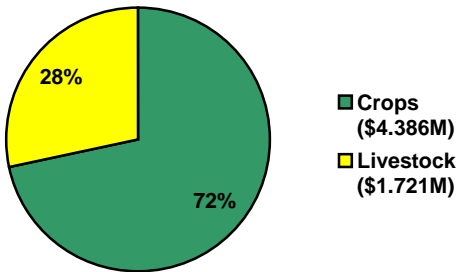
County	Acres in Farms	Total Farm Sales	Crops	Livestock
<i>Schenectady</i>	18,168	\$6,107,000	\$4,386,000 (71.8%)	\$1,721,000 (28.2%)
Albany	56,782	\$15,770,000	\$6,730,000 (42.7%)	\$9,040,000 (57.3%)
Montgomery	134,940	\$48,723,000	\$7,778,000 (16.0%)	\$40,945,000 (84.0%)
Rensselaer	98,965	\$28,700,000	\$9,612,000 (33.5%)	\$19,088,000 (66.5%)
Saratoga	72,928	\$29,885,000	\$8,832,000 (29.6%)	\$21,023,000 (70.4%)
Schoharie	110,773	\$26,973,000	\$5,847,000 (21.7%)	\$21,126,000 (78.3%)

Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

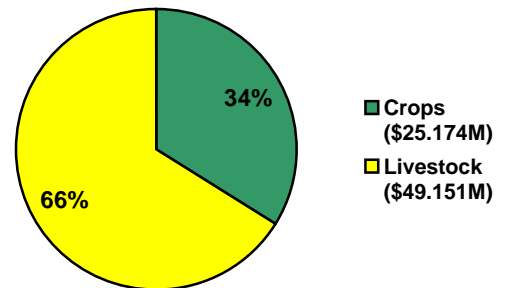
**Figure 5. Value of Agricultural Products Sold**

Crops, including nursery & greenhouse crops  
Livestock, poultry, and their products

Schenectady County



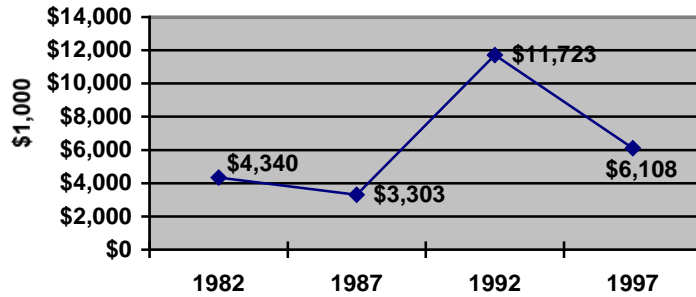
Other Capital District Counties\*



\*Includes Albany, Rensselaer & Saratoga Counties

The \$6,108,000 in Countywide farm sales for 1997 is a significant decrease from the farm sales of \$11,723,000 reported in the 1992 Census. This 48 percent decrease in sales represents a drop of \$37,189 per farm and is especially eye opening when compared to the statewide data where the sales per farm increased \$8,095, or 10 percent.

**Figure 6. Schenectady County Farm Sales (1982 to 1997)**



Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

\*Dollar values are in current dollars and are not adjusted for inflation or deflation.

A comparison of the 1992 and 1997 Census of Agriculture indicates that most of the drop in sales can be attributed to a reduction in sales of one commodity group—crops, including nursery and greenhouse crops. In 1992 there were sales of this commodity group totaling \$9,981,000. Five years later in 1997 there were reported sales of only \$4,386,000—a \$5,595,000 or 56 percent decrease in sales. This drop in sales may be related to the reported loss of commercial farms over these five years or may reflect underreporting of sales. In any event, over the 10-year period between 1987 and 1997 there was an 85 percent increase in farm sales countywide. Most of this increase is attributable to the nursery and greenhouse industry where sales climbed a notable 310 percent. During these 10 years, sales of livestock, poultry, and their products declined 7 percent.

Perhaps most significantly, during this time period the average net cash return for each commercial farm increased \$24,399 or 184 percent (Table 5). This is a significant jump, especially when compared to the other Capital District Counties, whose average net cash return increased a very modest 1 percent, significantly lagging behind the statewide average increase of 23 percent. The comparatively large increase in net cash return can probably be attributed to the fact that sales in Schenectady County are primarily derived from nursery and greenhouse crops, and reflect the relative success of this sector of the agricultural industry.

**Table 5. Per Farm Net Cash Return by County (Commercial Farms)**

	1987	1997	Change
<i>Schenectady County</i>	\$13,292	\$37,691	\$24,399 (184%)
Albany County	\$17,454	\$19,790	\$2,336 ( 13%)
Rensselaer County	\$26,148	\$28,883	\$2,735 ( 11%)
Saratoga County	\$28,012	\$23,729	(-\$4,283) (- 15%)
Statewide	\$27,610	\$33,845	\$6,235 ( 23%)

Source: 1992 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

### *Direct Consumer Sales*

Direct marketing benefits both farmers and consumers. By selling directly, farmers can earn a greater profit. By buying directly, consumers can obtain a wide variety of recently harvested locally grown farm products which are nutritious, safe to consume, and often unavailable elsewhere. Direct marketing is also a unique social and educational experience, offering consumers a direct connection to the source of their food and offering farmers the satisfaction of being appreciated for their hard work in producing quality food. It also provides a good opportunity to educate the public about issues important to the farming community, and the significant role local consumers can play in maintaining farmland.



**Roadside Stand**

The census reports that in New York State between 1992 and 1997 the number of farms selling products directly to the consumer and the value of those agricultural products sold directly has increased nearly 17 percent and 24 percent, respectively. Concurrently, the value of direct sales per farm has increased modestly statewide from \$9,360 to \$9,928. In Schenectady County the number of farms selling products directly to consumers remained virtually the same during this five-year period, increasing from 18 to 19 farms. However, the County has seen a more substantial overall increase in direct sales from \$94,104 in 1992 to \$144,495 in 1997—resulting in a 46 percent increase in direct sales per farm from \$5,228 to \$7,605. This is a relatively sharp increase; however, direct sales per farm are still \$2,323 or 31 percent below the statewide average of \$9,928.

The census reports that direct sales make up less than two percent of total sales statewide. At \$144,000 annually, direct sales comprise 2.4 percent of reported total sales Countywide.<sup>3</sup> While this is a relatively small percentage of total sales, direct sales are very important to many of the farms in the County with 53 respondents (56 percent) to the County survey indicating that they participated in some form of direct marketing of their agricultural products (see Map 4). Furthermore, since the census excludes non-edible products such as nursery crops and value-added agricultural products from direct sales figure, the direct sales figure reported in the census undervalues the importance of this marketing mechanism to farmers in the County.

Although an important source of revenues for County farmers, direct sales appear to offer a largely untapped market potential. The cultural diversity of the Capital Region creates opportunities for niche marketing and the proximity to metropolitan centers can allow for the development of more direct marketing outlets. Furthermore, when surveyed as part of this planning effort, local consumers responded overwhelmingly (79 percent) that they would “be willing to pay slightly more for locally produced agricultural products if doing so would help farms stay in business.” Eighty-six percent responded that they would “buy more local/state/regional produce if it was labeled as such” (Appendix B).

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<sup>3</sup> Reported direct sales exclude non-edible products such as nursery crops, cut flowers, etc. Sales of value-added agricultural products through a farmers’ own processing are also excluded.





In Schenectady County, direct sales are predominantly generated through farm stand sales and pick your own operations. Longstanding farm operations with optimal locations can readily establish roadside farm stands to directly market farm products. There are a number of such well-established farm stands in Schenectady County that account for the bulk of direct sales. Of the 53 respondents to the County survey that indicated they participate in some form of direct marketing, 23 (43 percent) said they have a roadside stand or pick your own operation. No farms responded that they participate in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)<sup>4</sup>. Only 6 (11 percent) said they participate in a farmers' market, indicating that farmers' markets are not currently utilized as a marketing mechanism for most farms in the County.

### *Farmers Markets*

While many successful farmers markets have been established around the state and region, in Schenectady County the farmers' markets do not have a prominent community presence and are limited to seasonal tailgate operations. In the City of Schenectady there are farmers' markets on Tuesdays in the St. Luke's Church parking lot on upper State Street and Thursdays on Franklin Street on the south side of City Hall. Approximately five vendors participated in 2002, only one of which had farm operations in Schenectady County.

Farmers' markets provide a window into the local farm community and can play an important role in educating the consumer as to the production and origin of their food. They also offer a low cost entry point for farmers and provide a secure and regular market outlet. This is especially valuable for new and small-scale producers—typical of Schenectady County—who are unable to produce the quantity required by supermarkets. Farmers' markets also help improve diet and nutrition by providing access to fresh food and information/demonstrations on how to cook and prepare fresh ingredients. Finally, markets can add to tourism and help invigorate secondary shopping areas such as the Jay Street area adjacent to the existing downtown farmers' market.



**Downtown Schenectady Farmers' Market**

Clearly there is a need to reach out to farmers within the County to participate in the local farmers' market. And there does appear to be some interest from local farmers with 7 percent of respondents to the County producer survey indicating that they are interested in participating in a farmers' market in downtown Schenectady and an additional 24 percent responding that they were not sure.

<sup>4</sup> At CSA farms customers pay a set price to be “share holders” for the season, guaranteeing farmers a fixed income. In return, customers receive a regular supply of fresh produce directly from the farmer.



Aside from the need to reach out to farmers, there is a need to provide overall assistance to the market. To be successful, farmers' markets need:

- Public outreach and marketing;
- An attractive infrastructure and setting;
- To emphasize quality and freshness;
- Consistent hours and location; and,
- Good number of vendors with a variety of foods and products.

The Mayor's Task Force on Art & Entertainment, which grew out of the Hunter Master Plan, recommended that the farmers' market carry more diversity of product, including baked goods, flowers, and crafts. The Task Force thought this might be accomplished by changing the vendor fee policy to encourage more partial season vendors. They also felt that it should be more of a festive market with music. The subcommittee also looked at locations and recommended Jay Street in front of City Hall. The markets current location on Franklin Street next to City Hall appears consistent with this recommendation. However, another planning effort taking place for downtown Schenectady, the Canal Square/400 Block Master Plan, recommends that the farmers' market be located along Stratton Plaza. Although no consistent location for the farmers' market is coming out of the various land use planning efforts for downtown Schenectady, the market is an integral component of each plan and they should be referenced when considering locations for the market.

According to the farmers' market manager, sales have been increasing steadily at both market locations. Consistent with the Art & Entertainment Task Force, the market will allow producers to participate on a weekly basis during the 2002 season instead of only on a seasonal basis in hopes of expanding the products offered. The downtown market location should also be able to capitalize on the additional foot traffic created by the opening of the new MVP office building and the pending development of the NYSDOT office building. The location at St. Luke's should ultimately benefit from a proposed reconstruction of State Street in that vicinity that will create a more pedestrian-friendly and visually appealing environment. An additional site for a Saturday market in either the Town of Rotterdam or Niskayuna is currently being explored by the market organization.

One program in the County that has expanded awareness and use of the farmers' markets is the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). Through this program, participants in the Women, Infants & Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC), receive approximately \$20 worth of farmers market coupons annually. About 70 percent of WIC Coupons are redeemed annually in Schenectady County suggesting that the farmers markets' current locations serve this population well. Statewide the redemption rate for coupons is approximately 65 percent. In 1997, for Schenectady County \$28,220 worth of coupons were issued. At a redemption rate of 70 percent, this program accounted for \$19,740 worth of direct sales in 1997, or nearly 14 percent of all reported direct farm sales in the County.

In fall, 2000, a 1 page, 12-question survey of WIC participants regarding the farmers' market was conducted. A total of 183 responses, representing approximately 20 percent of participating families in the County, were received. Approximately 56 percent of respondents indicated that they attend the Schenectady farmers' market once a week or more. A total of 81 percent indicated that they find the location of the farmers' market convenient with one third of the respondents indicating that they walk (16.5 percent) or take a bus (16.5 percent) to the market.

From a marketing perspective, the WIC coupons encouraged additional expenditures with 55 percent of participants indicating that they purchase goods at the market without a coupon. The markets also appear to have expanded the types of foods people buy, with 69 percent of respondents indicating that they have tried different types of food items as a result of the market. Of these respondents, 66 percent indicated that they continue to buy these additional food items at the grocery store. Complete results of the survey can be found in Appendix D.

## MAJOR FARM SECTORS

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**This section provides an overview of major farm sectors in Schenectady County. Recent sales and product trends in each sector are discussed along with typical business and operator profiles (full-time v. part-time, etc.).**

**Table 6. Current Major Farm Sectors (Farms & Sales)**

Farm Sector	No. of Farms	Annual Sales
Nursery & greenhouse	27	\$3,310,000
Dairy	8	\$958,000
Vegetables, sweet corn, & melons	17	\$567,000
Hay, silage, and field seeds	62	\$365,000
Livestock (other than dairy)	59	\$284,000

Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

### Nursery & Greenhouse

The nursery and greenhouse sector is one of the fastest growing segments of New York's agricultural industry. This sector covers a variety of farm products including vegetable and flower seed crops, bedding plants, foliage plants, vegetables for garden use, potted flowering plants, cut flowers, bulbs, and Christmas trees. As consumers continue to increase their purchases of plants for home use, the sector will grow to meet these demands.

In Schenectady County, annual sales from 1987 to 1997 increased \$2.5 M or 310 percent, while the number of nursery and greenhouse farms did not significantly increase. Sales per farm are relatively high compared with other agricultural sectors in the County with only 25 percent of respondents to the County's producer survey reporting annual gross sales less than \$10,000.

The majority of advances in sales volume in the past 20 years have been in the areas of bedding plants and herbaceous perennial plants for use in gardens. Cut flowers grown in the greenhouse and plant materials grown for Easter sales have been important but are declining in sales. Also on the decline now but probably still important for the local industry are poinsettias and fall mums. The majority of the sales in the local Greenhouse industry occur between May 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup> of any given year.

**Table 7. Nursery & Greenhouse Sector Growth (1987 to 1997)**

Sector Component	1987	1997
No. of Farms	25	27
Sales per Farm	\$32,320	\$122,593
Total Sales	\$808,000	\$3,310,000

Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

The nursery and greenhouse business is not necessarily land-intensive. According to the County producer survey, the average sized farm is 44 acres and only 25 percent of respondents indicated that they rent any land.

Most respondents (83 percent) to the County's survey consider themselves full-time farm operators with only 2 respondents indicating that they have off-farm employment. Locally, this sector should remain stable since almost all farm operators plan on continuing to farm over the next five years with only one responding that they plan to retire and sell the property for non-farm purposes.

Pressures on the industry include, but are not limited to, competition from foreign growers (particularly Canadian) and competition from chain or big-box stores. Most growers have been able to compete successfully with these new interests by maintaining a wider selection of plant material and container sizes and providing better service and information to the consumer.

The most serious problem reported in the County survey for this sector was the lack of qualified labor followed closely by property taxes. Non-farm development, local land use regulations, and state/federal regulations were the only other issues mentioned as problems.

Overwhelmingly respondents to the County survey indicated that for the farm operation they spend the most money on insurance and taxes, followed by machinery and equipment, seed or fruit stock, fertilizer, and spray materials/chemicals. On average they reported buying 31 percent of farm supplies, materials and services from within the County and 42 percent from the rest of the state.

The local greenhouse industry has changed significantly in the past several years. Most growers have switched to direct retail sales to maintain higher profit margins. All respondents to the County's survey said that they sell directly to consumers. Greenhouse technology has changed significantly as well. Growers have been very concerned about electricity and fuel costs in the past few years. Many newer facilities are being constructed with passive ventilation systems that utilize a minimal amount of electricity in their operation. Growers are

investing in more permanent, higher technology greenhouse structures. These structures often cost more to construct but have lower maintenance and operation costs over the life of the structure. The trend toward capital investment for this sector is supported by the County producer survey where over 60 percent of respondents indicated that the farm will expand or have an increase in capital investment within the next 5 years.



**Central Park Greenhouse**

In the Capital District, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County SWCD and Schenectady Job Training Agency maintain a County greenhouse facility that is utilized to train entry level workers for the industry and carry out research and demonstration projects to educate and benefit the local industry.

### Dairy

The Dairy Industry in Schenectady County generates the second largest agricultural sales volume. Following a national and statewide trend, the sector has become a smaller part of the agricultural industry in the County over the past 30 years. Since 1982, the number of dairy farms in the County has decreased 58 percent from 19 to 8 and total annual sales have declined 43 percent to \$958,000 in 1997. Statewide, the number of dairy farms decreased 46 percent. This decrease can be attributed to several factors including low wholesale milk prices. The average milk price in 2000 was equal to the price dairy farmers received in 1990 yet expenses increased considerably during that period. Also, with the availability of high paying, off-farm employment, young members of the family are less likely to remain on the farm and continue its operation. Finally, with low milk prices many farmers have been reluctant to make capital investments in the advanced technologies necessary to compete in this commodity market.

**Table 8. Dairy Farms & Sales (1982 to 1997)**

Year	1982	1987	1992	1997	2001*
No. of Farms	19	16	8	8	7
Annual Sales	\$1,673,000	\$1,052,000	Unavailable	\$958,000	\$2,200,000
Sales per Farm	\$88,053	\$65,750	Unavailable	\$119,750	\$314,286

Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

\*Due to fluctuating milk prices and the increase in cows per farm, dairy sales increased significantly according to the 2001 Cornell Dairy Farm Business Summary Program conducted by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

In addition to the farms themselves, the sector supports a significant amount of other businesses (feed supplies and services, veterinarian services, milking and animal housing equipment supplies and services, milk haulers and shippers, and milk processors) and has a high economic multiplier effect. Annual gross sales per farm are comparatively high with respondents to the producer survey indicating gross sales greater than \$100,000.

Modern dairy farming is a sophisticated business that requires a high degree of management and technology to remain competitive. Dairy operations also require high levels of inputs and services. Respondents to the County survey clearly indicated that the farm operation spends the most money on feeds and feed ingredients followed by machinery and equipment, transportation, and insurance and taxes. Almost none of the farm supplies, materials or services were reported as purchased from within the County. However, 95 percent were reported as purchased from within the rest of the state. Most of these purchases probably take place in adjoining Montgomery and Schoharie Counties where there are a number of agri-businesses.

Dairy farmers tend to be full-time operators with all but one respondent to the County survey indicating they devote 100 percent of their work time to the farm operation. In fact, all respondents that reported dairy as their principal farm enterprise responded that they are a full-time farm operator. Dairy operations are also the most land consumptive agricultural use in the County. They require extensive cropland and support land since they grow all of their own forage that makes up about 60 percent of a dairy cow's daily feed intake. The average dairy farm operator in the County owns 194 acres and rents or leases an average of another 66 acres. Of the 9 respondents that indicated they have a dairy operation, 7 are located in the Town of Duaneburg with the Towns of Glenville and Princetown having 1 each.

The dairy industry in the County has stabilized in the past ten years after a decline in the previous two decades. Dairy farms in the County are long tenured family businesses with respondents to the County survey reportedly owning/operating their farm for an average of 33 years, 8 years longer than the average tenure of the other types of farms in the County. All the dairy operators responding to the County's survey indicated that they plan on continuing farming or transferring the farm during the next five years. Only one dairy farm has a business plan according to the County's producer survey. This is somewhat surprising given the sophistication of the business and may point out a service need for this sector.

State/federal regulations and property taxes were reported as the two most problematic issues followed by local land use regulations and non-farm development.

### Vegetables, sweet corn & melons

Between 1987 and 1997, the number of vegetable farms has remained stable in the County while acreage in production has decreased 26 percent. Reported annual sales increased 109 percent over these 10 years to \$567,000 despite the decrease in acreage.

**Table 9. Vegetable Farms & Sales (1987 to 1997)**

Year	1987	1992	1997
No. of Farms	18	14	17
Acres	404	440	299
Annual Sales	\$271,000	\$393,000	\$567,000
Sales per Farm	\$15,055	\$28,071	\$33,353

Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

Many types of fresh market vegetables are sold through roadside stands, where the bulk of direct sales occur in the County. The many roadside stands in the County also offer value-added products (jellies, jams) and baked goods. None of the larger producers in the County sell product at the local farmers' markets although some Schenectady County producers participate in the Saratoga Farmers' Market.

The bulk of reported sales take place on the wholesale market. The Menands Market is the major wholesale outlet in the region, facilitating farm to broker and farm to farm transactions. The Menands Market is also a source of produce for local independent grocery stores and restaurants.

Some producers in Schenectady County have penetrated the larger retail grocery stores in the area. This can be a difficult market since it is very competitive. To access this market requires a large farm to produce a consistent quantity and quality needed by the large retail markets. Farms need to capitalize on economies of scale and produce high volumes since profit margins are smaller when dealing with large markets.

Many of the vegetable producers have expanded into ornamentals to take advantage of the higher profit margins. In fact, of the 97 respondents to the County producer survey, only 1 described their farm enterprise as primarily a vegetable farm. None of the respondents indicated that they participate in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). However, CSA has been successful elsewhere in the region and it appears to have potential as an additional marketing approach. Most vegetable producers are also involved in fruit production or a nursery/greenhouse operation and characterize this as their primary agricultural enterprise.

### Hay, silage, and other field crops

This sector of the farming industry is dominated by part-time residential farms. Only 8 percent of respondents to the County survey who indicated that hay was their primary agricultural product reported being a full-time farmer. Only 14 percent had annual gross farm income greater than \$10,000 with 32 percent indicating income of \$1,000 or less. Since 1987 the numbers of farms producing hay and silage and their annual sales have remained relatively steady. Much of the field crop production takes place on dairy and livestock farms and is fed to animals on-site and not sold off the farm. Consequently, reported annual sales do not accurately reflect production.

These farms comprise a significant amount of acreage; averaging 140 acres owned per respondent to the County survey. This reinforces the finding herein that despite limited gross farm sales, noncommercial farms help preserve open space and are important in any discussion regarding the agricultural industry, land use, natural resources, and the environment.

**Table 10. Hay, Silage & Other Field Crops Farm Sales (1987 to 1997)**

Year	1987	1992	1997
No. of Farms	76	63	62
Annual Sales	\$303,000	\$315,000	\$365,000
Avg. Sales per Farm	\$3,987	\$5,000	\$5,887

Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture



### Livestock (other than dairy)

Livestock production in Schenectady County (other than dairy) includes horses, beef, sheep, goats, and poultry. Most livestock producers are part-time and in most cases income is supplemented by another farm operation or from off farm income. Many of the livestock operations indicate that hay is the second most important component of the farm. There are no reported hog (swine) farms in the County. There is a renewed interest in raising goats in the County, especially meat goats, while sheep production has remained relatively stable.

**Table 11. Livestock (other than dairy) Farms & Sales**

Year	1987	1997
No. of Farms	79	55
Annual Sales	\$798,000	\$763,000
Sales per farm	\$10,101	\$13,873

Source: 1987 & 1997 Censuses of Agriculture

### Horses

The horse industry has seen the largest growth of any of the livestock enterprises with a 135 percent increase in the number of horses owned. The approximately 40 horse farms in the County vary widely in the number of animals and acres per farm.



Horse boarding and riding operations have become a more significant component of the agricultural industry and appear to be making use of previously idle farmland. In April 2001, the Schenectady County Legislature approved commercial horse boarding operations as land used in agricultural production, thereby, making them eligible for an agricultural land value assessment.

According to the County survey, approximately 65 percent are part-time operators with annual gross farm income less than \$10,000. Approximately 64 percent indicated that hay was the second most important (and in most instances the only) other component of the farm operation.

According to the County survey, horse farm operators have owned/operated their farm for an average of only 14 years, significantly less than the average tenure of farms in the County of 26 years. Over the next 5 years 91 percent expect to continue operating the farm.

Similar to other small farms, most horse farm operators (82 percent) reported property taxes as the biggest problem followed by local land use regulations, non-farm



development, and state/federal regulations. A majority of the farm operations (78 percent) reportedly spend the most money on insurance and taxes, followed by feed and feed ingredients, and hay.

### *Beef*

Beef producers are mainly cow/calf producers that utilize pasture land extensively and have very little investment in buildings and equipment. In most instances the cow herd remains on pasture year round and feeder calves are sold in late fall or early spring. Sales take place through local sale barns or by private treaty to feedlot operators in and around New York State. In some instances producers raise their own calves and market directly to consumers. These sales tend to be predominantly freezer beef to steady customers. None of the beef producers responded that they utilize farmers' markets. A reported 60 percent have gross annual sales of \$10,000 or more. According to the County survey 90 percent are part-time operators and 80 percent expect to continue farming over the next 5 years.



Property taxes are the biggest reported problem followed by state/federal regulations, non-farm development, local land use, distance to suppliers, and availability of markets. The lack of local USDA inspected slaughter facilities is also mentioned frequently. The farm operations reportedly spend the most money on insurance and taxes, followed closely by feed and feed ingredients, and machinery & equipment.

### *Sheep & Goats*

Sheep and goat production has increased slightly due mainly to the interest in raising boer goats for meat production. Sheep numbers have remained relatively stable despite very low wool prices over the last several years. This in part, is attributable to the high prices received for Easter lambs in this area.

### *Poultry*

Poultry production is making a small comeback in the County as a result of increased demand for an all natural poultry product raised entirely on pasture. There is still one large egg producing poultry farm in the County.

## SIZE & IMPACT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

To effectively evaluate the size and impact of the agricultural economy, it is important to consider the substantial multiplier effects associated with the agricultural industry. Farmers typically purchase most of their goods and services from within a 20-25 mile range of the farm, while their product is marketed outside the region. Consequently, according to a study by economists at Cornell University, this export of product and import of dollars creates a high multiplier effect as indicated in table 12 below.

**Table 12. Economic Multipliers for Selected Agricultural Sectors  
New York State (1997)**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Employment</b>
Dairy farm Products	1.545	1.760
Poultry & Eggs	1.420	1.690
Fruits	1.662	1.544
Vegetables	1.606	1.544
Forest products	1.787	1.415
Greenhouse & Nursery Products	1.552	1.334
Landscape & Horticultural Services	1.716	1.222

Source: Cornell University

The economic multiplier summarizes the cumulative (direct, indirect, and induced) effect of additional expenditures, employment, and income generated as the farms and employees of these farms purchase goods and services from other industries. As the agricultural businesses accrue revenues, they then distribute these revenues to employees, suppliers of goods and services, and to the government sectors in the form of taxes and fees. These “direct” expenditures stimulate additional rounds of “indirect” and “induced” expenditures as other businesses and local households make purchases with sale revenue or wage income acquired from the industry.

For example, a total output multiplier of 1.552 for greenhouse businesses means that every \$1.00 increase in output by this sector brings additional production valued at \$.552 for the state through indirect and induced effects. In other words, the \$3.3M in sales for the greenhouse and nursery sector results in \$1.8M in additional output due to the expenditures by greenhouse businesses for goods and services and personal consumption expenditures by employees. Therefore, the total output effects associated with the greenhouse and nursery business in Schenectady County were about \$5.1 million in 1997.

**Table 13. Total Economic Effects of Selected Agricultural Sectors**

<b>Farm Sector</b>	<b>Annual Sales</b>	<b>Total Economic Effect (Output)*</b>
Nursery & greenhouse	\$3,310,000	\$5,137,120
Dairy	\$958,000	\$1,480,000
Vegetables	\$567,000	\$910,000

\*Equals annual sales times selected economic multiplier.

Clearly, efforts to enhance production in the agricultural sector of the economy produce relatively large secondary and tertiary benefits. The jobs supported go beyond the farm and include accountants, processing facilities, veterinarians, motor vehicle repair and auto/truck dealers. For example, Schenectady County farmers own and must maintain 217 trucks, 341 tractors, and 221 mowers and other pieces of farm equipment with a total estimated market value of \$5.4 million according to the 1997 Census of Agriculture. They also purchase over \$260,000 in petroleum products, spend \$410,000 on general repairs and maintenance, \$460,000 in property taxes, and over \$1.1 million in hired farm labor resulting in total farm production expenses of \$4.8 million.

### **Cost of Farmland Development**

Another way of looking at the economic effects of the agricultural industry is to examine the cost side of the equation. It is a generally accepted tenet that farmland pays more in taxes than it costs a municipality in services. This is not true for every type of land use and depending upon the type of development that occurs on converted farmland, the costs of providing services to the new land use can be far greater than the revenues received by a community. Studies of towns in New York found that, on average, only 29 cents of every tax dollar generated by farm property was needed to provide services to the farm—producing a surplus of 71 cents. The 71-cent surplus puts farm property on par with commercial and industrial property as a tax positive land use. In comparison, most studies show that residences require \$1.27 in services for every dollar they generate—producing a deficit of 27 cents. This is largely due to the cost of educating children that reside in the home.

Residential development is not bad for a community. Everyone needs a place to live and there are economic benefits associated with housing development. However, aside from the many positive aspects of farmland, farming and farmland should be valued based also on what it does not cost a community. As a net tax gain, farmland protection can be viewed as a strategy to maintain the long-term fiscal health of a community.

When a community loses a farm, the economic impact can be felt throughout the county and region depending upon the size and type of farm operation. Establishing the actual economic impact is difficult and depends on a variety of factors including what replaced the farm operation. To get a sense of the economic impact losing a farm can have, the loss of a dairy farm is analyzed. The 2001 Northern Hudson Region Dairy Farm Business Summary puts the average accrued expenses for 54 Dairy Farms at \$604,529. This figure includes all expenses to operate a 175-cow dairy farm. Using the multiplier effect discussed previously, the loss of one 175-cow dairy farm yields an economic loss to the County of \$933,997. This is an annual loss unless the farm is put back into operation. This translates to a per cow economic loss to the County of \$5,337 annually and provides some sense of the cost of farmland conversion.

# COUNTY DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

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The vast majority of the County’s farm operations are located within the Towns of Duanesburg, Glenville, and Princetown. Neither the County nor these three towns have experienced much development over the past 10 years. From 1990 to 2000, the Census Bureau estimates that the population of the County has decreased nearly 2 percent from 149,285 to 146,555. During these 10 years Duanesburg’s population increased approximately 6 percent, Glenville’s declined 2 percent and Princetown had an increase of 5 percent.



**Encroaching Development/Utilities**

The residential building permit data confirms the modest development pressure. During the years from 1987 to 2000, a total of 3,593 residential building permits were issued in Schenectady County, an average of 265 per year. While the Capital District Region has not experienced tremendous growth over this period, Schenectady County’s growth has lagged somewhat behind the Region’s. Residential building permits in Schenectady County represent only 10.4 percent of the Region’s 34,700 permits reported during this 14-year period. By comparison, the Town of Wilton in Saratoga County issued 1,612 residential building permits between 1987 and 2000 while the 3 Towns of Duanesburg, Glenville, and Princetown in Schenectady County issued a total of 1,143—469 less than Wilton alone.

Despite this lack of growth, some of the farm operations may come under increasing development pressure due to residential subdivisions and water district extensions. The Town of Princetown formed its first water district in 1999 and the Town of Glenville’s water service area has expanded significantly in recent years. However, most of the loss of farmland in the County over the past 20 years can probably be attributed more to other factors such as low profitability than conversion pressure from encroaching development. A substantial amount of former farmland remains idle and undeveloped.



**Idle Farmland**

## Local Land Use Regulations

All of the municipalities in Schenectady County have zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. The bulk of active farmland in the County is within Rural Residential zones where agriculture is a principally permitted use. The County Agricultural District encompasses most of the active farmland within the County. Generally, agricultural properties within the County conform to local zoning and

comprehensive plans and are consistent with the definition of a farm established in municipal zoning ordinances.



Encroaching residential subdivision and commercial development have impacted some agricultural operations. Due to the lack of clarity and some inconsistencies in local zoning ordinances, discerning the treatment of agricultural uses in the more suburban areas is difficult. However, most residential subdivisions and commercial development within the County is subject to referral to the County Planning Department under General Municipal Law (GML-239). The County continues to support agricultural uses subject to encroaching development and recommends proper notifications be given to potential neighbors.

## **COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT**

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New York State's Agricultural District Law (Article 25AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law) seeks to create an economic and regulatory climate that will encourage farmers to continue farming. The Law recognizes that agricultural lands are an important and irreplaceable resource, and that they are being lost due to development, high costs of doing business, and regulatory restraints. While the Law does not provide complete protection for farming and farmers, it is an important mechanism to preserve farmland. It is the declared purpose of the Law to provide a locally-initiated mechanism for the protection and enhancement of New York State's agricultural land as a viable segment of the local and state economies and as an economic and environmental resource of major importance.

Agricultural Districts are legally recognized geographical areas formed by one or more landowners and approved by the county legislative body and the NYS Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets. The District boundaries must conform to tax parcel boundaries. The Schenectady County Agricultural District was created in 1988 and must be reviewed every eight years. Properties can only be added to or deleted from the district during the review period. (A more complete summary of the Agricultural District Law can be found in Appendix F.)

Relying primarily on the initiative of landowners and county governments with state oversight, the Law provides agricultural landowners with a number of benefits and protections without burdening a landowner with additional restrictions. Contrary to a common misconception, land in an agricultural district is not subject to additional land use restrictions, nor is the sale of land within the district restricted. A landowner's right to sell his or her land for whatever purpose is fully protected under the Law.

When the County Agricultural District was originally formed in 1988, it consisted of 9,539 acres located entirely within the Town of Duanesburg. In 1996 when the District underwent its mandatory eight-year review, a total of 785 acres, or approximately 8 percent of the district, was removed due to residential subdivision activity. While 8 percent may seem significant, conversion of farmland did not appear to be occurring at an alarming rate.

New landowner applications totaling 1,502 acres were added during the 1996 Agricultural District review in the Town of Duanesburg, resulting in a net increase of 717





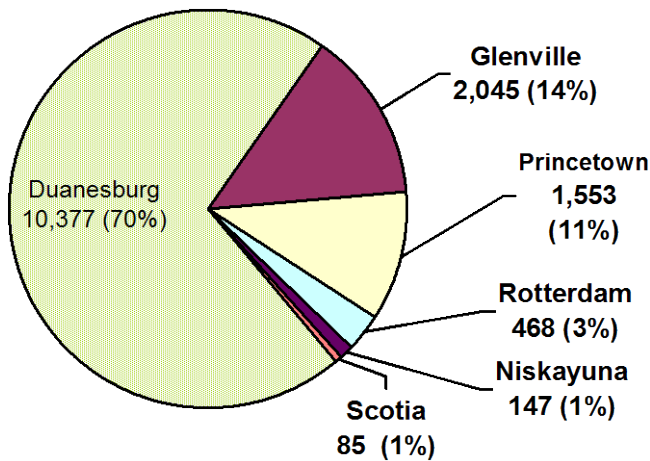
acres of Districted lands in the town. During the 1996 review, eligibility for inclusion in the District was extended to property throughout the County. As a result, 77 separate tax parcels outside of Duanesburg totaling 4,514 acres were also added to the District.

There are currently 36 properties totaling 3,014 acres classified as agriculture for real property tax purposes but not located within the Agricultural District (see Map 3). The bulk of these properties are located in the Towns of Princetown (1,663 acres) and Glenville (976 acres) with much smaller acreage in the Towns of Rotterdam (223 acres) and Duanesburg 151 acres). There are also additional properties being actively farmed but neither classified as agriculture for real property tax purposes nor within the County Agricultural District. Further, the Agricultural District contains some idle farm properties that are not currently being farmed. Therefore, Map 3 depicting the agricultural properties in the County does not encompass all agricultural uses, and in some instances may overstate the extent of agricultural activity taking place on a parcel.

One noteworthy observation is that although the majority of prime farmland within the County is located along the Mohawk River flatlands, a small fraction of this land is within the County Agricultural District. Of the approximately 550 acres of prime farmland being actively farmed along the river, only 120 acres (22 percent) are in the County Agricultural District.

**Figure 7. Schenectady County Agricultural District No. 1**

**Acres & Percent of District by Municipality**



Currently, the Agricultural District consists of 14,966 acres comprised of 233 separate parcels or approximately 11 percent of the County's land area. The vast majority of the District (70 percent) is located within the Town of Duanesburg. Approximately 14 percent of the District is located in Glenville and nearly 12 percent in Princetown. The remaining 4.6 percent is divided among Rotterdam, Niskayuna, and the Village of Scotia. The next review of the district takes place in 2004.

## IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

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Implementation priorities identified during the plan development process emphasize:

- improved marketing,
- enhanced economic development initiatives, and
- education for both the non-farming public and producers.

The emphasis in the Plan is placed on business development and education to increase profitability and provide a more agricultural-friendly business environment.

The challenge now will be to ensure that the recommendations contained in the Plan are implemented. General responsibility for the Plan falls on the County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) and the agencies that staff the AFPB—County Planning Department, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Soil & Water Conservation District. However, successful agriculture and farmland protection and promotion efforts will require leadership from local farmers themselves.

Following the adoption of the Plan, a structure can be established through Cornell University's AIDER process to provide the necessary support for local farmers in ensuring implementation of the Plan. Action oriented committees composed of present advisory group members and others will be formed to begin work on implementation priorities. The multi-county collaboration should continue and possibly be expanded to include other neighboring counties for regional implementation issues. A staff person should also be identified to serve as the Agricultural Plan coordinator to ensure that implementation recommendations are carried out.

All elements of the Plan will not be implemented immediately due to limited staffing, changing economic climate and the evolving agriculture industry. However, 13 “rapid response” projects are identified below for implementation over the next two years.

### **Improved Marketing**

*Explore sites for permanent farmers' markets and apply for a Farmers' Market Development Grant to assist with physical improvements to the market, including assistance for architectural design.*

*Develop a promotional campaign for the existing Schenectady Farmers' Market.*

*Work with local producers to assess the opportunities and barriers to participating in the local farmers' market.*

*Develop a marketing brochure/tour map of local farms, farm stands and markets and associated web page on Schenectady County's web site.*

*Explore the feasibility of creating a local (Capital District) product label for both edible and non-edible agricultural products. Consider participating in the ongoing “Produced in the Mohawk” marketing campaign and encourage local producer participation in the “Pride of New York” marketing campaign.*

### **Enhanced Economic Development Initiatives**

*Help to develop and promote local farms' participation in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).*

*Work with the Schenectady County Micro-enterprise Program (SCMP) to actively market the program's small business services to the farming community.*

*Compile a directory of organizations, individuals and agencies that can provide business development services to farmers.*

### **Education for Both the Nonfarming Public and Producers**

*Conduct focus groups/study circles to better determine what services and support the small farm sector and beginning farmer needs.*

*Develop an educational display on local agriculture that can be shown at various community events.*

*Establish an agricultural education field day on the farm that offers students and the non-farm community opportunities to experience the local food and agriculture industry first hand.*

*Hold regular training workshops for local assessors and other government officials regarding farm assessment and farm business needs.*

*Develop a producer recognition program.*

There are many state, federal and local agencies that provide assistance to the agricultural community. Some of these agencies and programs are briefly described below and their potential involvement with the implementation of this Plan is highlighted.

## **Local Government Role**

Many issues identified as affecting the County agricultural industry, such as taxes, land use regulations, and overall lack of recognition, are largely influenced at the town and county levels.

### ***County Government***

The County has played a key role in formulating this Plan and will continue to play a significant role in the Plan's implementation. The County Legislature is the lead agency on the adoption of the Plan and will provide future financial and executive leadership with many of the agricultural-related programs outlined below. Working with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Soil and Water Conservation District, the County Planning Department provides staff to the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board.

These three agencies will provide the staff assistance necessary to carry out the recommendations in the Plan.

### **County Planning Department**

The Planning Department provides demographic, zoning, agricultural district and other information about Schenectady County and provides a variety of land-use planning services to individuals, businesses, and municipalities. The Commissioner of the Department serves ex-officio on the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) and department personnel provide regular staff assistance to the AFPB. The Department is in charge of mapping and re-certification of the County's agricultural district, a key program for maintenance of agriculture in the County. The Department maintains a complete library of environmental resource data including an extensive geographic information system.

The County Planning Department also reviews certain local land use actions under the NYS General Municipal Law including the adoption of comprehensive plans, zoning laws or amendments thereto, and various development actions. The County should continue to recommend that proper notice is given to prospective neighbors of agricultural operations, encourage the establishment of buffer zones and cluster provisions to direct development away from prime farmland and support reasonable farm operation applications for site plan approval, special use permits, etc.

The Department should continue to provide technical assistance to local governments on land use matters paying close attention to the impact on agriculture.

### **Schenectady County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)**

The SWCD provides organizations, individuals, and municipalities with assistance in the development, maintenance and improvement of the land, water and natural resources within Schenectady County. The District provides technical assistance with water management, drainage, engineering plans, woodland management and wildlife habitat improvement. Major emphasis is placed on erosion control and water quality by employing appropriate construction measures, plant materials and critical area seeding. The District also assists farmland owners in applying for agriculture value assessments from the local town assessor's office.

The District maintains a complete library of environmental resource data including a published soil survey, USGS topographical maps, flood insurance maps and NYSDEC protected wetlands maps. Assistance is provided to landowners with obtaining funds for agricultural and conservation proposals such as USDA Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP); Wildlife Habitat Improvement (WHIP); Conservation Reserve Program (CRP); and, Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). These federal programs are discussed in more detail below.

### **Cornell Cooperative Extension**

Cooperative Extension serves a leadership role in providing agriculture education services to both the public and agricultural producers. Cooperative Extension has entered into regional agreements with neighboring counties to deliver in-depth, highly technical programs to Schenectady County agricultural producers. Educational programs and seminars are available to local producers covering a wide range of subjects including: horticulture (greenhouse, nursery, turf), field crop, livestock, and commercial vegetable production; nutrient management; whole farm planning; farm business analysis; integrated crop management; pesticide certification; and, marketing. In addition to classroom style education delivery, Cooperative Extension utilizes individual consultations, field demonstrations, tours, fact sheets and bulletins, on-farm workshops and targeted newsletters.

Since education is an important component of this Plan, Cooperative Extension will play a critical role in the Plan's implementation.

### **Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board**

The Board can serve a significant role in promoting and protecting agriculture within the County. The Board advises the County Legislature and works with the County Planning Department on the modification and continuation of the agricultural district rendering expert advice as to the nature of farming and farm resources. The Board reviews notice of intent filings pursuant to the Agriculture and Markets Law and makes findings and recommendations as to the effect and reasonableness of proposed actions involving the advance of public funds or acquisitions of farmland in agricultural districts by government entities. Typical actions subject to review include the construction of commercial or industrial facilities, residential dwellings, and water or sewer facilities to serve non-farm structures. The Board also helped develop and approved the County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan and can apply for implementation funds thereunder.

It is envisioned that members of the Board will take an active role in realizing many of the recommendations in the Plan by serving on the action oriented committees that will be formed to work on implementation priorities. The Board can play a critical role in providing a higher profile for the County agricultural industry and serve as a point of leadership for local farmers.

### **County Industrial Development Agency (IDA)**

The participation of an IDA in a project can confer many financial advantages including eligibility for a real property tax abatement through a Payment-In-Lieu-Of-Tax (PILOT) agreement; exemption from sales tax on construction materials and certain capital equipment purchased in connection with the project; and, exemption from the mortgage recording tax. Staff at the IDA can also provide general business guidance and recommend other avenues of financial assistance. The Plan envisions the County IDA playing an increased role in agricultural business development.

## **Schenectady County Community Business Center**

The Community Business Center (CBC) provides services to local small businesses varying from entrepreneur training and business plan development to financial assistance. Business and technical assistance is provided through a combination of in-house expertise, mentoring and a network of community support including local colleges. Financial assistance is provided through the micro-enterprise program, small business loan program or through linkages with other revolving loan funds, banks and other lending institutions. The CBC has been engaged in the Plan development process and will step up outreach efforts to the agricultural community.

### ***Town Government***

Many critical issues important to the maintenance of agriculture are dealt with at the local town level. Comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and other local laws have a direct impact on farmland and farm businesses. Agricultural land issues involve decisions that attempt to balance growth and resource protection and confront the tradeoffs between private property rights and community values and goals. The Plan calls upon towns to take a more proactive role in agricultural development/preservation and to heighten the awareness of agricultural uses. Some of the ways towns can foster the implementation of the Plan are discussed briefly below.

The NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets has published a variety of Guidance Documents for local laws affecting farm operations. These guidance documents are intended to inform local governments and farmers of how the Department interprets and applies the Agriculture & Markets law. They are also useful tools when reviewing zoning ordinance amendments, comprehensive plans, and subdivision regulations. These documents can be accessed through the Department's web site ([www.agmkt.state.ny.us](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us)).

### **Comprehensive Plans**

The state statute on adoption of comprehensive plans requires agricultural review and coordination with the state agricultural and markets law. Local governments when enacting or administering comprehensive plans, local laws, ordinances, rules or regulations "...shall not unreasonably restrict or regulate farm operations within agricultural districts...unless it can be shown that the public health or safety is threatened." It also requires that newly adopted or amended town comprehensive plans take into account the county agricultural and farmland protection plan. Since municipal zoning regulations must be in accordance with a comprehensive plan, the comprehensive planning process creates both an opportunity and an obligation to address agricultural land use issues.

### **Zoning**

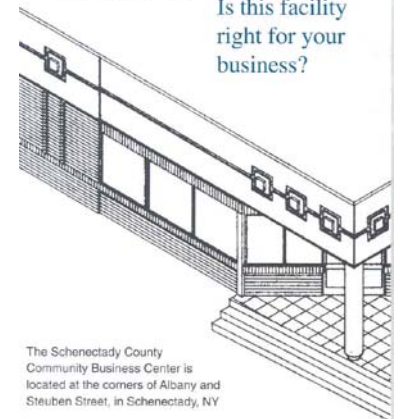
Once the comprehensive plan has outlined the community's vision for its future land use decisions with respect to agricultural uses and farmland, the challenge remains to draft



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The Center provides a full range of small business assistance services to its tenants as well as to other businesses not actually located in the Center, that could also benefit from these services.

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The Schenectady County Community Business Center is located at the corners of Albany and Steuben Street, in Schenectady, NY

implementing language for zoning and subdivision regulations. Among the main issues addressed in zoning ordinances that affect agriculture are definitions, density, and allowable uses. As development continues to encroach on agricultural uses, it is important for towns to reassess their definition of agriculture or farming to assure that it is broadly enough defined to include other activities that are necessary to the success of modern agriculture. Typically, definitions in zoning ordinances will address the practice of raising livestock or growing crops within the purview of the definition of agriculture. However, other activities such as agri-businesses, value-added processing, farm stands, agritainment activities (corn maze, petting zoo), and other types of related uses may not be regulated in the same manner or discussed at all. The extent to which accessory uses are permitted is extremely important to the continuation of agriculture. Farm stands, saw mills, farm equipment repair, and agritainment activities are often an important part of farm income.

### **Subdivision Regulations**

Several techniques can be incorporated into subdivision regulations to lessen the impact of residential development on agriculture. For example, clustering provisions and buffer strips can be used to direct development away from prime farmland. Buffers may be created by strips of land or by vegetation and may be required as conditions of subdivision approval. Towns should also ensure that prospective neighbors to farm operations are given sufficient notice that they are purchasing lands near a farm and that farm activities occur that may cause noise, dust and odors.

### **Right-to Farm Laws**

Tension between farmers and non-farm neighbors has resulted in many challenges to agricultural uses by the non-farm neighbors. As a result of increasing tensions local governments have begun to enact right-to-farm laws. These local laws are intended to complement the right to farm provisions of the state Agriculture and Markets Law and demonstrate local support for agriculture. These laws serve as an effective way to put people on notice that the locality encourages and supports agriculture. They protect the right to undertake agricultural practices reasonably necessary to conduct the business of farming and require notice to prospective neighbors who may apply for building permits and subdivision approval. Most of the local laws are modeled on a version distributed by the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

### **State Environmental Quality Review Act**

The New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) is intended to promote a thorough review of the environmental impacts of proposed projects before they are funded or approved. The SEQR regulations require the consideration of agricultural land conversion as one of the criteria in determining whether an environmental impact statement will be required. Additionally, the regulatory threshold is lower for proposed nonagricultural land uses in agricultural districts.

### **Events and Festivals**

Celebrating Schenectady County agriculture and its contributions is an important way to support the farming community. The Altamont Fair, Carrot Festival, and Harvest Festival promote interaction within the farm community and provide educational



opportunities for the non-farm public. In Clifton Park, the town has taken a major role in the annual Clifton Park Farmfest.

## State Government Role

New York State through a variety of agencies provides numerous technical and financial services to the agricultural industry and will provide much assistance with the implementation of this Plan. The NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets plays the key state role in agricultural economic development, farmland protection and environmental management issues. In addition to the state agricultural district program, the department administers numerous programs, organizes activities and provides services that assist the industry. The department ensures that right to farm protections are enforced, provides state product promotion, workforce development, competitive grants, and a variety of technical and financial assistance under the *Grow New York* Initiative.

### Farmers' School Tax Credit

This program allows eligible farmers to obtain an income tax credit (or corporate franchise tax credit) for school district property taxes paid. This credit applies to school taxes paid by farmers on land, structures, and buildings used for agricultural production. Farmhouses used as personal residences do not qualify.

### Farm Building Exemptions

Several provisions in the NYS Real Property Tax Law exempt farm buildings or structures from property taxes. Section 483 of the Real Property Tax Law exempts new and rebuilt farm buildings for ten years. Section 483-a entirely exempts certain agricultural structures from taxation, including farm silos, feed grain storage bins, commodity sheds, bulk milk tanks and coolers, and manure storage and handling facilities. Section 483-c also exempts temporary greenhouses. To claim each of these exemptions, owners must apply to their local assessors.

### Agricultural Assessment

Any owner of land used for agricultural production may qualify for an agricultural value assessment if the land meets certain agricultural production requirements or is formally rented to an eligible farm operator. Under the program, land is assessed based on its agricultural use value, not for its market or non-farm development value.

### PDR

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) is a voluntary farmland protection program that pays owners to permanently maintain their land for

## Farm Building Exemptions

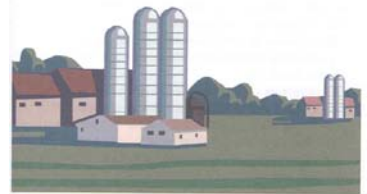
### Questions & Answers

Newly constructed or reconstructed structures

Certain Limited Use Agricultural Structures

Historic Barns

Temporary Greenhouses



A publication of the  
State Office of Real Property Services

[www.orps.state.ny.us](http://www.orps.state.ny.us)

January 2002

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January 2005

New York State Office of Real Property Services  
A publication of the



Eligible Farmland in NY's  
Real Property Taxes for  
Partial Reduction in

Questions & Answers

Assessments  
Agricultural

agricultural use. The development rights to a property are separated and sold to a municipality or qualifying non-profit. Funds for PDR are allocated from the state's Environmental Protection Fund and the open space account of the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act.

**NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets**  
**Business Development, Direct Marketing Assistance, Pride of New York**

***Grow New York Grant Programs***

**Farmland Viability Program**

The purpose of the program is to encourage farm operators to develop Farmland Viability plans (economic, environmental, and comprehensive nutrient management) and implement components of those plans. The program will also assist County AFPBs in the implementation of an approved farmland protection plan.

**Food and Agriculture Industry Development (FAID) Program**

Funds research and development projects, more efficient distribution systems, and new marketing approaches that will further the development of the state's food and agricultural industry.

**Farmers' Market Grant Program**

Assist farmers' markets to undertake physical improvements that increase the visibility, attractiveness, effective functioning and comfort of market sites.

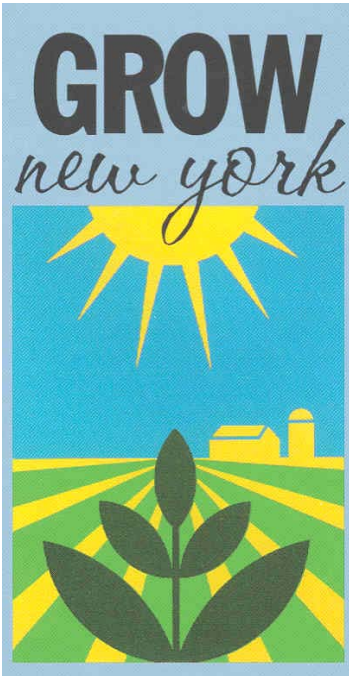
**Specialty Crops Project**

The purpose of the program is to enhance and promote specialty crop businesses. "Specialty crops" are defined as any agricultural crop or products other than wheat, feed grains, oilseeds, livestock and livestock products. The program is funded through a federal block grant appropriated by Congress to support the various specialty crops production sectors that have historically not been involved in federal agricultural programs.

**NYS Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation**

**Historic Barns Program**

Provides funding to restore and preserve barns and related agricultural buildings. Barn owners may apply for up to 80 percent of project costs for a maximum of \$25,000. The 20 percent match can be cash, in-kind services or labor.



## **NYS Department of Transportation**

### **TEA-21 Transportation Enhancements Program**

#### **Acquisition of Scenic Easements & Scenic or Historic Sites**

The primary purpose of this category is to preserve and protect scenic views and scenic or historic sites in the viewsheds of state- or federal-designated scenic byways. Projects for scenic preservation must make a substantial contribution to the scenic viewshed of the highway, though they do not have to be immediately adjacent to the road.

## **New York State Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA)**

Through its agricultural program, NYSERDA offers cost-sharing and low-interest financing programs to help farms throughout the state save energy, develop new products, and increase profits. NYSERDA sponsors annual conferences to share the results of these projects and describe upcoming funding opportunities. NYSERDA has provided funding to help farmers: lower on-farm energy costs, use more environmentally friendly manure-management methods, improve profitability through value-added products, and generate their own electricity.

## **Empire State Development**

Through Empire State Development, the state can provide direct loans, loan guarantees, and grants that can help businesses reduce costs. Funds are available to help defray the capital expenses such as the acquisition, renovation, or improvement of real estate, including land and buildings, the acquisition of machinery and equipment, and related soft costs. The main objectives are job retention and creation.

## **Federal Government Role**

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture**

#### **New York Rural Development**

Provides a variety of financing programs for community and economic development including farm labor housing and rural businesses. A main objective is job retention and creation. The applicant for business lending and grant programs is typically a municipality or nonprofit corporation.

#### **USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)**

FSA lends money and provides credit counseling and supervision to eligible applicants who operate family-size farms. FSA offers the following loan programs: Direct farm ownership; Beginning Farmer; Guaranteed Operating; Farm Operating; Youth Project; and, Guaranteed Farm Ownership Loans.

#### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)**

NRCS offers landowners and farmers financial, technical, and educational assistance to implement conservation practices to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, enhance

cropland, and protect wetlands and wildlife habitat. NRCS offers the following specific programs:

Conservation Reserve (CRP); Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP); Wetlands Reserve (WRP); and, Wildlife Habitat Incentives (WHIP).

### **Farmland Protection Program**

The Farmland Protection Program provides funds to help purchase development rights keeping productive farmland in agricultural use. The USDA joins with state, tribal, and local governments or land trusts to acquire conservation easements or other interests from landowners. Enrollment in the FPP limits the land to agricultural use for a minimum of 30 years, with preference given to permanent agricultural conservation easement projects.

### **Conservation Reserve Program**

The Conservation Reserve Program encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to natural vegetative cover. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover. The CRP reduces soil erosion and sedimentation in streams and lakes, improving water quality. It also enhances forest and wetland resources and establishes wildlife habitat.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program**

A voluntary program that offers technical and financial support to landowners who wish to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The program offers landowners three options: permanent easements, 30-year easements, and restoration cost-share agreements of a minimum 10-year duration. The goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values on enrolled property.

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The EQIP works primarily in locally identified priority areas where there are significant natural resource concerns, such as soil erosion, water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, wetlands, and forest and grazing lands. Priority is given to areas where state or local governments offer financial, technical, or educational assistance, and to areas where agricultural improvements will help meet water quality objectives. Activities must be carried out according to a conservation plan. The EQIP offers financial, educational, and technical help to install or implement structural vegetative, and management practices called for in 5- to 10-year contracts. These practices—which include manure management systems, pest management, and erosion control—help improve and maintain the health of natural resources.

## DEFINITIONS & EXPLANATIONS

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**Agri-business:** Any business that provides products or services generally directed toward the support of agricultural production, marketing and distribution of its products.

**Agricultural District:** A legally recognized geographical area formed by one or more landowners and approved by the county legislative body and the NYS Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets. Enrolling land in a District is voluntary and does not restrict the use of the property. The District boundaries must conform to tax parcel boundaries. The Schenectady County Agricultural District was created in 1988 and is reviewed every eight years. Properties can only be added to or deleted from the district during the review period.

**Agricultural Assessment Value:** The value per acre assigned to land in agricultural use for local assessment purposes established by the state board of real property services and based on soil productivity, not the land's highest and best use. In many cases the agricultural assessment is significantly lower than its market value. Owners of agricultural lands are eligible for agricultural assessments if they own at least 10 acres with a minimum annual average gross sales value of \$10,000, or less than 10 acres with a minimum annual average gross sales value of \$50,000. Rented land of not less than ten acres, which does not independently satisfy the gross value sales requirement, can qualify for an agricultural assessment if it is being farmed under a written rental arrangement of five or more years in conjunction with land which qualifies for an agricultural assessment.

**Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB):** A board established by the County Legislature pursuant to NYS Agriculture and Markets Law consisting of eleven members, at least four of whom shall be active farmers. The members of the board shall also include the chairperson of the county soil and water conservation district's board of directors, a member of the county legislature, a county cooperative extension agent, the county planning director, and the county director of real property services.

**Boer Goat:** A breed of meat goat recently brought into this Country from Africa.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** A marketing approach where customers pay a farm or farms in advance to provide a variety of agricultural products from the farm throughout the growing season. It provides the small farmer with a pre-paid market, market stability, and cash flow.

**Cooperative:** A user-owned business that may fill a variety of needs for its member users, including processing and marketing their products, purchasing their production supplies or consumer goods.

**Conservation Easement:** A legal agreement a property owner makes to restrict the type and amount of development that may take place on the property. Easements may apply to an entire parcel or just a portion of the parcel. Each easement's restrictions are tailored

to the particular property and to the interests of the individual owner. The owner and the prospective easement holder identify the rights and restrictions on use. The owner then conveys the right to enforce those restrictions to a qualified conservation recipient, such as a public agency or a land trust. Easements may be donated or sold and most are permanent. Landowners who donate permanent conservation easements may be entitled to tax benefits.

**Crop:** A plant or part of a plant intended to be marketed as an agricultural product or fed to livestock.

**Direct Sales:** Direct sales represents the value of agricultural products produced and sold directly to individuals for human consumption from roadside stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own sites, etc. It excludes non-edible products such as nursery crops, cut flowers, wool, etc. Sales of agricultural products by vertically integrated operations through their own processing and marketing operations were excluded.

**Farm:** Any place that actually had or normally would have had \$1,000 in agricultural product sales during the census year.

**Farm, Commercial:** Any place that actually had or normally would have had \$10,000 in agricultural product sales during the census year.

**Farm, Family:** Any farm organized as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or family corporation. Excludes farms organized as nonfamily corporations or cooperatives, as well as farms with hired managers.

**Farm Operation:** The land and on-farm buildings, equipment, manure processing and handling facilities, and practices which contribute to the production, preparation and marketing of crops, livestock and livestock products as a commercial enterprise, including commercial horse boarding operations.

**Farm, Operator:** Person who makes the day-to-day decisions on the farm. There is one operator per farm.

**Farmers' Markets:** Groups of two or more farmers who assemble in a location to sell their products directly to consumers.

**Feeder Calves:** A beef animal weighing between 500 and 700 pounds ready to enter a feed lot.

**Horse Boarding, Commercial:** An agricultural enterprise, consisting of at least 10 acres and boarding at least 10 horses, regardless of ownership, that receives \$10,000 or more in gross receipts annually from fees generated either through the boarding of horses or through the production for sale of crops, livestock, and livestock products, or through both such boarding and such production.

**Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** A sustainable approach to managing pests, using methods that minimize environmental, economic, and health risks. The mission of the NYS IPM Program is to educate and encourage agricultural producers to grow crops and raise animals using pest management methods that: reduce or replace the use of synthetic organic pesticides; are environmentally sound; pose minimal risk to human health; enable growers to obtain a reasonable return on investment; and, ensure consumers a supply of high quality, safe, and economical foods and other agriculturally related products.  
<http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu>

**Livestock:** Any cattle, sheep, goat, swine, poultry, wild or domesticated game, or equine animals used for food or in the production of food, fiber, feed, or other agricultural-based consumer products.

**Organic (USDA):** A labeling term that refers to an agricultural product produced without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics or hormones in accordance with the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, as amended (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.) and the regulations thereunder.

**Pasture:** Land used for livestock grazing that is managed to provide feed value and maintain or improve soil, water, and vegetative resources.

**Prime Farmland:** The USDA broadly defines this term as those soils best suited for producing food, feed, fiber, forage crops, or forests. It possesses sufficient soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

**Producer:** A person who engages in the business of growing or producing food, fiber, feed, and other agricultural-based consumer products.

**Purchase of Development Rights (PDR):** A conservation easement program where the landowner voluntarily sells the right to develop land. Participants retain full ownership of their land and can sell or transfer their property at any time. In the case of agricultural land, the land is typically permanently protected from non-farm development and remains available for agricultural use. The value of the development right is generally based on the difference between the land's value for non-farm development and its agricultural value as determined by professional appraisers. New York State has established a PDR program that provides 75 percent of the cost of eligible projects.

**Right to Farm:** A provision in the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law establishing that sound agricultural practices, as determined by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets, shall not constitute a private nuisance. Sound agricultural practices refer to those practices necessary for the on-farm production, preparation and marketing of agricultural commodities. (Article 25AA NYS Agriculture & Markets Law, section 308).



**Soils Capability/Class:** Soils capability grouping shows, in a general way, the suitability of soils for most kinds of field crops. The groups are made according to the limitations of the soils when used for field crops, the risk of damage when they are so used, and the way they respond to treatment. In the capability system soils are grouped at three levels: the capability class, the subclass, and the unit. The broadest grouping, capability class, are defined as follows:

- **Class I** soils have few limitations that restrict their use.
  - **Class II** soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices.
- 
- **Class III** soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, that require special conservation practices, or both.
- 
- **Class IV** soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, that require very careful management, or both.
  - **Class V** soils are not likely to erode but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use largely to pasture, range, woodland, or wildlife.
- 
- **Class VI** soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that limit their use largely to pasture or range, woodland or wildlife.
  - **Class VII** soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use largely to pasture or range, woodland or wildlife.
  - **Class VIII** soils and landforms have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plants and that restrict their use to recreation, wildlife, water supply, or to esthetic purposes.

Prime Soils

Good Soils

Fair Soils

Poor Soils

**Total Sales:** Total sales represents the gross market value of all agricultural products sold before taxes and expenses in the census year including livestock, poultry, and their products, and crops, including nursery and greenhouse crops and hay.

**Value-added:** Monetary value that is added to an agricultural product through processes that enhance its usefulness or appeal to the consumer (e.g. cheese, salsa).

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# Appendices



# Appendix A

## Survey of Schenectady County Farm Owners/Operators

## Survey Report Schenectady County Farm Owners/Operators

The Schenectady County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board conducted a 4 page, 31-question survey of agricultural producers countywide. A mailing list of 166 "farms" was developed utilizing information from the Soil & Water Conservation District and County Planning Department. The first mailing was sent out in February of 2000 followed by a second mailing in March approximately one month later. Prior to the first mailing, a public meeting was held in the Town of Glenville to solicit input from agricultural producers on the status of the Agricultural Industry in the County. We also used this meeting as an opportunity to encourage farmers to respond to the upcoming survey. A second public meeting was held in the Town of Duanesburg during March followed by our second mailing of the survey.

The overall response to the survey was excellent. The first mailing resulted in a return rate of just over 40 percent. The second mailing solicited a good percentage of additional returns. A total of 124 of the 166 surveys mailed were returned for a response rate of 74.7 percent. Of these respondents, 27 indicated that they were not farming resulting in a total of 97 agricultural producers surveyed. The 97 farmers responding represent 64.2 percent of the 151 farmers reportedly in the County according the 1997 Census of Agriculture. More importantly, the respondents represent 87.8 percent of the reported 41 commercial farmers (annual gross farm sales of \$10,000 or more) in the County based on the 1997 Census of Agriculture.

The 97 farmers who responded own 10,559.5 acres of land and rent an additional 2,283 acres, representing a total of 12,842.5 acres of farmland. The average sized farm (acreage owned) is 107 acres. Table 1 below shows responses and associated acreage by municipality.

**Table 1. Responses & Acreage by Municipality**

Municipality	Responses	% of all Responses	Total Acreage	% of all Acreage
Duanesburg	46	47.9	6,061.6	57.7
Glenville	21	21.9	1,489.3	14.5
Niskayuna	6	6.3	140.6	1.3
Princetown	18	18.8	2,539.0	24.7
Rotterdam	5	5.2	189.0	1.8
Totals*	96		10,419.50	

\*One respondent did not indicate the location of their reported 140-acre farm.

Of the 97 farmers, 29 (29.9%) responded that they consider themselves a full-time farm operator and 68 (70.1%) part-time. Most of the full-time operators are located in Glenville (11), followed by Duanesburg (7), Princetown (5), Niskayuna (4), and Rotterdam (2).

A total of 31 respondents (32 % of farmers) indicated that they receive an agricultural assessment for property tax purposes. Of these, 16 (51.6%) are located in Duanesburg, 5

(16.1%) in Glenville, 2 (6.5%) in Niskayuna, 3 (9.7%) in Princetown, and 2 (6.5%) in Rotterdam. Of the 15 respondents that indicated they were not sure if they received an agricultural assessment, 8 (53.3%) were from Duaneburg followed by 4 (26.7%) from Princetown and 1 (6.7%) from Rotterdam. Interestingly, of the 31 respondents receiving an agricultural assessment, 16 (51.6%) indicated they were part-time farm operators and only 13 (41.9%) responded that they were full-time operators.

The vast majority of respondents (82.6%) indicated that they expect to continue farming over the next five years. Only 9 respondents (9.8%) indicated that they expect to retire during this time period and just 3 respondents (3.3%) indicated that they plan on selling any of their land for non-farm purposes.

Most respondents indicated that they have owned/operated their farm for a relatively long time. The average tenure of ownership was 26.1 years and the median was 25 years. The average age of respondent was 59.9 years and the median was 60 years.

Of the 29 full-time farmers, 11 anticipate the farm will expand or have an increase in capital investment within the next 5 years. Eleven farmers responded that they do not anticipate any expansion and seven are not sure. The vast majority of farmers (65.4%) are not seeking financing. Only 11 (11.7%) responded that they have experienced difficulty obtaining the necessary financing to renovate or expand.

Direct marketing appears to be popular with 54 (55.7%) respondents indicating that during 1999 they grew crops or raised livestock, poultry or their products that were sold directly to individual consumers. A total of 7 farmers indicated that they would be interested in participating in a farmers' market in downtown Schenectady and an additional 24 responded that they were not sure. The remaining 67% indicated that they are not interested.

Gross annual sales categories ranged from less than \$1,000 to \$500,000 and over. Farms with gross sales less than \$25,000 represented nearly 80 percent of respondents.

**Table 2. Survey Respondents by Gross Farm Sales (1999)**

Sales	Number of Farms
Less than \$1,000	18
\$1,000 to \$4,999	22
\$5,000 to \$9,999	18
\$10,000 to \$24,999	16
\$25,000 to \$49,999	5
\$50,000 to \$99,999	5
\$100,000 to \$249,999	5
\$250,000 to \$499,999	2
\$500,000 or more	3

Approximately 30 percent of all farm supplies, materials or services are purchased within Schenectady County with the majority of purchases occurring within the rest of New

York State (61%). Out of state purchases comprise the rest of the sales at 9 percent. When only considering the farms with sales in excess of \$10,000, just 20 percent of all farm supplies, materials or services are purchased within Schenectady County with 68 percent of purchases occurring within the rest of New York State and 12 percent occurring out of state. None of the respondents indicated that they participate in buying groups.

The survey results indicate that over the last three years:

- Customers had increased or stayed the same for 85 percent of respondents;
- Sales volume had increased or stayed the same for 79.5 percent of respondents;
- The value of sales increased or stayed the same for 70.9 percent of respondents; and,
- Profit had decreased for 48.1 percent of respondents.

A total of 43 respondents (46.7%) indicated that *Insurance & taxes* was the single item that they spent the most money on in a typical year followed distantly by *Machinery & equipment* (18.5%), and *Feeds & feed ingredients* (16.3%).

Farmers were presented with a list of items that could be considered problems for their farm operation. They were asked to respond by circling the number that best indicates how they feel about each item. Numbering was on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 representing "Not At All A Problem" and 5 representing "A Major Problem." Table 7 presents a summary of the responses ranked by mean response. The one item that a high percentage of respondents identified as a "Major Problem" was property taxes (58.3%). This fluctuated somewhat by municipality with only 33 percent of respondents identifying taxes as a major problem in both Princetown and Rotterdam while approximately 66 percent of respondents in Duanesburg, Glenville and Niskayuna ranked taxes as a major problem. It should be noted that while "Lack of qualified labor" had a mean response ranking it relatively low on the potential problem list, nearly 30 percent of respondents indicated it was a "Major Problem." Obviously, for some types of farming activities, labor is a real issue.

**Table 3. Farmer Attitudes**

Potential Problem	Mean Response	Not At All A Problem				Major Problem
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
Property taxes	<b>4.17</b>	9.6%				58.5%
State/federal regulations	<b>3.37</b>	12.6%				26.4%
Non-farm development	<b>3.31</b>	14.5%				21.7%
Local land use regulations	<b>3.19</b>	12.9%				22.4%
Lack of qualified labor	<b>3.11</b>	22.4%				29.4%
Availability of markets	<b>2.53</b>	31.3%				13.3%
Distance to suppliers	<b>2.49</b>	29.3%				11.0%
Access to loans	<b>2.03</b>	39.0%				9.1%

Means calculated on a 5-point scale with **1** representing "Not At All A Problem" and **5** a "Major Problem."



Only 21 farms (21.6%) indicated that they have had problems with neighbors concerning their farming practices. Odors and noise were the most often mentioned problems followed by mud and manure in the road, trespass, and boundary disputes.

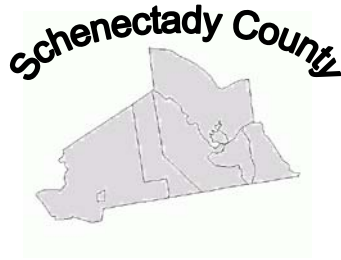
Many respondents were unaware of some of the tax relief programs currently available to farmers. The lack of knowledge of such programs is more evident for farmers with an annual gross farm income below \$10,000. For such farmers:

Only 33 percent of respondents said they were familiar with the Farmers' School Tax Credit. Just 26 percent of respondents said they were aware of the 10-year exemption on all real estate tax for new farm buildings and 29 percent were aware that certain classes of farm structures are tax exempt under State law.

Farmers with higher gross farm sales were more knowledgeable of such tax relief programs. For respondents with an annual gross farm income above \$10,000:

39 percent of respondents said they were familiar with the Farmers' School Tax Credit. 50 percent said they were aware of the 10-year exemption on all real estate tax for new farm buildings and 61 percent new that certain classes of farm structures are tax exempt under State law.

Most respondents (83.7%) were not aware how purchase of development rights programs for farms operate. Of the 15 respondents who were aware of how these programs operate, 10 said they were not sure or would consider participating and 4 said they would not consider participating. There was one non-response.



## **Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board**



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Schafer Heights ♦ 107 Nott Terrace ♦ Suite 303 ♦ Schenectady, New York 12308  
(518) 386-2225 ♦ Fax: (518) 382-5539

February 25, 2000

Dear Farm Owner/Operator:

In cooperation with the County Planning Department and Cornell Cooperative Extension we are conducting a survey of agricultural producers in Schenectady County. This survey is part of the Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan for Schenectady County that we are now developing with financial assistance from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The survey can be completed in less than 15 minutes, so please take the time to answer the enclosed questionnaire. Your participation is strictly voluntary, however, your input is very important. The data received will allow us to develop an accurate representation of the agricultural industry in the County and help us develop priorities to be addressed in the Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan.

Please complete the enclosed survey and mail it by March 10, 2000 in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. All responses are confidential and only statistical totals of answers will ever be published.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

William Ruther  
Chairman

Schenectady County



**Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board**



Schafer Heights ♦ 107 Nott Terrace ♦ Suite 303 ♦ Schenectady, New York 12308  
(518) 386-2225 ♦ Fax: (518) 382-5539

March 20, 2000

Dear Farm Owner/Operator:

I would like to thank all of the people who have responded to our survey and take this opportunity to make one more appeal to those who haven't yet responded. To date, we have received responses from over 40 percent of the identified agricultural producers in the County. While this is already an excellent response, we would like to hear from everyone, even if your involvement with farming is minor or you no longer farm at all. If you have already responded, please excuse us for this mailing and accept my thanks.

If you haven't responded and you are no longer farming or your land is not in agricultural production any more, please answer the two questions below and mail this letter back to us in the stamped addressed envelope provided. If you are involved with agricultural production to some degree but didn't respond to our first request, please take the time to fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the stamped envelope provided.

All responses are confidential and only statistical totals of answers will ever be published.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

William Ruther  
Chairman

**Please complete the following if you no longer are farming or your land is not in agricultural production any more and mail to us in the stamped envelope provided.**

1. Please enter your name and address.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Would you like to remain on our mailing list for informational purposes?

\_\_\_\_ Yes, please keep me on mailing list.

\_\_\_\_ No, please remove my name from your mailing list.

**SCHENECTADY COUNTY**  
**AGRICULTURE & FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD**  
**SURVEY FOR SCHENECTADY COUNTY FARM OWNERS/OPERATORS**

This survey is part of a countywide study of agriculture that will help develop an Agricultural Protection Plan for Schenectady County. Your participation is voluntary, however, your cooperation is extremely important.

Please refer to your farm operation in Schenectady County when answering the following questions.

\_\_\_\_\_

**1.** In what municipality is your farm operation primarily located?

- a. 52 Duanesburg      b. 23 Glenville      c. 6 Niskayuna  
d. 19 Princetown      e. 6 Rotterdam      f. 0 Scotia

**2.** How would you describe the area surrounding your farm operation?

- a. 83 Rural      b. 17 Suburban      c. 2 Urban

**3.** Is your farm operation in the Schenectady County Agricultural District?

- a. 81 Yes      b. 5 No      c. 18 Not sure

**4.** In 1999, did your farm operation receive an agricultural assessment for property tax purposes?

- a. 31 Yes      b. 60 No      c. 15 Not sure

**5.** In 1999, how many acres of land did you own?      Avg.- 107    Total - 10,560 acres

**6.** In 1999, how many acres of land did you rent or lease FROM OTHERS?      None \_\_\_\_\_ acres

**7.** In 1999, how many acres of land did you rent or lease TO OTHERS?      None      Total 678 acres

**8.** Please describe your farm enterprise. If more than one category below applies, please rank in order of importance (#1 being the most important).

- |                          |                             |   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| a. <u>7</u> Dairy Cows   | g. <u>2</u> Dairy Goats     | m. <u>5</u> Retail Nursery or Greenhouse    |
| b. <u>11</u> Beef Cattle | h. <u>2</u> Meat Goats      | n. <u>3</u> Wholesale Nursery or Greenhouse |
| c. <u>10</u> Horses      | i. <u>0</u> Sweet Corn      | o. <u>1</u> Christmas Trees                 |
| d. <u>2</u> Sheep        | j. <u>1</u> Other Vegetable | p. <u>0</u> Maple Syrup/Honey Products      |
| e. <u>0</u> Hogs         | k. <u>2</u> Tree Fruits     | q. <u>24</u> Hay                            |
| f. <u>0</u> Poultry      | l. <u>2</u> Small Fruits    | r. _____ Other (please specify)_____        |

**9.** Do you consider yourself a part- or full-time farm operator?

- a. 29 Full-time      b. 68 Part-time

**9a.** What percentage of your work time is devoted to your farming operation?      Avg. 52%

**9b.** Do you have off-farm employment?      a. 46 Yes      b. 51 No

10. How long have you owned/operated your current farm? Avg.- 26 Years

11. Over the next five years, you most likely expect to...

(please check all that apply)

- |   |       |   |
|---|-------|---|
| a. <u>76</u> Continue farming.                                  | b,e   | 3 |
| b. <u>9</u> Retire from farming.                                | b,d   | 1 |
| c. <u>3</u> Sell all of my land for non-farm purposes.          | a,e   | 2 |
| d. <u>0</u> Sell a portion of my land for non-farm purposes.    | a,d   | 1 |
| e. <u>4</u> Sell/transfer the farm operation to another person. | a,d,e | 1 |

11a. What are the reasons for this decision?

12. Do you anticipate that the farm operation will expand or have an increase in capital investment within the next five years?

- a. 31 Yes                      b. 47 No                      c. 27 Not Sure

13. In general, have you had difficulty obtaining the necessary amount of financing to renovate or expand?

- a. 11 Yes                      b. 25 No                      c. 68 Not Seeking Financing

14. Is there a financial business plan for the farm?

- a. 20 Yes                      b. 82 No

15. On a scale of 1 – 5, to what extent do you feel the following items are problems for your farm operation. (Please circle the number that best indicates how you feel about each item, or check no opinion.)

	Not At All A Problem				Major Problem		No Opinion
a. Property taxes	1 9	2 1	3 11	4 19	5 56		1
b. Non-farm development	1 13	2 8	3 20	4 21	5 19		1 4
c. Local land use regulations	1 12	2 11	3 31	4 11	5 20		1 2
d. State/federal regulations	1 12	2 14	3 16	4 19	5 24		1 4
e. Availability of markets	1 27	2 14	3 16	4 8	5 12		1 8
f. Distance to suppliers	1 25	2 17	3 15	4 10	5 9		1 8
g. Access to loans	1 31	2 16	3 8	4 2	5 7		1 15
h. Lack of qualified labor	1 20	2 12	3 9	4 8	5 26		1 12
i. Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5		

16. Have you had problems with neighbors concerning your farming practices?

a. 21 Yes                      b. 83 No

If Yes, please identify the nature of the problem (e.g. boundary dispute, manure odor) and how (if) it was resolved.

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17. During 1999 did you grow crops (including nursery, greenhouse) or raise livestock, poultry or their products that were sold *directly* to individual consumers?

a. 54 Yes                      b. 42 No

If Yes, please identify sales manner(s) below:

       Roadside stands                   Farmers' markets                   Pick your own  
       Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)                   Other (Please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

18. Is your farming operation a member of a marketing cooperative?

a. 7 Yes                      b. 96 No

If Yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

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19. Would you be interested in participating in a farmers' market in downtown Schenectady?

a. 7 Yes                      b. 65 No                      c. 24 Not Sure

20. Please estimate the gross annual sales for your farming operation in a typical year.

a. 18 Less than \$1,000            d. 16 \$10,000 to \$24,999            g. 5 \$100,000 to \$249,999  
b. 22 \$1,000 to \$4,999            e. 5 \$25,000 to \$49,999            h. 2 \$250,000 to \$499,999  
c. 18 \$5,000 to \$9,999            f. 5 \$50,000 to \$99,999            i. 3 \$500,000 or more

21. Over the last three years, have the following business factors increased, stayed the same or decreased? (Please circle one response for each business factor that is applicable).

BUSINESS FACTOR	Increased	Same	Decreased
a. Number of customers	1 <u>22</u>	2 <u>46</u>	3 <u>12</u>
b. Volume (quantity) of sale	1 <u>23</u>	2 <u>39</u>	3 <u>16</u>
c. Value (\$) of sales	1 <u>20</u>	2 <u>36</u>	3 <u>23</u>
d. Profit	1 <u>14</u>	2 <u>27</u>	3 <u>38</u>

22. Please estimate which of the following materials, supplies, or services you spend the most money on for the farm operation in a typical year (1 being the most money followed by 2, 3...)? For the items below that are not applicable, please indicate by writing N/A in the space provided.

a. 15 Feeds & feed ingredients            e. 4 Hay, silage, etc.            i. 1 Veterinarian services  
b. 4 Fertilizer            f. 0 Transportation            j. 43 Insurance & taxes  
c. 4 Seed or fruit stock            g. 0 Packaging/advertising            k. 1 Legal/accounting  
d. 17 Machinery & equipment            h. 2 Spray materials/chemicals            l. 1 Other (specify below)

23. In 1999, what percent of your farm supplies, materials or services were purchased from...

- a. Schenectady County \_\_\_\_\_%
- b. The rest of New York State \_\_\_\_\_%
- c. Outside of New York State \_\_\_\_\_%
- d. Buying groups \_\_\_\_\_%

24. Are you familiar with the Farmers' School Tax Credit?

- a. 37 Yes
- b. 65 No

If Yes, will you get a refund of school taxes paid in 1999?

\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_ No

25. Are you aware of the 10-year exemption on all real estate tax for new farm buildings?

- a. 35 Yes
- b. 67 No

26. Are you aware that certain classes of farm structures (e.g. silos, greenhouses, manure storage facilities) are tax exempt under State law?

- a. 41 Yes
- b. 62 No

27. During 1999 did you participate in the New York State Agricultural Environmental Management Planning Process?

- a. 8 Yes
- b. 47 No
- c. 48 Don't know what this program is

28. Did you receive payments in 1999 for participation in Federal farm programs?

- a. 11 Yes
- b. 94 No

If Yes, please indicate which program(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**For example:** • Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)/Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) • Disaster payments • Forestry incentive program • Soil conservation payments • Indemnity program payments

29. Are you familiar with how purchase of development rights programs for farms operate?

- a. 15 Yes
- b. 77 No

If Yes, would you consider participating in a purchase of development rights program for your farm operation?      \_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_ No      \_\_\_\_ Not Sure

30. What is your age?      Avg. 60 Years

31. What is your gender?      a. 84 Male      b. 14 Female

Please indicate any ideas you have about improving/preserving agriculture in Schenectady County.

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**THANK YOU**

Please return the completed form by March 10, 2000 in the stamped, addressed envelope provided.



## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

*Secure agricultural tax exemptions for horse boarding operations in Schenectady County.*

*Stop NY State from stealing land from farmers for so called wetlands. If they consider wetlands pay for the land at fair market value price.*

*Until people buy for value, not only for price and convenience, there probably isn't much hope.*

*For people who own large amounts of land we need to lower taxes we have to pay. This would free more capital for agriculture supplies to improve our farms.*

*Restrict housing developments – require 5 acre lot sites for new homes in rural areas – Help small farm owners connect with other farm owners with equipment to improve the land – those with plows, discs, fertilizer and seeding equipment not every landowner has access to these things.*

*Lower taxes – It's hard to come out ahead in farming – but it's the work I chose. At 48 I don't have problems – but at 58 I'm pretty sure I will as the work is strenuous.*

*More available information on Agricultural Products grown in Schenectady County. I also farm organically, Regional Farm and Food Project in Albany is doing a great job bringing farmers together.*

*I would like to see land used to produce agriculture products, vegetable gardening, rather than sold for industrial enterprises.*

*Do not raise the taxes and assessments every year on land as if it is developed.*

*Have governing bodies be just as concerned about farmers as they are about developers. Back up the farmers once in a while.*

*I am very concerned about the aggressive (my perspective) business development in the town, and the building on lands originally and or currently devoted to agriculture. The rural appeal & nature of this area, in general, is in jeopardy.*

*Keep milk prices up where a farmer could make a decent living.*

*More direct contact with the farmers.*

*Control development.*

*We are very discouraged with Schenectady County and New York State's lack of interest in a new farming operation. The farm income requirement for a tax break is impossible for us as "new farmers" to reach especially when full time employment is necessary to support the farm development.*

*Promote consumer awareness so they can buy "fresh from the farm" meat & produce. Local slaughter house or processing facility. Tax relief for smaller farmers or part time farmers.*

*Exempt pole barns from taxes. Bring back support for traditional subsurface drainage.*

*Reduce the taxes. Why do I have to pay a school tax when there is no buildings.*

*Consider a County sign program to direct traffic to roadside markets/pick your own locations. Farmers could contribute to cost.*

*Protection from Deer – reimbursement for deer damage.*

*Tax breaks for cropland for any income level – costs of machinery, gas, labor, etc. for harvesting hay never leave enough for taxes and a small profit. Schenectady County needs those of us who farm small pieces & keep the rural areas open & free of development and they tax us heavily for providing this. Our farm has been pastureland for over 200 years, and we pay to keep it that way. Communities right to value the green spaces.*

*Public education & awareness of it being here and important for the County, Country & State.*

*A dumb farmer has no voice in government yet they feed the nation. Have you ever calculated the cost of getting into farming. Agriculture in Schenectady is dead.*

*Make the existing farm owners more aware of programs that exist for them.*

*I believe there are good farmers and poor ones. You cannot help the poor ones without the better ones getting better and you will be right back where you started.*

*Cut taxes for retired farmers that want to keep land but don't farm.*

*Quit selling building lots.*

*Reduce school & land tax dramatically.*

*Promote direct marketing. Alternative agriculture, niche markets, etc.*

*Your minimum rules exclude small guys from your financial programs and from property tax relief. It makes it almost impossible to expand or be successful.*

*Give farmers big tax breaks so they don't have to sell their land to put up houses. Make it easier for farmers to start other business on their land.*

*Find funds to develop alternative forms of agriculture.*

*Would like to see a local USDA inspected slaughterhouse.*

# Appendix B

## General Public Survey

# Albany & Schenectady County Agriculture & Farmland Protection Boards 2001 General Public Survey

What town/city do you reside in? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe the area surrounding your home?      14 % Urban    35 % Suburban    51 % Rural

How strongly do you agree or disagree that:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
Farms play an important role in preserving open space for scenic and recreational uses.	<u>71 %</u>	<u>28 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>1 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>
Consumers should have more locally-grown fruits and vegetables available to them.	<u>73 %</u>	<u>27 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>
Keeping farms viable in the Capital District is important.	<u>72 %</u>	<u>25 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>3 %</u>
Buying locally produced agricultural products is an effective way to keep farms viable in the Capital District.	<u>73 %</u>	<u>25 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>3 %</u>
Farmers make good neighbors.	<u>64 %</u>	<u>26 %</u>	<u>3 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>7 %</u>
Consumers can influence what is grown locally.	<u>44 %</u>	<u>47 %</u>	<u>6 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>4 %</u>
The agricultural industry is an important component of our local economy.	<u>51 %</u>	<u>36 %</u>	<u>7 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>6 %</u>
Farmland preservation is a means of protecting air and water quality and providing important wildlife habitat.	<u>70 %</u>	<u>21 %</u>	<u>6 %</u>	<u>1 %</u>	<u>1 %</u>
Cafeterias in schools, hospitals and other public institutions should serve food grown by local farmers.	<u>64 %</u>	<u>26 %</u>	<u>4 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>6 %</u>

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Would you be willing to pay slightly more for locally produced agricultural products if doing so would help farms stay in business?	<u>93 %</u>	<u>1 %</u>	<u>6 %</u>
Would you buy more local/state/regional produce if it was labeled as such?	<u>96 %</u>	<u>0 %</u>	<u>4 %</u>

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Always
When purchasing produce, how often do you notice information about where produce is grown?	<u>1 %</u>	<u>16 %</u>	<u>56 %</u>	<u>27 %</u>

# Appendix C

## PUBLIC MEETINGS SUMMARY Glenville & Duanesburg

**PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY**  
**Glenville (2/16/00) & Duanesburg (3/01/00)**

**Summary of Public Comments**  
**When Asked to Identify Problems for Agricultural Industry**

- Taxes
- Recognition of Horse Boarding
- Lack of Knowledge of County & Town Officials
- Local Zoning
- Encroachment
- Neighbors – Odor & Nutrient Runoff
- Federal Wetlands Law
- Water Quality Issues
- Wildlife Damage
- Recreational Vehicle Damage (Trespassing)
- Dumping of Refuse
- Low Prices
- Lack of Local Ag. Services
- Insurance Costs & Labor Regulations
- Labor Supply
- CAFO – Nutrient Management
- Town Regulations
- Competition From Foreign Countries
- Distance to Markets
- Distance to Suppliers/Services

**Summary of Public Comments**  
**When Asked to Identify Possible Solutions**

- Explore Alternative Agriculture
- Better Marketing Practices
  - Direct Marketing
  - Educate Consumer on Quality
  - Market to Health Conscious
  - Develop Local Identity
- Shorten Period for Ag. District Review
- Possibility of PDR
- Promote Tourism



# Appendix D

## Farmers' Market Survey for WIC Participants

## **SURVEY OF WIC PARTICIPANTS**

The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides checks to low income, nutritionally at-risk families enrolled in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Senior Meal Programs, which are redeemable for fresh produce at more than 200 participating farmers' markets statewide. As part of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, the Schenectady County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board conducted a 1 page, 12-question survey of WIC participants in the County. A total of 183 responses were received representing approximately 20 percent of participating families in the County.

Approximately 56 percent of respondents indicated that they attend the Schenectady farmers' market once a week or more. A total of 81 percent of respondents indicated that they find the location of the farmers' market convenient with one third of the respondents indicating that they walk (16.5 %) or take a bus (16.5 %) to the market.

Ninety-three percent of respondents rated the quality of produce at the market as good or excellent with only 7 percent considering it fair. Selection of the produce was rated similarly with 89 percent responding that it was either good or excellent and compared to local supermarkets 77 percent responded that they thought the prices were reasonable, with only 12 percent responding that they thought prices were unreasonable.

From a marketing perspective, the WIC coupons appear to encourage additional expenditures with 55 percent of participant indicating that they purchase goods at the market without a coupon and only 17 percent responding that they would not attend the market without the coupons. Finally, the markets appear to have expanded the types of foods people buy, with 69 percent of respondents indicating that they have tried different types of food items as a result of the market. Of these respondents, 66 percent indicated that they continue to buy these additional food items at the grocery store.

### *Farmers Market Survey for WIC Participants*

Please refer to the two farmers markets in Schenectady when answering the questions below.

1. Which farmers market do you visit most often?

a. 111 State Street (Downtown Schenectady)    b. 67 St. Luke's Church

2. How often do you visit the farmers market?

a. 26 Twice a week    b. 77 Once a week    c. 49 Less than once a week    d. 29 Only once a year

3. How do you most often get to the farmers market?

a. 119 Drive    b. 30 Bus    c. 3 Taxi    d. 31 Walk

4. Do you find the location of the farmers market convenient?

a. 148 Yes    b. 30 Somewhat    c. 5 No

5. Would you attend a farmers market on Saturdays?

a. 135 Yes    b. 24 No    c. 24 Not Sure

6. How would you rate the quality of the produce at the farmers market?

a. 73 Excellent    b. 97 Good    c. 12 Fair    d. 0 Poor

7. How would you rate the selection of the produce at the farmers market?

a. 51 Excellent    b. 112 Good    c. 20 Fair    d. 0 Poor

8. Compared to the local supermarkets, do you think the prices at the farmers market are reasonable?

a. 140 Yes    b. 21 No    c. 20 Not Sure

9. Would you attend the farmers market without the WIC Coupons?

a. 119 Yes    b. 31 No    c. 32 Not Sure

10. Do you purchase goods at the farmers market without a WIC Coupon?

a. 99 Yes    b. 82 No

11. Do you purchase the same types of goods at the farmers market as the grocery store?

a. 150 Yes    b. 34 No

12. Have you tried additional types of foods as a result of the farmers market?

a. 126 Yes    b. 57 No

12a. If yes, do you continue to buy these additional types of food at the grocery store?

a. 83 Yes    b. 38 No

# Appendix E

2001 Schenectady County Farm Guide Survey

## 2001 Schenectady County Farm Guide Survey

If you wish to be listed in the Schenectady County Farm Guide please complete the following survey.

**Guide Listing** (Please complete as you would like it to appear in the guide)

Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Owners: \_\_\_\_\_

**Business Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Call before visiting?  Yes  No

Months open \_\_\_\_\_ to: \_\_\_\_\_

Days/Hours of operation \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of farm enterprise** (please check all that apply):

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| A. <input type="checkbox"/> Roadside stand        | F. <input type="checkbox"/> Maple Syrup | K. <input type="checkbox"/> Greenhouse/Nursery/Flowers |
| B. <input type="checkbox"/> On-farm Retail Outlet | G. <input type="checkbox"/> Honey       | L. <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Trees            |
| C. <input type="checkbox"/> U-Pick/Cut Operation  | H. <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry/Egg | M. <input type="checkbox"/> Processed/Specialty Food   |
| D. <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Grower          | I. <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy       | N. <input type="checkbox"/> Horses                     |
| E. <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable/herb Grower | J. <input type="checkbox"/> Meat        | O. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe)    |

**Products Available (Please check "R" if sold at Retail outlet, "U" if available for "U-Pick" or "U-Cut"):**

	<u>R</u>	<u>U</u>		<u>R</u>	<u>U</u>		<u>R</u>
Apples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grapes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Apple Cider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other tree fruit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Herbs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Honey & Products	<input type="checkbox"/>
Berries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flowers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Baked Goods	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vegetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Christmas Trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Preserves	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sweet Corn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dairy Products	<input type="checkbox"/>		Specialty Foods	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tomatoes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Eggs & Poultry	<input type="checkbox"/>		Greenhouse Plants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pumpkins	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meat	<input type="checkbox"/>		Nursery Products	<input type="checkbox"/>
Melons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maple Syrup	<input type="checkbox"/>			

**Promotional Description:** Please describe anything distinctive/attractive about your farm business including featured products and agritourism activities.

**Miscellaneous Information:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Do you sell at community farmers markets? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No    | Do you sell directly to stores/restaurants? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do you produce/process specialty food items? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | Do you want info on farmers markets in   |
| Do you sell any of your products wholesale? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No  | Schenectady County? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No                         |

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please mail this form by March 23, 2001 to: Schenectady County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board, 107 Nott Terrace, Suite 303, Schenectady NY 12308. You may fax the form to: 382-5539. If you have any questions, call Stephen Feeney at 386-2225. THANK YOU!

# Appendix F

## Agricultural Districts Law

## **AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT LAW**

Enacted in 1971, New York State's Agricultural District Law (Article 25AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law) seeks to create an economic and regulatory climate which will encourage farmers to continue farming. The Law recognizes that agricultural lands are an important and irreplaceable resource, and that they are being lost due to development, high costs of doing business, and regulatory restraints. It is the declared purpose of the Law to provide a locally-initiated mechanism for the protection and enhancement of New York State's agricultural land as a viable segment of the local and state economies and as an economic and environmental resource of major importance.

Relying primarily on the initiative of landowners and county governments with state oversight, the Law provides agricultural landowners with a number of benefits and protections without burdening a landowner with additional restrictions. Contrary to a common misconception, land in an agricultural district is not subject to additional land use restrictions, nor is the sale of land within the district restricted. A landowner's right to sell his or her land for whatever purpose is fully protected under the Law.

As more fully described below, the benefits and protections available to agricultural landowners within an agricultural district include: limitation on local regulation; limitation on the exercise of eminent domain and other public acquisitions or advancement of funds; limitation on local benefit assessments; right to farm protections; coordination of local planning and land use decision-making; and, a required disclosure statement for transfers of real property. However, it should be noted that many of the benefits and protections available under the Law apply only to actively operated farms or "land used in agricultural production" as defined under Article 25AA (see Appendix 1). Consequently, while a property may be included in the agricultural district, it may not be eligible to receive all the benefits and protections available under Article 25AA detailed below.

### **Limitation on Local Regulation**

The Law prohibits enactment of laws or ordinances by local governments which would unreasonably restrict or regulate farm structures or farming practices within an agricultural district, unless the regulations directly affect public health or safety. This prohibition applies only in the case where the land affected was included within the agricultural district prior to the enactment of the local regulation.

The Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets may independently initiate a review of a proposed or existing local law or ordinance or proceed upon the complaint of a district landowner. The Commissioner is authorized to bring an action to enforce the Agricultural District Law, if necessary.

### **Limitation on the Exercise of Eminent Domain and Other Public Acquisitions or Advancement of Funds**

The Law requires that any state agency, public benefit corporation, or local government which intends to acquire more than one acre of land from any farm within an agricultural district or more than 10 acres in total from a district, must file a notice of intent to that effect with the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets at least 30 days prior to taking the action. Similarly, a notice must be filed for all actions wherein the government sponsor intends to advance a grant, loan, interest subsidy or other form of public funding for the construction of dwellings, commercial or industrial facilities, or water or sewer facilities to serve nonfarm structures within an agricultural district.

The purpose of the notice requirement is to assure a full evaluation of the potential effects of a government sponsored acquisition or construction project on farms and farm resources, and to determine whether any reasonable alternative exists which would minimize or avoid the adverse impact on agricultural enterprises within the district. The Commissioner's findings and recommendations are only advisory. The Commissioner has no authority to disapprove, alter, or otherwise mitigate expected adverse impacts to agriculture.

### **Limitation on Local Benefit Assessments**

Benefit assessments or special ad valorem levies for local improvements are generally calculated on the basis of the value, acreage, or frontage of the properties benefited. Since agricultural operations generally involve large tracts of land and multiple structures, they are usually subject to higher assessments. The Law, therefore, restricts assessments for local improvements, such as water and sewer, to a lot not exceeding one-half acre surrounding any dwelling or nonfarm structure located on land used in agricultural production in an agricultural district, and to farm structures which are directly benefited.

This limitation on benefit assessment is available only in those instances where the agricultural district was formed prior to the improvement district or benefit area.

### **Right to Farm Protections**

On any land in an agricultural district, an agricultural practice shall not constitute a private nuisance provided such agricultural practice constitutes a sound agricultural practice pursuant to an opinion issued by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets upon request. Sound agricultural practices refer to those practices necessary for the on-farm production, preparation and marketing of agricultural commodities. Examples of practices include, but are not limited to, operation of farm equipment; proper use of agricultural chemicals and other crop protection methods; and, construction and use of farm structures.

### **Coordination of Local Planning and Land Use Decision-Making**

Any application for a special use permit, site plan approval, use variance, or subdivision approval requiring municipal review that would occur on property within an agricultural district containing a farm operation or on property within 500 feet of a farm operation located in an agricultural district, shall include an agricultural data statement. An agricultural data statement must include a description of the proposed project and a map showing the site of the proposed project relative to the location of nearby farm operations within the district.



The municipality shall consider the agricultural data statement in its review of the possible impacts of the proposed project upon the functioning of farm operations within the agricultural district. Notice of the project must be mailed to any owner of land within the agricultural district located within 500 feet of the project.

### **Disclosure Statement for Real Property Transfers**

Prior to the sale, purchase, or exchange of real property located partially or wholly within an agricultural district, the prospective grantor shall deliver to the prospective grantee a notice or disclosure statement. Such disclosure statement shall be recorded on a property transfer report form prescribed by the state board of real property services as provided for in the real property law. The notice must state the following:

*"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 and that farming activities occur within the district. Such farming activities may include, but not be limited to, activities that cause noise, dust and odors."*

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This is a brief summary of the NYS Agricultural District Law and the benefits conferred to agricultural operations located within an Agricultural District. The Law is amended frequently and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets should be contacted for clarification of the Law's provisions.

NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets  
1 Winners Circle, Albany, NY 12235

518-457-3880 • [www.agmkt.state.ny.us](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us)

**Schenectady County**



**Agricultural & Farmland Protection Board**



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