

# Chapter Six

## Agriculture

### Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to identify and describe the current and future status of agriculture within the region. The plan outlines goals and objectives for agricultural sustainability in the region based on the region's unique history and farmland trends for the future.

### What is Agricultural Sustainability and Why is it Important to the Region?

Agricultural sustainability allows agricultural producers to meet the needs of their operations, their environments, and their communities. While specific techniques and approaches vary by farmer, common goals include:

- Providing a more profitable farm income
- Promoting environmental stewardship
- Promoting stable, prosperous farm families and communities (See Sustainable Agriculture through Research and Education; [www.sare.org/publications/explore/index.htm](http://www.sare.org/publications/explore/index.htm))



Farm in Deerfield

Agriculture encompasses a wide range of food and plant production, including but not limited to, livestock, fruits and vegetables, annual and perennial greenhouse plants, nursery stock, maple syrup, honey, hay and sod, and lumber. The definition of agriculture in New Hampshire Statute RSA 21:34-A gives a more comprehensive list of included activities (see Appendix 1).

Agricultural land is integral to the region economically, ecologically, aesthetically, and culturally. All towns in the region were originally settled as agricultural establishments, with much of the current forested areas once existing as farmland. At the height of New Hampshire's agricultural industry, 50 percent of the state was farm or pasture land. Today, most of those farm jobs have been converted to jobs in industry and commerce; only five to seven percent of the land in the state is in agricultural use (GRANIT 2004). Southern New Hampshire still contains a wealth of prime farming soil, and its agricultural heritage helps to establish the rural character of many of the towns surrounding Manchester.

The value of NH's agricultural industry is nearly \$935 million from about 3,400 commercial farming operations across the state. This includes \$554 million in direct sales of agricultural and other horticultural products and services and \$381 million in direct spending by agriculture related tourists (fairs, scenic travel, etc.) (NH Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, 2007).

Within local communities, farming supports government budgets and enables the creation of wealth locally, without outside developers. Farming facilitates job creation, support services and

businesses, and secondary markets such as food processing. Environmental benefits of farmland preservation include protected wildlife habitat, clean air and water, flood control, groundwater recharge, and carbon sequestration. Finally, the farmlands of the SNHPC region are an integral part of the area's heritage and identity, founded on the principle of living off the land.

## **Main Issues and Concerns**

New England produces the least amount of food for itself in the country, making it the most vulnerable and least sustainable. New Hampshire is only 3 to 4 percent self sufficient in terms of growing local and in turn, the food we eat travels over 1500 miles from the source to our dinner tables<sup>1</sup>. Despite the importance of agriculture to the region's economy and culture, land is being developed significantly and much of New Hampshire's most productive farmland remains unprotected. A key issue in New England is the stark contrast between urban and rural lands, which are extremely close in proximity. This encourages more developmental threats to farmland in the region.

The largest threat to agricultural sustainability is the increasing price of land. This has led to land being more economically valuable as development rather than farmland. As a result, the amount of farmland and the number of family-operated farms has been steadily declining. By nature, it is difficult to attain profit margins in an agricultural enterprise comparable or greater than those of commercial or residential development. Furthermore, the soils that are desirable for agriculture are also the easiest to develop. Municipalities in the SNHPC region recognize the value of agriculture to their local economies and identities. However, the wide array of roadway improvement projects planned for the next few decades promise increased land values, which will further augment the problem.

Within the SNHPC region, no municipalities have adopted a zoning district designed specifically and exclusively for agriculture (see Table 1). Goffstown has a district entitled "Agricultural District" and Weare has a district entitled "Rural/Agricultural District," but both of these zones have been established with the purpose of encouraging low or limited density residential development and maintaining the rural character of the towns. Additionally, Bedford, Chester, Deerfield, Londonderry, New Boston, and Raymond all have Agriculture/Residential districts. These districts generally permit all types of agriculture, yet they are overwhelmingly occupied with low-density residential developments rather than agricultural operations. The town of Candia only permits unrestricted commercial agriculture in its Industrial District. The remaining municipalities (Auburn, Derry, Hooksett, and Manchester) allow agriculture in rural or low-density residential zones. Many of the towns also offer limited or special exception agricultural operations, such as forestry, farm stands, and pesticide-free farming, in commercial, industrial, conservation, and other residential districts (for specific zoning regulations, refer to each municipality's individual Zoning Ordinances).

The lack of agriculture-specific zoning contributes to one of the most pressing issues for New Hampshire's agriculture industry - the rapidly diminishing supply of farmland. With no land exclusively zoned for agricultural use, the current zoning ordinances of the region do nothing to

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<sup>1</sup> Carrol, John. The Real Dirt Toward Food Sufficiency and Farm Sustainability in new England. 2011

ensure the preservation of farmland. Some municipalities have taken steps toward preserving local farmland through land purchases, conservation easements, tax exemptions, and increased regulations. Many of these farmlands become recreation sites.

Local agriculture grapples with several other pressing issues. Multi-generational family farms are decreasing, the average size and acreage of farms in Rockingham and Hillsborough Counties are down significantly in the last decade, and farmers who rent land for their farms increasingly risk the sale of their farms in favor of more profitable development ventures. Due to the increasing challenges of profitable farming operations, young people are less likely to enter agricultural professions. According to Richard Uncles, director of regulatory services at the N.H. Department of Agriculture, the average age of farmers across the state and nation has been increasing over the past few decades, and is currently in the mid to late 50s. As of 2007, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service found the average age of farmers in Rockingham County to be 55.6. (The New Hampshire Wire, 2010)

Farmers also face the continuing threat of invasive species and the challenge of pesticide use without environmental detriment. Agriculture in the region looks toward local support for revitalization; this support can come in the form of farmers’ markets, buy-local campaigns, agricultural tourism, and agriculture-friendly zoning and regulations.

**Table 1**  
**Primary Zoning District for Unrestricted Agriculture**

Municipality	Agricultural District	Agriculture/ Residential District	Rural/Low Density District
Auburn			X
Bedford		X	
Candia			
Chester		X	
Deerfield		X	
Derry			X
Goffstown	X		
Hooksett			X
Londonderry		X	
Manchester			X
New Boston		X	
Raymond		X	
Weare	X		

## **Overall Goal**

Protect lands for agriculture for existing and future generations to continue providing a sustainable food supply for the residents of the region. Allow and promote for small scale agriculture in inner-city and suburban areas.

## **Public Survey Results**

The Agricultural Sustainability Survey was developed to measure public input regarding regional agricultural operations and to identify concerns and potential resolutions related to threatened local farms. Every SNHPC region community participated in the survey, with the exception of Chester. Auburn and Londonderry achieved the highest levels of participation, together comprising 33 percent of the total survey sample.

### Survey Results:

- A strong majority of survey respondents agreed that the demise of regional farming was a damaging trend and expressed support for the implementation of local and state government mechanisms to preserve agricultural operations.
- However, many of the same participants acknowledged that their communities had not taken aggressive actions to counter such trends and many expressed unfamiliarity with non-profit, state and federal programs to support agriculture.
- More than 70 percent of respondents indicated that the loss of agricultural lands was a significant concern within their communities.
- Nearly all of those surveyed indicated that their communities had taken action through zoning and subdivision regulations to encourage more agricultural development.
- But sixty-eight percent indicated that their town had not adopted a “Right to Farm” ordinance,
- Nearly 80 percent indicated that their community had no Agricultural Commission in place (11 percent were not sure),
- 97 percent indicated that their community had not formed a Farming Protection Committee (the remainder were not sure).
- 29 percent estimated that their community has lost between 11 and 26 percent of their farmland over the past decade, but over 30 percent of respondents indicated that they were not sure.
- Strong majorities expressed support for mechanisms to preserve and promote local agriculture including the establishment of more CSA gardens (77 percent) and more opportunities for farmers to sell produce directly to consumers (69 percent).

- The vast majority of respondents were too unfamiliar with various agricultural programs to render any opinion on their effectiveness levels.

## **Existing Conditions**

### **Regional Agricultural Activities**

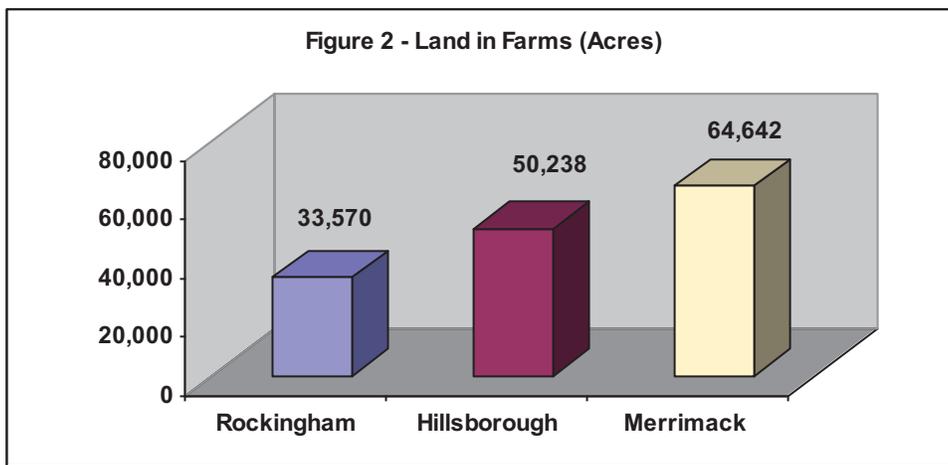
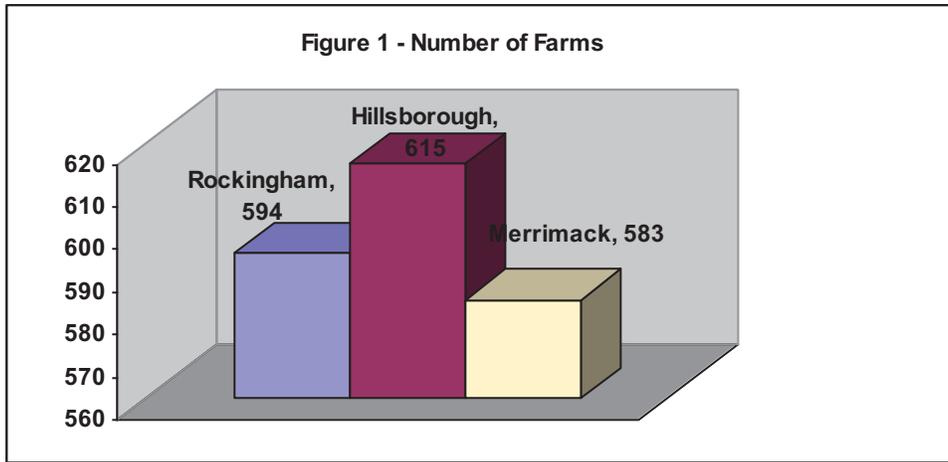
Agriculture in the Southern New Hampshire Planning Region includes an abundance of fruits and vegetables, ornamented agriculture, livestock, milk, dairy, and value added products. Environmental horticulture is perhaps the fastest-growing agricultural activity in the area, particularly in the form of ornamental greenhouse plants. The region also specializes in sheep, goats, poultry, dairy, horses, and pigs. Included in the agriculture industry of the region are forestry (logging), maple syrup production, and honey. Additionally, more specialties such as elk and llama farms represent a truly diverse agricultural industry in the region.

Much of the region was settled as farmland and remained so until industrialization in the mid-1800s. Some towns maintain a strong farming heritage and have developed their agricultural operations to reflect this identity. For example, the town of Londonderry created “Apple Way” to highlight their apple orchards and attract tourism with related commercial developments. Londonderry is also home to Stonyfield Farm, the nation's fastest-growing yogurt company with all natural and certified organic yogurt and ice cream products distributed nationwide. Deerfield hosts the annual Deerfield Fair, New England’s oldest family fair, started in 1876 and featuring an array of agricultural showcases and competitions.

### **Key Statistics**

The United States Census Bureau collects agricultural data by county. The SNHPC region lies primarily in Hillsborough County, containing the municipalities of Bedford, Goffstown, Manchester, New Boston, and Weare. Rockingham County containing the municipalities of Auburn, Candia, Chester, Deerfield, Derry, Londonderry, and Raymond. The town of Hooksett lies in Merrimack County.

From the 2007 agricultural census data, there are approximately 615 farms and 50,238 acres in Hillsborough County; 583 farms and 64,642 acres in Merrimack; and 594 farms and 33,570 acres in Rockingham. This totals in approximately 1,792 farms and 148,450 acres of farmland in all three counties. In 2002 there were approximately 1,428 farms and 150,929 acres of farmland in the same area. This shows approximately a 26 percent increase in the number of farms and about 2 percent decrease in acreage of farmland over the five-year period.

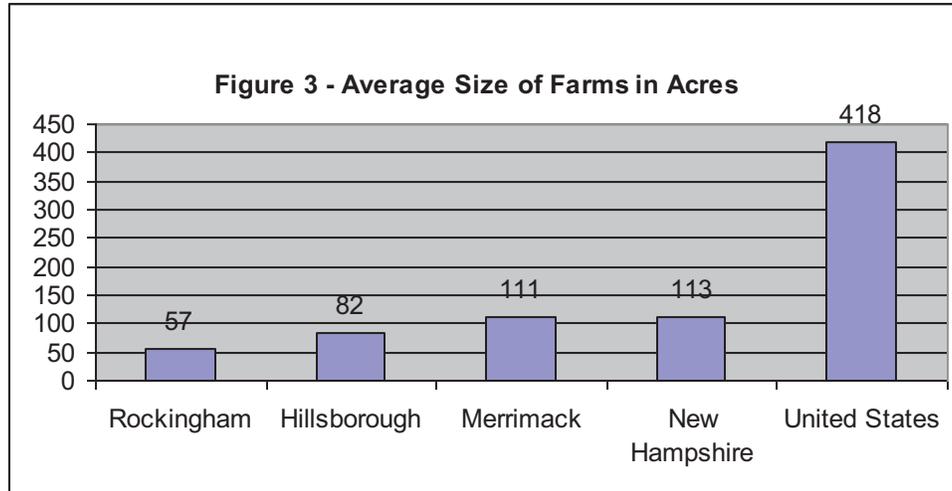


Rockingham County ranks second in the state for the average value of crops per farm (including nursery and greenhouse crops) sold with \$19,544 in 2007. Their average market value of production was \$16,955,000 in 2002, third highest in the state. Other significant products include vegetables, fruits and berries, greenhouse crops, sheep, goats, and horses.

Hillsborough County ranks third in the state for average value of crops sold with \$11,554 in 2007. Their total market value of production was \$27,799 in 2007, fourth highest in the state. Other significant products include vegetables, fruits and berries, hogs and pigs, and horses. Hillsborough County also leads the state in farm acreage of vegetables, apples, and sweet corn.

Merrimack County ranks first in the state for average value of agricultural crops sold with \$94,831 in 2007. They also rank first in value of crops with \$45,208,000. Merrimack County is a top state producer of sheep, goats, greenhouse plants, grains, horses, cattle, sod, and hay.<sup>2</sup> (USDA, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Hooksett is the only town in the SNHPC region in Merrimack County. Hooksett has a very small agriculture industry and is not representative of the county as a whole.



Source for all charts and graphs: National Agricultural Statistics Service;  
<http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>

According to the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, 102,831 people were employed in agriculture or an agriculture-related field in New Hampshire in 2002, which was approximately 13 percent of the total state workforce, as seen in Table 2. Of that number, nearly 5,000 were employed directly on farms as farm proprietors or salaried workers. Over 11,000 people worked in the closely related fields of agricultural services, agricultural input industries, and agricultural processing and marketing. Finally, approximately 87,000 people were employed in agriculture retail and wholesale trade as well as indirect agribusiness. The steady number of farmers evidences the cultural importance of farming in the past three decades despite development pressures (ERS 2005).



Chester Farm

**Table 2**  
**Farm and Farm-related Employment in New Hampshire, 2002<sup>3</sup>**

Farm industries	Employment	Percent of total
<i>Farming:</i>		
Farm production	4,956	0.62 %
<i>Closely related:</i>		
Agricultural services	3,992	0.5 %
Agricultural input industries--	316	0.04 %
Agricultural processing and marketing--	6,784	0.85 %
<i>Peripherally related:</i>		
Total farm & farm-related employment	102,831	13 %
All other employment	694,034	87 %
Total employment	796,865	100 %

### Existing Trends

Farm stands and farmers' markets, traditional sales operations that allow agricultural producers to sell directly to community members, are increasingly important to the success of the region's agriculture. Dozens of markets and individual farm stands already exist, but local experts suggest that there remains a greater demand for local food and not enough publicity for current operations. Agricultural producers and agencies are looking to expand advertising and signage for farmers' markets and farm stands and to increase overall visibility of local food sales.

The Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission has worked with most towns to create unique farmers' markets of their own. The newest market is in Hooksett which started in 2010 as a product of the CTAP initiative. Also, Raymond started a winter farmers' market this past season. Other towns that have established farmers' markets are Bedford, Deerfield, Derry, Manchester, New Boston, and Weare.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/FarmandRelatedEmployment/ViewData.asp?GeoAreaPick=STANH  
New+Hampshire&YearPick=2002](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/FarmandRelatedEmployment/ViewData.asp?GeoAreaPick=STANH>New+Hampshire&YearPick=2002)

**Table 3  
Community Supported Agriculture in SNHPC Region**

Name	Description	Town	Website/Phone
Random Hills Farm	Small-scale operation producing vegetables and herbs.	Weare	603.657.8294 Random.hills.farm@gmail.com
Charmingfare Farms	Vegetables, fruits, berries, herbs, fresh flowers, meats and eggs.	Candia	www.visitthefarm.com
Field to Fork Farm	Organic eggs and pasteurized chicken, organically fed and forest raised pork.	Chester	www.fieldtoforkfarm.com

Source: 2011 NH CSAs, NH Dept of Agriculture, Markets and Food

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an emerging concept bringing community members into direct participation in the local agricultural industry. Participants buy a subscription or share in the harvest prior to the start of the growing season. In exchange, they regularly pick up a portion of the produce throughout the season, subject to the success of the harvest. CSAs can range in level of participation, with some operations requiring labor or pick-your-own for some produce, as well as availability of foods. Table 3 shows some of the various foods available through local CSA farms. Several of the farms in the area cannot keep up with the demand for shares, demonstrating a greater need for expansion of CSA operations.

Several existing programs through the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture address the integration of agriculture into community life. One such program, the New Hampshire Farm to Restaurant Connection, aims to increase the purchase of local foods for use in restaurant preparation. This project includes chef surveys, a directory of supplier farms, a directory of restaurants using local foods, and “Grower Dinner” promotional events. Another state-run program is the New Hampshire Farm to School Program, which integrates local produce—particularly apples—into school cafeterias and classroom curricula.



Apple orchard in Londonderry; *photo courtesy of Town of Londonderry.*

In 2009, there were three certified organic farms in the SNHPC region with dozens more in surrounding areas. However, almost all local farmers markets feature organic produce, indicating that outside organic farmers supply the region. As public demand for organic foods has increased in recent years, there is a need to encourage and promote more organic farming in the SNHPC region.

In the SNHPC region, Londonderry successfully operates tourism around “Apple Way,” a route of orchards supplemented by bed-and-breakfasts and other commercial establishments. Agriculture tourism can be

an integral part of the region's agriculture industry; farm tours, field trips, and "pick-your-own" operations can better integrate agriculture into the community.

Finally, a new statewide grant program focusing on rural development helps agricultural operators to develop business and marketing plans. Currently there are 20 farms in New Hampshire being served by this program, including several in the SNHPC region.

### **Existence of Agricultural Easements**

Conservation Easements are currently one of the most feasible solutions for farmland preservation in the region. Land value is determined by professional appraisals. The land remains privately owned and on tax rolls, and the owner maintains the right to use the land. Conservation easements are also an important tool for the protection of forested land for lumber operations.

The Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP), a program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the USDA, has helped acquire several agricultural conservation easements. Among these are 371.5 acres of orchard land in Londonderry, the 20.5-acre Root Farm in Chester, and the 25-acre Robert R. Corneliusen Trust property in Derry (Eagle Tribune 2004). Recently there are eight federally funded agricultural conservation easements in Hillsborough County for over 650 acres and holds potential for additional easements in the future.



Senator Bell Farm in Chester

### **Definitions of Soils**

*Prime farmland*<sup>4</sup>: "Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is also available for these uses" (Natural Resources and Conservation Service)

*Farmland of statewide importance*: "Soils which are considered to be important to agriculture in New Hampshire. Although these soils exhibit such properties as erodibility and droughtiness, they can produce fair-to-good crop yields when properly managed."

*Unique Farmland*<sup>5</sup>: "This is farmland other than prime that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops in New Hampshire. Sites represent a special combination of soil quality, location, growing season and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. In order to qualify as unique farmland, a high-value food or fiber crop must be actively grown. In New Hampshire, unique farmland crops include, but are not

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<sup>4</sup> Town of Chester 1997, definitions derived from NRCS USDA standards

<sup>5</sup> New Hampshire Soil Attribute Data Dictionary, 2002

necessarily limited to apples, peaches, pears, plums, strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, blueberries, pumpkins, squash, and tomatoes.”

## Future Conditions

While specific regulations and measures can help facilitate agricultural operations in the SNHPC region, overriding ingrained attitudes and techniques have the greatest potential for real change in bringing about sustainable agriculture. These new perspectives and practices require the participation and support of agricultural operators as well as municipal leaders, planning and zoning boards, and community residents. Cooperation and understanding between all three groups can provide mutually beneficial results for the entire community.

## Direct Sales to Clients



Twin Gate Farm in Londonderry

According to farmers and those who work most directly with them, the single best action farmers can take towards sustaining agricultural activity in the region is direct involvement with clients. This can range from the simple step of manning a booth at a farmers’ market to bottling milk on site at a dairy farm to create the ability to sell directly to the community. Especially in urbanizing areas, where residential neighborhoods lie adjacent to agricultural operations, the farmer who can serve the community the best will be the most successful. According to Bill Wilson of the Hillsborough County Farm Service Agency, “In urbanized areas, ‘wholesale’

has been termed ‘no-sale.’” Customers want to see where their food comes from and are eager to buy local foods from a known source. Farmers who can make the transition to direct customer sales will see a difference in their bottom line.

Agricultural operators cannot make this switch alone. With more involvement by community leaders, agricultural dollars can have an even greater impact within the local economy. Residents can participate by buying directly from farmers and learning more about agricultural operations. If farmers can purchase equipment and supplies locally and market their products to local consumers, all of the financial agricultural benefit can be felt within the town’s economy as opposed to other counties, states, or countries.

An increase in the farmer’s bottom line is an increase in the healthy living in the region that farmer resides. The Carsey Institute published a article in the winter of 2011 found that rural communities had a difficult time gaining access to healthy, fresh foods despite being located near farms. Most drastically hit were lower incomes who found little selection, low quality, and intermittent availability of fresh foods.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms are one solution that can facilitate the direct sales of produce to local residents. The success of current operations in the region as well as the unmet demand for shares in CSAs demonstrate the need to expand shareholder farms.

## **Conservation Easements**

Conservation easements have been promoted in the region as a response to the continuing loss of farmland to development. While a few easements have been created, there still remains a vast potential for saving thousands of acres of farmland through easements. There are a variety of government programs and non-profit agencies that provide grants and matching funds for easements (see Section F. Existing Local, State, and Federal Programs). The challenge for towns is to educate taxpayers on the benefits of conservation easements. Town planners can also help by adding regulations that prevent development on prime farmland soil and soil of statewide importance and working with agricultural producers to enact agriculture-friendly ordinances. Municipalities can also preserve wooded lands on prime agricultural soil, as these may someday be reverted back to farmland.

Municipalities should make every effort to assist all agricultural operators who wish to continue producing upon their land through zoning regulations and facilitation of community programs. However, farmers should always have the option to sell their land and operations at their highest value, should they choose to cease production. The community must recognize that conservation easements are an important tool in farmland preservation, yet in some cases, the value of an easement may not be high enough to meet farmers' needs. A municipality supportive of farmland preservation must also respect the individual farmer's property rights.

A new committee of New Hampshire legislatures, called the Farm Viability Committee, is considering a new land conservation program based on a Massachusetts model. In this program, farmers agree to keep a specific amount of land open and undeveloped for at least 10 years in exchange for maintenance money for their farms. After 10 years, they could choose to develop the land, in which case they would pay back part of the subsidy money. This can give farmers a short-term boost without the intimidation of permanent conservation easements.

The next few decades may see the emergence of agricultural commissions in municipal governments. The Town of Weare has already established one. These advisory boards would consider agriculture in the way that conservation commissions focus on natural resources. Planning or zoning commissions could refer projects to the agricultural commission, who would then make a recommendation based on the agricultural impact of the project. Several towns have had success with these commissions in Massachusetts, leading to an interest in developing them in New Hampshire.

## **Diversification of Agricultural Production**

Another emerging trend that offers promise for agricultural sustainability in the future is the diversification of agricultural operations. Small, part-time farmers have increased in the past few years, and they have focused on diversifying their types of operations as well as the ways in which they market their products. Some farmers take on multiple small-scale operations, such as

honey and soap from goat's milk. Agricultural operators are becoming wiser about diversifying their products in general, with techniques such as rotational breeding and cutting hay on dormant fields. One dairy farm, for example, bottles milk, produces ice cream and beef, and maintains an on-site hunting operation, all in addition to traditional milk operations. The added creativity of diversification results in greater efficiency and profits.



Mac's Apples in Londonderry

Another trend suggested by the Farm Viability Committee is the encouragement of the use of biofuels, such as biodiesel, by government agencies and private consumers. This increases the market for agricultural products, from which the fuel is made.

## **Community Education and Involvement**

Even as communities value the “rural character” that agriculture provides in their towns, many residents are unaware of the diversity of operations in modern agriculture and the benefits agriculture brings to the local economy. Citizens living in close proximity to agricultural operations should learn more about the tax benefits of open spaces provided by agricultural land, practices such as manure-spreading (a natural alternative to fertilizers), the health and economic benefits of eating locally produced food, the availability of locally produced foods and goods, and the threat development poses to farmlands. Almost all state and federal grant programs require cost-sharing with local municipalities, and therefore farmland will continue to be threatened until taxpayers are willing to pay for farmland preservation directly.

Nearly all agricultural specialists agree that the greatest hope for revitalization of New Hampshire's agricultural industry lies with community involvement. The best way to involve community members and educate them about local agriculture is through an on-site event at a local farm, where residents can see for themselves the type of production that occurs. Residents also tend to mobilize around major issues that affect the community, so events should be geared around those, if possible. One example to model is that of Stonewall Farm in Keene, which is a fully operational farm with livestock, produce, dairy, and flowers open to the public seven days a week. The farm includes a year-round learning center, a summer camp, and special community events, such as workshops and Contra-dances.

In addition, experts highlight a proliferation of farmers' markets and farm stands, CSAs, Buy Local campaigns on a town level, an expansion of agricultural tourism and other businesses that support agriculture, and the purchase of farm equipment and supplies within the community as evidence of New Hampshire's agricultural revitalization. The few programs and markets in operation should be promoted and serve as examples for others. These changes are best facilitated through community education programs and agriculture-friendly planning and regulations.

## **Existing Local, State, and Federal Agricultural Programs**

A variety of state and federal programs exist to help farmers and landowners preserve farmland and maintain successful agricultural operations. More emphasis is needed on educating local municipalities about these existing programs and funding sources for farmland preservation in order to make conservation and protection efforts cost-efficient.

The conservation provisions in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) will provide conservation opportunities for farmers and ranchers for years to come. The new provisions build on the conservation gains made by farmers and ranchers through the 1985, 1996 and 2002 Farm Bills. They simplify existing programs and create new programs to address high priority environmental goals. Please refer to Appendix A for a complete listing of programs and additional resources.

## **Recommendations**

Municipalities within the SNHPC region can take specific actions to support agriculture and enhance community life in three areas: reducing development pressure for productive agricultural land, integrating agriculture into the local economy, and ensuring the farmer's right to farm. All municipalities should organize a Agriculture Commission. Initially these commissions were established to give farmers a voice and raise public awareness. Eventually they have evolved in to much more. They can collaborate with other town boards to mitigate issues facing the town through the voice of the farmers, help resolve farm-related problems, protect farmland, and assist with natural resource management.

If your agriculture commission is creative and willing to take the next step, they could even; create a agricultural overlay district as a community bylaw, organize agricultural incentive agreements, promote on-farm energy, collaborate with land trusts and open space conservation organizations to get more land in to farming, forecast impacts on future food supplies, and many more.

The actions listed below are some of the most important actions that can be undertaken directly at the local level. For further details on any of these recommendations or to take additional steps towards sustaining agriculture, consult the Resources section of this chapter.

1. Reduce development pressure on agricultural lands currently in use by:
  - Purchasing development rights
  - Limiting infrastructure improvement (sewer and water) in agricultural areas
  - Using zoning to guide growth away from farms
  - Creating zoning regulations to protect prime farmland soils and soils of statewide importance.
  - Budgeting money for agricultural conservation easements, supplemented with funds from state and federal programs.
  - Increasing efforts to protect farmland through conservation, and applying to grants for financial assistance.

2. Enhance integration of agriculture in local economy by:
  - Supporting farmers and enable legislation regarding state tax issues that directly impact their operations (tax credits for working agriculture)
  - Including opportunities for agricultural expansion in future economic development initiatives
  - Establishing a “buy local” program
  - Establishing a community education program to teach the social and economic benefits of agriculture.
  - Promoting and supporting the establishment of a farmers’ market in a commercially attractive location to help create new markets for locally grown agricultural products.
  - Encouraging the expansion of current Community Supported Agriculture operations to meet existing demand.
  - Enhancing and encouraging agriculture-related tourism such as Apple Way.
  - Increasing signage for farms, farm stands, and farmers’ markets, and reduce restrictions for temporary or seasonal signage for these purposes.
  - Working directly with farmers and agricultural property owners to enhance viability of agriculture in the town.
  
3. Ensure the Right-to-Farm by:
  - Removing impediments to agriculture in zoning ordinances through measures to
    - i. Encourage agricultural activity anywhere in the community unless a specific safety or health hazard can be documented
    - ii. Provide flexibility in zoning, subdivision, and site plan review regulations for agricultural uses.
    - iii. Permit wide-range of farm-based enterprises by removing impediments to home-based business or other subordinate or accessory farm activity.
  - Exempting agriculture or clearly differentiate subdivision and site-review requirements for agricultural enterprises from those regulating commercial, industrial, and residential.
  - Requiring developers to buffer new non-agricultural development from existing or potential farm locations to prevent or minimize negative interactions.
  - Educating town officials and farmers about existing grant money and facilitate the application process.

The New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture (NHCSA) and the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension have produced a comprehensive resource kit for planners entitled “Preserving Rural Character through Agriculture” that specifically addresses the needs of New Hampshire agricultural operators and local governments. The kit contains specific zoning guidelines to help planners encourage agriculture in their municipalities. Some of these guidelines include:

- Allow agriculture in more than one zoning district
- Allow simpler designs for Site Plan Review and flexible restrictions on seasonal agricultural businesses

- Allow off-site signs to attract customers
- Have a consistent policy approach for local land use procedures dealing with agriculture
- Allow roadside stands or pick-your-own operations
- Use zoning definitions of agriculture in a broad and inclusive manner
- Allow farm stands to sell products produced elsewhere
- Allow non-traditional or retail-based farm business in agricultural zones
- Properly assess specialized agricultural structures and address them in building codes
- Encourage conservation easements and purchase of farmland
- Have visible demonstration of value of agriculture
- Ease local restrictions and tax assessments on greenhouses

The NHCSA also reports the following guidelines as “Best Agricultural Planning Practices” for specific areas of municipal planning:

- **Signage:** Master Plan should indicate value of signage to agriculture, including exempt or reduced standards for signage and permission for seasonal and off-site signage.
- **Agricultural Structures:** Waivers from building and site requirements, exemption from site plan review process, follow but not exceed national code requirements for agricultural structures
- **Housing:** Master plan should include a policy statement on agricultural housing that allows clustering of farm dwellings and houses on site for non-related farm employees. Zoning should allow flexible provisions for accessory units on farms, and municipalities should keep farm housing separate from standard multi-family operations such as apartment buildings.
- **Nuisance:** The right to farm should not be “unreasonably limited by use of municipal planning and zoning power” and a farm cannot be a nuisance after it has been operational for one year (assuming no previous complaints or change in operations).
- **Transportation:** Town should use signage to indicate roads used by farm equipment for public relations and safety reasons. There should also be a policy statement to have several access points on agricultural lands.
- **Parking:** Farm roadside operations should not be considered commercial (if at least 35% of sales come from farm production). Local planning boards should consider waiving standards for parking lot design and construction for seasonal or pick-your-own farms.
- **Animal density:** Follow state recommendations for best practices of manure handling.
- **On-Farm Retail Sales:** Communities should be flexible in site plan review regulations and exempt seasonal farm stands from municipal regulations (except proof of safe site access). Year-round operations should have reduced standards from commercial and industrial uses.
- **Buffers:** Planning boards should consider buffering requirements on bordering non-agricultural land. Requiring developers to build buffers releases the burden from agricultural operators.
- **Prime Agricultural Lands:** Inventory prime agricultural lands in the master plan and adopt policies to protect this land from development.
- **Cluster:** Recognize agricultural land not only as open space but also as farmland.

## **Conclusion**

Agricultural operations can benefit greatly from farm-friendly zoning regulations, local food marketing, and community involvement. “We need to emphasize that agricultural producers need everybody,” says Linda Langdell of the USDA Farm Service Agency. The University of New Hampshire should be the beacon for this progress in the region. UNH has the greatest potential of all New England land grant universities with its 1100 areas of farms and woodlands within six miles of campus, a setting in an area of significant interest in demand for local food from Portland to Boston, and its long distinguished history of agricultural research.

Today the key is for UNH to honor its claims as leaders in sustainability and take full advantage of its opportunity. A community educated about the local agricultural industry will understand the economic and social benefits of agriculture well beyond the success of individual farmers. The SNHPC region already ranks high in community involvement in agricultural sales, as evidenced by Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties’ high national ranking of direct sales. The continued integration of agriculture in the community will ensure the agriculture’s place at the heart of the region’s identity, despite the loss of farmland. It will be up to communities in the region to protect and encourage a variety of sustainable agriculture practices.