

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF FARMS AND FOOD IN ERIE COUNTY
ERIE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN
PUBLIC MEETING

Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension
21 South Grove Street • East Aurora, NY 14052
Monday, March 21, 2011
7:00 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

Erie County Legislator Dino Fudoli, Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Chairman

PRESENTATION ON PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURE IN ERIE COUNTY

Diane Held, Sr. New York Field Manager, American Farmland Trust

- Ms. Held discussed county tools to plan for agriculture:
 - 14 Agricultural Districts in Erie County
 - County Right To Farm Law and 21 Town Right To Farm Laws (includes Town of Alden, the most recent)
 - Erie County Ag & Farmland Protection Plan and Municipal Ag & Farmland Protection Plans in Eden, Clarence, Marilla, Brant/Evans/North Collins
 - Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Programs in Amherst, Elma, Clarence, Marilla
 - Agricultural Economic Development (Eden Valley Growers, Southtowns Coalition-Agritourism)
 - Infrastructure Planning (Framework for Regional Growth Policy on sewer and water extensions in Ag Districts)
 - Food and Health Policies
 - Educate the Public (festivals, fairs, farm tours)
- New Erie County Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan Preparation:
 - Consultant:
 - [American Farmland Trust](#)
 - Subcontractors:
 - [Stuart I. Brown Associates](#)
 - [Agricultural & Community Development Services \(ACDS\)](#)
 - Contacts:
 - Mark Rountree, Erie County Department of Environment & Planning
 - mark.rountree@erie.gov or (716) 858-8008
 - Diane Held, American Farmland Trust
 - dheld@farmland.org or (716) 652-0100

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES IN ERIE COUNTY

- [ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING \(DEP\)](#) – Darren Kempner, Deputy Commissioner
 - DEP's role in Agriculture:
 - Agricultural Plans and Planning
 - Agricultural District Administration
 - Staff to Erie County AFPB
 - Microenterprise Loan Fund
 - DEP has a new website (<http://www2.erie.gov/environment/index.php?q=agriculture>) that will be used to post information about the plan process, meeting notices and minutes, and the draft Ag & Farmland Protection Plan when it is available.

- [CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION \(CCE\)](#) – Deb Roberts, Executive Director
 - Partnership between state, federal, county government and involves the public
 - Programs involve agriculture, horticulture, 4H youth education, nutrition education, energy, community development, and Integrated Pest Management
 - CCE works to ensure that farms are sustainable and profitable and provides business planning assistance, working with farms of all sizes, in rural or urban areas.
- [ERIE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT \(SWCD\)](#) and [NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE \(NRCS\)](#) – Mark Gaston, District Field Manager
 - Technical service providers, Water Quality Conservation
 - Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program
 - Locally led by conservation partners
 - Farmers doing their part to protect water quality
 - NRCS and AEM work hand-in-hand with similar goals
 - Responses to audience questions:
 - Mr. Gaston stated that they work with everyone, urban and rural farms.
 - Every county in New York has a SWCD, and adjacent SWCDs frequently work together on watershed issues
 - Brief discussion about Wyoming County’s Methane energy conversion projects
- [EDEN VALLEY GROWERS](#) – Karyn Agle, Grower and Board Vice President
 - 12 member farms, shipping mainly to WNY, efficient marketing of agricultural programs
 - What made Eden Valley Growers so successful?
 - The growers are in business together and work for the good of the organization
 - Variety of 100+ product options for supermarkets/customers
 - Excellent management staff that takes care of sales, accounting, organization
 - Two specialized coolers were funded by Erie County Environment and Planning through the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA), which are integral to allowing made Eden Valley Growers to ship products to distant destinations and provide products with a longer shelf life.
 - Responses to audience questions:
 - The young people getting involved in agriculture usually already have a background in farming. In rare cases, people getting involved are completely new to farming.
- [ERIE COUNTY FARM BUREAU](#) – Bryant Zilke, President
 - Unified national voice on agriculture through a grassroots, independent, non-governmental organization, for the purpose of resolving problems
- [WESTERN NEW YORK LAND CONSERVANCY](#) – Pat Szarpa, Executive Director
 - Covers 8 counties in WNY, the majority of their land conservation work is in Erie County due to increased development pressure here
 - Currently over 4,500 acres are in permanent protection (approximately 61 properties), more than half of which is agricultural lands.
- [FIELD & FORK NETWORK](#) and EDIBLE NEW YORK MAGAZINE – Lisa Tucker
 - Connect local growers with local buyers in 8 counties of WNY
 - Use agriculture as a local economic driver
 - Edible New York is a consumer-focused publication

DISCUSSION ON SUPPORTING FARMING & PROTECTING FARMLAND IN ERIE COUNTY

- Responses to audience questions regarding the new County Ag & Farmland Protection Plan:
 - The plan will be completely new, not a revision of the old plan.
 - It will review and include all other ag and farmland protection, comprehensive, or other plans that deal with agriculture.
- Strengths
 - Good food
 - Strong Agritourism (e.g. Upcoming WNY Maple weekends)
 - Framework for Regional Growth is an asset to farmland protection and redevelopment concepts that will alleviate pressure on agricultural lands.
 - Farmer's markets have exploded over the last ten years
- Weaknesses
 - Education is needed:
 - Agriculture is so much more than just food
 - Town officials and assessors need to be educated and get on the same page with regard to ag assessment and other programs
 - Raise ag awareness in grade schools and community colleges to prepare the next generation of farmers
 - Need for improved transportation to NYC, as they are a big buyer
 - Shortage of USDA slaughter facilities is problematic for beef farmers, who currently ship out of state
- Opportunities
 - We have a lot of non-traditional partnerships, but there are challenges connecting schools that want local food with the farmers that want to provide to local foods. (There are lots of issues ranging from nutritional requirements to the hierarchies of education systems)
 - Cross-border food processing industry opportunities
 - Local branding would help raise ag awareness (like California dairy advertisements)
 - Green Energy Opportunities exist to provide solar/wind power for farms and to get year round greenhouses to extend our short growing season
 - Erie County's Microenterprise Loan Program is available to help manage economic hardships and to improve the economic viability of farm businesses.
 - Reclamation/new uses of abandoned agricultural land needs to be explored (Poor lands are often abandoned and lend themselves to biomass energy production).
 - Winter farm markets have been very successful in Rochester (greenhouse growing and storage can elongate the season)
 - Educating the public about gardening, canning, food preservation as a means of handling a worsening economy
 - Apprenticeship programs could be started (like in Ontario county)
 - It is crucial to create connections between agricultural product producers (including food, as well as non-traditional ag products like compost) and the people that need them. (Create connections between farms and chefs). A published guide would be helpful.
 - Zoning Amendments should make small farms viable, even in Buffalo
- Threats/Challenges
 - Governmental barriers (farmers should fight overly restrictive regulations & barriers to business)
 - Funding shortages/inadequacies
 - Sprawl
 - New residential neighbors may not be tolerant of agriculture practices