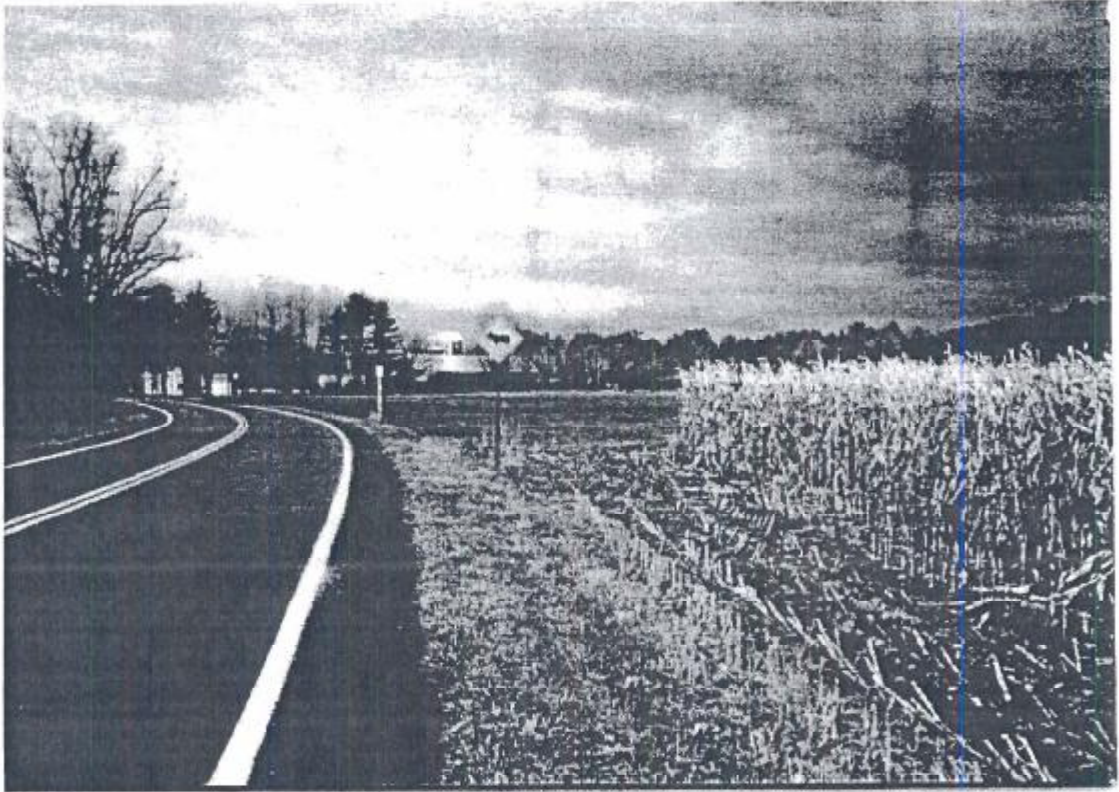


21st Century Farms



Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HISTORY OF OSWEGO COUNTY FARMING	2
III. INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS	3
Economic, Social and Natural Resources	
IV. ISSUES AFFECTING VIABILITY	7
V. LANDS TO BE PROTECTED	13
Open Space Benefits	
Criteria for Selection	
VI. PROTECTION OPTIONS	17
Case Studies	
List of Options	
VII. PREFERRED PROTECTION OPTIONS	26
VIII. IMPLEMENTATION	35
APPENDICES	

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has intrinsic value as employer, source of affordable food and raw material, provider of open space, environmental steward, and component of sustainable development. The Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan focuses on the theme of "21st Century Farms," recognizing agriculture must address economic, environmental, social and land use challenges to remain viable into the next century. "21st Century Farms" will try to strike a balance between the preservation of farmland and enhancing productivity and profitability of agriculture. The two concepts can be mutually reinforcing.

The New York State Agricultural Protection Act was passed in 1992, establishing a county's authority to create an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board. This legislation provides for local government involvement in farm protection and authorizes protection for farmers who are engaged in sound agricultural practices. The Board may comment on proposals to fund capital projects in districts. An Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board serves farmers to broaden the discussion about community and environmental interests. The Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board was established in 1993 with an 11 member board consisting of local government officials and farmers. The goal was to create a county-wide protection plan, funded by NYS Ag and Markets. The steps of preparing the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan involved: 1) inventory and analysis of agricultural resources; 2) identification of trends and issues that affect the long term viability of agricultural operations in Oswego County; 3) establishing goals for farmland protection efforts and identification of lands to be protected; 4) identification and description of protection options; 5) evaluation and identification of preferred options; and 6) implementation strategies, funding and responsibilities. This document followed these steps to come up with strategies for encouraging farmland protection in Oswego County.

II. HISTORY OF OSWEGO COUNTY FARMING

Agriculture has a long history as an integral part of Oswego County's economy. Its staying power is the result of numerous factors, partly due to both rich, fertile soil and physical geography. In the early days, individual farmers could sustain their families on products from the farm and sell surplus goods to boost the local economy. With the expansion of water transportation in New York State, local farm products began traveling to more distant markets. As early as the first part of the 19th Century, the Oswego Canal was transporting local farm goods to markets as far away as New York City, Canada and the West.

By 1855, it is estimated almost half of Oswego County's population was involved in farming. In the early part of the 1800's, farmers depended on wheat as a primary cash crop, but by the 1850's dairy farming, butter, and cheese production were popular activities. In 1870, Oswego County farmers were the sixth largest producers of cheese in New York State. At this time, agriculture also produced large amounts of fruit, mainly strawberries and apples. Today, Oswego County, just south of Lake Ontario, is in one of the largest fruit regions in the state, with considerable diversity. Agricultural land is scattered around Oswego County with large pockets in Granby, Mexico, Hannibal and Palermo (Map 1). Very few agricultural districts are left in the eastern end of Oswego County, an area which is today dominated by forests.

III. Inventory and Analysis

The following analysis of maps and statistical data illustrates the available agricultural resources in Oswego County. To help us better understand how to protect Oswego County's agriculture, mapped information will be combined with statistical data to describe in more detail the region's farmland. Agricultural land that is most important for its location and productivity is also often valued for development. This can cause land use conflicts with agricultural uses often losing out. An inventory of Oswego County's resources can later assist with defining criteria to be used when prioritizing farmland for protection.

After examination of the trends in Oswego County agriculture, it can be said that the region has a story not uncommon to many New York counties. The issues to be addressed in this section are the size and number of farms, along with agricultural land use in the county over time. As seen in Table 1, the average acres per farm has increased since the 1870's from 70 acres, with a significant jump in 1978, to 170 acres. However, the number of farms in Oswego County has substantially decreased over time. There were 7,192 farms in 1875, decreasing to 735 by 1995. The combination of these results point to fewer farms of larger size. Yet over the past decade, farm size has not been increasing, and the number of farms continues to decline. As compared to New York State, the average size of a farm in 1992 was 170 acres in Oswego County while in New York State it was 231 acres, a 26% difference (Table 3).

Between 1875 and 1960, two-thirds of New York State farms went out of business as they could no longer compete as production units. The number of Oswego County farms declined by 72% during that same period. In 1875, almost 82% of land in Oswego County was classified as agricultural, dropping to a mere 17% by 1995. One explanation for this decline is changes in the U.S. Census of Agriculture's definition of a farm. Since 1850, the U.S. Census of Agriculture definition has changed nine times. Before 1954, a farm was a place of three or more acres if the annual value of agricultural products amounted to \$150 or more, or less than three acres if sales were greater than \$150. For the 1959 U.S. Census, a farm was a place of ten acres or more if sales amounted to \$50 or more and less than ten acres if sales were greater than \$250. The Census definition again changed in 1969 and in 1974. A farm was a place making \$1,000 or more per year in agricultural products. Yet even taking into account the numerous changes in definition, farmland has been lost at an alarming rate in Oswego County.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 1992 the average value of land and buildings per farm in Oswego County was \$175,306. When compared to the New York State average of \$282,546, Oswego County farms are about 38% below the state average value. This historically is true and has only been aggravated over the decades, in part because land is of lower value per acre in Oswego County.

It should be noted that in the 1970's and 1980's, the population of Oswego

Oswego County Agriculture

Table 1

Year	Number of Farms	Land in Acres	Acres per Farm	% Land in Agriculture
1875	7,192	506,385	70	81.7
1930	4,726	388,861	82.3	62.9
1935	5,555	N/A	N/A	N/A
1940	4,426	359,824	81.3	58.1
1945	4,311	379,014	87.9	54.1
1950	3,339	335,462	100.5	54.1
1954*	2,854	305,761	107	49.0
1959	2,030	251,949	124	33.0
1964	1,592	210,575	132	34.0
1969	1,000	161,347	N/A	26.1
1974	904	150,382	"	N/A
1978	831	141,349	170	"
1982	940	141,100	169	22.8
1983	960	143,100	N/A	N/A
1984	910	139,000	"	"
1985	830	132,300	"	20.9
1986	835	128,500	"	N/A
1987	835	126,800	164	19.8
1988	815	122,800	N/A	N/A
1989	775	119,500	"	"
1990	755	116,400	164	18.4
1991	745	115,100	N/A	N/A
1992	775	123,500	170	18.4
1993	765	122,000	N/A	18.2
1994	735	119,000	"	N/A
1995	735	115,800	"	17.3

Source: US Census of Agriculture 1930 - 1980, Census Bureau. NY Farms, Farmland & Major Crops County Estimates 1987-1995, NY Ag And Markets.

*1954 a farm was a place of 3 acres or more. 1959 a farm was a place of 10 acres or more. This changed again in 1969 and in 1974 was a place making \$1,000 or more in agricultural products.

County grew rapidly. Between the 1980's and 1990's, the rate of growth slowed. This is consistent with the observation that with a rise in population in the '70's and '80's, there was an increase in the loss of farmland. As population growth has slowed, so has the loss of productive farmland. Today, the highest growth areas are in the southern townships and the Town of Scriba.

Oswego County Economic, Social and Natural Resources

Agriculture is a crucial element of rural economies. According to the 1992 U.S. Census of Agriculture, there were 659 farms encompassing 112,334 acres in Oswego County, down from 831 farms and 141,349 acres in 1978 (Table 2). Market value of all products sold in 1992 amounted to over \$31 million, little changed from a decade earlier and down from \$34 million in 1987. However, average farm sales increased from \$37,318 in 1982 to \$47,487 a decade later. All categories of production show decline since 1982; however, much of the agricultural decline can be clearly attributed to the difficulty faced by the dairy industry in New York. In New York State, the number of cows has dropped since 1981, yet the production of milk is constant. Between 1981 and 1991, more milk was produced per cow.

Other factors influencing the loss of agricultural land are changes in technology, society and the economy over the decades. Technology and best management practices have made it possible to produce more product at a larger profit on less farmland. Farming today also requires more investment in the purchase of equipment and improvements to comply with regulatory changes. The typical farm is larger and more scientifically operated. The traditional pattern of continuous family ownership of a farm is increasingly rare. More children of farm owners choose to do something other than the family business due to disinterest or the poor economics of farming. A result is the increase in the average age of farm operators. The early to mid-fifties is the average age, posing specific retirement issues for the farm community.

Agriculture has a significant multiplier effect on the community. The direct benefit of agriculture is the primary sale of agricultural products and the indirect spin-off effects are the farmer's demand for services utilized to produce the goods. According to Cornell Cooperative Extension data, the combined annual revenue in Oswego County from dairy and livestock, fruit and vegetables was \$56.2 million in 1992. Another \$1.1 million was generated from a thriving commercial horticulture industry. Yet, over the last fifteen years, the average value of products per farm in Oswego County has been significantly lower than state averages. In 1978, Oswego County produced \$25,829 per farm and New York State \$43,210 per farm, a 40% difference in the value of products at the State and County levels. Currently, the value of Oswego County products is rising at a rate faster than the state average, beginning to close the gap. Between 1978 to 1992, the State has had a significant drop in the number of farms with sales over \$10,000 while Oswego County has remained relatively stable (Table 3).

Oswego County Agriculture as Compared to New York State 1978-1992

Table 3

	1978		1982		1987		1992	
	OC*	NY	OC	NY	OC	NY	OC	NY
Ave. Size of Farm	170	220	169	218	164	223	170	231
Ave. Value of Land and Buildings/ farm	\$93,433	\$146,597	139,815	177,988	147,413	218,934	175,306	282,546
Ave. Value of Products per farm	\$25,829	\$43,210	37,318	57,501	45,251	64,697	47,487	57,738
% of farm sales >\$10,000/ year	40.8%	79.8%	39.1	54.3	39.9	54.1	42.6	55.9
Ave. Age of Operator	50.6	50.1	50.2	51.4	51.6	50.0	54.1**	53

Source: County City Data Book 1988, 1992, 1994; US Census of Agriculture 1982, 1987; and <http://www.census.gov/agfs>.

*Oswego County= OC

**calculated by the percent difference between state and county.

The type of farm operation is indicative of what is occurring in the region. Livestock and dairy farming are the largest money makers in Oswego County. This category, including beef, sheep, pigs, goats and poultry, brings in \$20 million annually. Fruits are a burgeoning high value crop in Oswego County that includes strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries. This crop has an annual revenue of \$7 million with apples and pears as leading products. The fruit industry is enhanced by the climate of Oswego County which is moderated by proximity to Lake Ontario.

The practice of producing vegetables by muck farming is also a significant factor in Oswego County agriculture. Oswego County has half of Central New York's wetland acreage with the largest swamps on the Tug Hill Plateau and along the Oswego and Oneida Rivers. Muck and peat soils correspond closely with the occurrence of swamps. Muck farming is labor intensive and produces a high market value crop at \$14.4 million per year. In Oswego County, farmers produce onions, potatoes and lettuce on over 3,500 acres of muckland. About 20 percent of the onion acreage in New York is located in Oswego County. Of the onions and lettuce produced, nearly 99% is exported from the county, thus leading to spin-off employment in the packing and shipping industries.

A large portion of muck lands are in the Towns of Oswego, Scriba, Volney, Schroepfel, Palermo and Granby (Map 2). Muck lands are wetlands with rich, organic soils in thick deposits over a mineral substrate. The controversial use of these wetlands for muck farming means strict regulation at the sacrifice of potential economic gains to Oswego County farmers. Land used for muck farming only lasts 20 to 100 years. When it is exhausted, a muck field sometimes reverts to forested wetlands. This is an area of critical importance because Oswego County is 13%, or 80,505 acres, state regulated wetlands of 12.4 acres or more. The class of wetland describes the general significance of the eco-system. In Oswego County, 66% of the wetlands are Class I, or most significant in terms of wildlife, vegetation and hydrological value.

Soil is another element which has been inventoried in Oswego County (Map 3). It can be used as a factor when categorizing the suitability of an area of agriculture for protection. Soil inventory elements consist of: permeability, texture, profile, erosion potential, and drainage potential. Oswego County has large areas of prime, unique and important agricultural soils. The Towns of Schroepfel, Palermo and West Monroe have a large amount of unique soils. On the other hand, Oswego, Minetto and Hannibal have important soils.

Climate is another element to examine when discussing the suitability of land for agricultural use. Monthly precipitation is well distributed throughout the year, but ranges from an annual average of 34 inches in the southwestern portion of the county to about 55 inches in the northeastern Tug Hill areas. Frost dates in the Tug Hill are, on the average, from early October to late May, and result in a shortened growing season. This contrasts with areas along Lake Ontario which have a longer growing season. The cooling effect of the lake in the spring also prevents premature budding and freezing of

Oswego County Agriculture Characteristics 1978 - 1992

Table 2

	1978	1982	1987	1992
Total # of Farms	831	826	749	659
Total Acres	141,349	139,440	122,648	112,334
Ave. Acres per Farm	170	169	164	170
% Land in Agriculture	23.1%	22.8%	19.8%	18.4%
Farms with Sales of \$10,000 or more	339	323	299	281
Ave. Market Value of Land & Buildings	\$93,433	\$139,815	\$147,413	\$175,306
Ave. Value of Equipment	\$26,299	\$35,466	\$40,590	\$48,647
Ave. Value of Ag. Products	\$25,829	\$37,318	\$45,251	\$47,487

Source: US Census of Agriculture, 1982, 1987, & 1992.

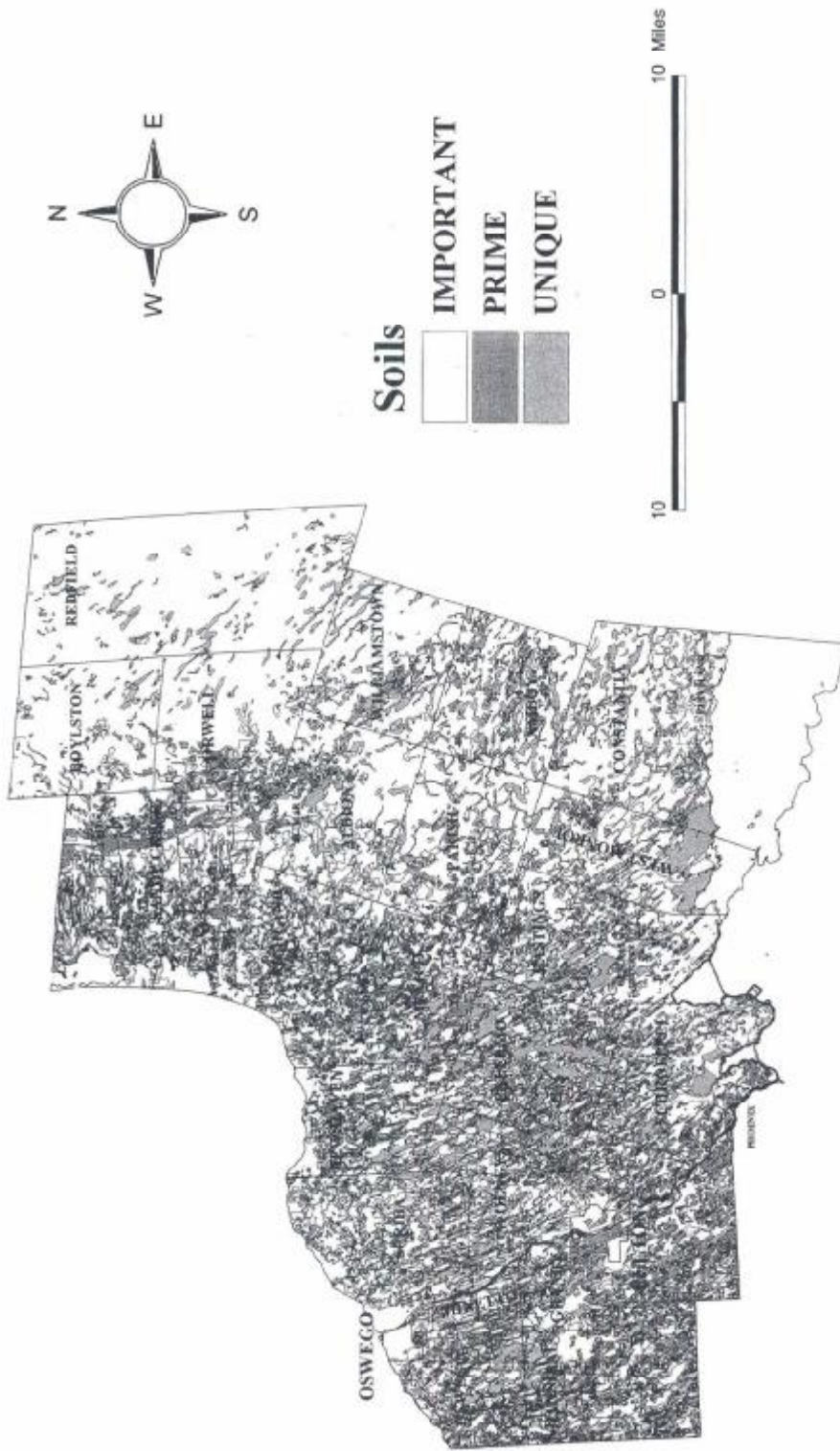
Wetlands in Oswego County

Map 2



Soil Types in Oswego County

Map



fruit trees. The geographical differences within Oswego County are **significant** to agriculture and the development of a protection plan. Farmland and the crops produced are influenced by soils, wetland concentration and climate.

IV. ISSUES AFFECTING VIABILITY

The problems affecting the viability of agriculture in Oswego County echo those experienced across the state. To find out the cause of the current farming crisis, information on the issues was gathered by several methods. In Oswego County, potentially valuable agricultural land is not being used in active production. As a farmer sells, land remains vacant or is converted for development because current operations cannot afford to expand and acquire more land. Yet, at the same time there is a rise in the value of agricultural land, buildings, equipment and products in Oswego County. Can it be concluded that there is an adequate economic return on agricultural land? What other factors make it difficult to maintain economically viable agriculture? Our query was, "What was occurring in Oswego County agriculture that statistics could not illustrate about farm viability?"

The input of interested and affected parties was gathered in several ways with meetings and surveys. One of the first methods used was the creation of the *Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Survey*. The survey was distributed to a sample of farmers within Oswego County. From the approximately 735 farms in Oswego County, 300 surveys were randomly mailed out and almost 150 returned (Appendix 1: Sample Survey).

The results of the survey were enlightening about the current scenario of Oswego County agriculture. According to survey results, the top two issues affecting farm viability were profitability and taxes. A big surprise was that many did not consider farmland as having greater value for development than the expectations as productive farmland. In the surveyed farmer's opinion, conversion selling for development was not why farms are going out of business. When farm production ends, land is currently more likely to lie vacant than be developed in Oswego County. The list of results below is in order of importance as having an affect on farm conversion (number of affirmative responses in brackets):

1. Profitability (130)
2. Taxes (127)
3. Regulations (66)
4. Willingness of the next generation to continue farming (63)
5. The land's perceived value for development is greater than the expectation as farmland (54)
6. The needs of the present landowner to receive a return to assist as a portion of retirement income (52)
7. Difficulty of finding the labor to complete the job (45)
8. Inadequate resources including land, buildings, equipment (28)
9. Willingness of the present generation to make long term investments (15)
10. Conflicts with neighboring land use (11)
11. Lack of a willingness to adapt to change or utilize new technology (10)

The results suggest that difficulty in making a farm operation profitable is more important than the temptation to sell farmland to a developer. There is generally a willingness in the community to change farming practices to become more profitable. However, taxes and regulations make it too hard to invest in the future of an operation for many in Oswego County agriculture.

An interesting issue illuminated by the survey results is the age of present agricultural landowners. Over fifty percent of respondents were 60 years of age or older. This demographic suggests the special needs of retirement age farmers must be addressed when looking at farm viability issues. The survey also illustrated the delineation of crops by type and distribution of farmland in the county by town. The results showed many of the responding farms were located in Richland, Granby and Mexico. Dairy and beef were prevalent types of farms among respondents. A protection policy must be adapted to fit the profile of our region's farming community.

Another method used to identify the issues affecting viability was discussion generated during the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board meetings. The topic of viability was addressed at an April 1997 meeting and the board identified these issues:

- * Parts of the land do not contribute to farm profitability so it is subdivided and sold for profit. The result is the loss of open space that is given over to development.
 - * Retirement age - what to do with the land when you retire besides subdivide? Many think this is the most cost effective option.
 - * Need to make agriculture profitable.
 - * Access to transportation networks. Agriculture needs to be close to transportation so products can quickly move to expanded markets.
 - * Competition in North America and international markets is a critical issue. How can Oswego County agriculture remain competitive with other less regulated or subsidized producers?
- Machinery and custom operators to run harvesters are too expensive for many of the modest sized farms to purchase or rent.
- * Land is fallow too long, requiring too much work to bring back into agriculture.
 - * Employment is an issue that includes the minimum wage of workers and regulations associated with labor practices. It is difficult to get people to work on farms without proper compensation, but some regulations place undue burden on farm budgets.

- * Aesthetic value of farmland is important due to the increasing importance of tourism in the region. Open land benefits can be combined with agricultural tourism opportunities.

Smaller focus groups were gathered in July 1997 to discuss their views on the current issues affecting farm viability. The forums delved into what types of farms should be protected and what are today's critical issues impacting farm viability. The focus groups involved were the Oswego County Beef Producers and the Farm Bureau.

The beef producer group perceived real estate taxes as a significant impediment to agriculture. They questioned how equitably the consumer's dollar is distributed between producer and retailer, the lack of crop subsidies, problems with food allocation, and the value of forestry on farmland. These participants were interested in how public officials and the general public are educated on farm issues. The beef producer group believes local officials and the public need to understand agriculture because they have the power to initiate or support important policy decisions.

The farm bureau group also discussed many issues relevant to farm protection:

Historically, Oswego County has been dependent on dairy and livestock.

Transportation networks have been constructed to meet the needs of dairy and livestock, leaving out other agriculture producers.

- * The cost of farm improvements and maintenance to farms are high. Those who retire or are trying to rent the farm to others find technological improvements costly.
- * To remain dynamic producers, it is necessary to research, invest, and encourage new types of farming in Oswego County.
- * One challenge is that profit from farming comes over generations; it takes time to build up a farm business.
- * A large amount of land is allocated to dairy and wood lots in our county. Some perceive too much dependence on one crop as fatal for agriculture in Oswego County making it vulnerable to market fluctuations.
- * Investment is costly yet necessary to survive. It is necessary to find public and private money to invest in the production and processing of agricultural products.
- * The changing nature of the community is a very important part of future farm viability. Oswego County has to evolve with and adapt to change.

At the end of February 1998, the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board again met to discuss the issues that needed to be addressed to encourage farm retention. The overriding theme was the urgency of short-term strategies to help the farmer now facing retirement or selling the family farm. This topic is critical because Oswego County has a relatively small number of farms when compared to other counties and any losses have a significant impact. Also, Oswego County has an aging population of farm owners facing retirement. The farm protection board believes this target group needs assistance right now in terms of estate planning, financial planning, and other options to prevent the sale of land for development. New methods need to be found to allow farmers to retire without sacrificing agricultural land to development, conversion or abandonment.

Two public meetings were held in the Spring of 1998. The first was targeted at the farm community and organized in the form of an open discussion. The farm community was asked to express their views on the issues affecting their operations. A panel of agency members, representing the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Oswego County Planning, USDA Field Office, and a long-time Oswego County farmer presented their role in the plan. Jerry Fones, lifetime farmer in Oswego County, narrated the changes in agriculture over the past fifty years (Appendix 2). Next, the floor was opened up to discussion by the public. Numerous ideas were brought up for inclusion in the plan and all were recorded for later analysis. Some of the key remarks and comments by the farm community were:

Concept of preserving the farm vs. enhancing production.

- * Farmers feel disappointed with the current prices of their goods.
- * Farmers want a profit oriented opportunity, not more grants or loans.
- * Are there any marketing tools for products and farms that could be helpful?
- * Concern about the repercussions of land being labeled a "wetland" and its effect on land used in farm production.

Confusion about the role of a farmland protection board, the purpose of the grant and making sure communication networks remain open after plan is complete.

Tax burden placed on farms is high in relation to the demand farmers make on services.

Education and marketing is necessary to make the public aware of farm benefits and current issues affecting farm viability.

Who does the farmer contact about progress on the plan? Where can they go to get assistance?

This public meeting emphasized the many critical issues that need to be addressed in the protection plan. The topic of implementation of future plans and how government can keep in touch with the agricultural community were discussed.

A second public meeting was held in May 1998. It was targeted at local planning officials to discuss how agriculture was dealt with at the local level. The meeting consisted of a brief presentation of the plan's history and progress, with attendees breaking into smaller groups for discussion. It turned out to be a very productive meeting with input from each and every participant. The issues uncovered by this group were similar to the April meeting, but new issues or a slightly different slant on ones raised earlier were also expressed.

Conflicts with snowmobiles and the problem with liability and vandalism drew comments from many. Landowners are angered by snowmobiles destroying their fields by trespassing. Farmers see a lack of education on farming in the schools. An emphasis needs to be made on more education at County fairs.

The cost of farming is also problematic to many landowners. Many complained about unfair and unregulated competition from other countries. Labor issues were another point of concern. The expense of hiring and difficulty in finding farm laborers was mentioned. Also, all the groups cited taxes as a major problem. A large share of their profit goes to taxes to support services farms do not demand. Also, there was concern about how tax credits benefit farmers. Currently, tax exemptions often do not benefit farmers who are trying to keep the farm in the family. Intergenerational transfer of farms consists of assets, but usually not property. Farmers who rent or are retired or work part-time are effectively excluded from tax benefits.

From the public input session and surveys, common themes can be found. A number one problem is high property taxes even with agricultural assessments. This drains money that could be used for much needed improvements on the farm. There need to be tax assessments that reflect the value of land and the demand for public services. Other important issues are:

- * Cost of environmental regulations are burdensome with very little governmental financial help.
- * Lack of generational continuance in agriculture. As farmers retire, it is less likely the children will take over.

Retirement and the aging demographic profile of farmers. When farmers reach retirement age, they sell to developers, if possible, for profit. This is not always

the most beneficial alternative for finding a retirement income. The average age of the farm owner is on the rise, making retirement a critical issue.

- * Conflict between muck farming methods and environmental laws are problematic. Farmers involved in muck farming find it very difficult to expand into new wetland fields.
- * Competition from out-of-state and international producers. Farmers find the regulations placed on New York State producers as limiting their ability to compete with other markets. New York places importance on environmental quality over low price, hence allowing other states and countries to easily find a market in New York State for cheaper products.
- * Reliance on dairy and beef farming are a major issue in Oswego County. Oswego County needs to focus on diversifying and expanding the profitable fruit and vegetable crops. This region has geographic advantages that could be used for a flourishing fruit industry. Agriculture needs to focus on diversification into areas of higher profit potential.
- * Lack of predicted appreciation of agricultural land is problematic. In Oswego County, land is worth less than in many parts of the state. Currently, land offered for sale is not bought due to little demand in Oswego County.
- * Price of the product for the farmer versus the cost to the consumer is a point of contention. The price given to farmers has not changed significantly over the past decade while the consumer is paying more. Farmers want a larger share of the profits.
- * The supply of labor to work on the farm. Many say it is difficult to find good, hard-working employees at a reasonable wage and it is expensive to have many laborers. Health and workers compensation insurance add to the cost of hiring adequate help for the farm. The prevalence of "part-time farmers." Many work other jobs to make ends meet.

This list of issues was compiled from responses to our public meetings, surveys, and evaluations. In the next section, how lands to be protected should be identified is outlined.

V. LANDS TO BE PROTECTED

Agriculture has a multi-million dollar impact on Oswego County's economy. Protection of farmland is critical to the economic well being of the region. At the same time, agricultural land fills the purpose of a public good as an environmental benefactor. It provides flood absorption, air cleansing, water filtration, and open space protection.

The methodology used to choose criteria for protection was to examine specific factors related to agriculture. The variables discussed were the type of farm operation, geographic differences, impacts on watersheds and surficial aquifers, concentration of existing farms, communities with 5 or fewer farms which may be in danger of losing agriculture altogether, willingness to be included in protection efforts, and open space contributions. Using these variables, along with the eligibility requirements for inclusion in an agricultural district, lands to be protected can be identified. Characteristics to be examined in determining agricultural district eligibility are:

- * be prime, unique or productive soil
- * be part of a pending offer from state, local or tribal protection program
- * privately owned
- * large enough to sustain agricultural production
- * be accessible to markets of products with infrastructure and services
- * have surrounding parcels of land to support long term agricultural production

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets defines criteria for funding of agricultural protection projects. Priority is given to those that will preserve viable agricultural land located in areas facing significant development pressure, and which serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics. Viable agricultural land is "highly suitable for agricultural production and which will continue to be economically feasible for such use if real property taxes, farm use restrictions and speculative activities are limited to levels approximating those in commercial agricultural areas not influenced by the proximity of non-agricultural development." Consideration is also given to:

- * Number of acres to be preserved
- * Quality of soils
- * Number of acres available for farm production
- * Proximity of property to other farms
- * Level of farm management demonstrated
- * Likelihood of property's succession with a change in ownership

Public Lands and Open Space

Open space contributions are important criteria in selecting farmland to protect. Agricultural land next to environmental and historic resources can partner with other advocacy groups to add strength to a farmland protection plan. As being part of the open space plans, a mutually reinforced relationship could grow between protected lands and agricultural land. This concept is reinforced by the Oswego County Comprehensive Plan. There is a large amount of public land in Oswego County (Map 4) along with open space amenities.

Tug Hill Region

The Tug Hill Region includes the Salmon River drainage basin, which is a moderate size drainage system made up of sloped, walled valleys and shallow, fast moving streams. The region is very popular for recreation activities. On the plateau, there are poor soils, few roads, limited natural resources and severe winter snow. Tug Hill is largely forested, making agricultural production difficult. This area has forestry and recreation as major economic activities. It is dominated by forest land that includes twelve state forests, two state wildlife management areas, and extensive land holdings by Niagara Mohawk around the Salmon River.

Lake Ontario Plain

The Lake Ontario Plain includes Lake Ontario and Oneida Lake, along with the Oneida and Oswego Rivers. Lake Ontario is important as water supply for Oswego and surrounding counties, and Oneida Lake is important for recreational activities. The river system is key to both recreation and transportation. The Lake Ontario shoreline has a number of recreational facilities that include state and local parks, private and public marinas, camp grounds, and wildlife reserves. Other features deserving note are the Eastern Lake Ontario Sand Dune complex and a multitude of Class I wetlands.

Oswego River

The Oswego River Valley is 24 miles long with soil comprised of silt and clay. This results in poor drainage and permeability. The flood plain is narrow due to its steep banks and river width. There is important vegetation and wildlife along the banks of the Oswego River. It is important to note that this is a heavily populated area of the county.

Oneida Lake Outlet and River

The Oneida River is 18 miles long and prone to seasonal flooding. Large wetland complexes exist along the river. Oneida Lake is 20.9 miles long and between 2.8 and 5.5 miles wide with a maximum depth of 35 feet. Strip development has contributed to the loss of many farms along NYS Route 49.

In all of these geographic areas, archeological resources can be found. Due to the sensitive nature of the material, they cannot be pinpointed in this type of a planning process. However, archaeological areas in Oswego County are known to be concentrated along the Oswego River, Oneida Lake, Salmon River and Lake Ontario. Agricultural protection can help to preserve these resources.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF FARMLAND

After examining the resources in Oswego County, criteria have been defined to select farmland targeted for protection. It is difficult to distinguish between one operation or another for protection. To be reasonable and fair, these criteria are aimed at selecting agricultural land that can be productive into the twenty-first century and beyond.

In order to assist in the selection process, a prioritized list of criteria has been put together. Many of the criteria are mutually reinforcing to make a viable farm operation. Criteria that apply will vary for each farm. The criteria are divided into three groups: essential, important and preferred protection criteria.

Essential to Selection

- * Willingness of farmer to participate and complete the plan.
- * Economic viability of operation and long-term investment necessary to remain productive.
Agricultural soils recognized as important, prime, unique or Class I-V (NYS), or other natural resource protection, including water quality, groundwater recharge and wildlife habitat.

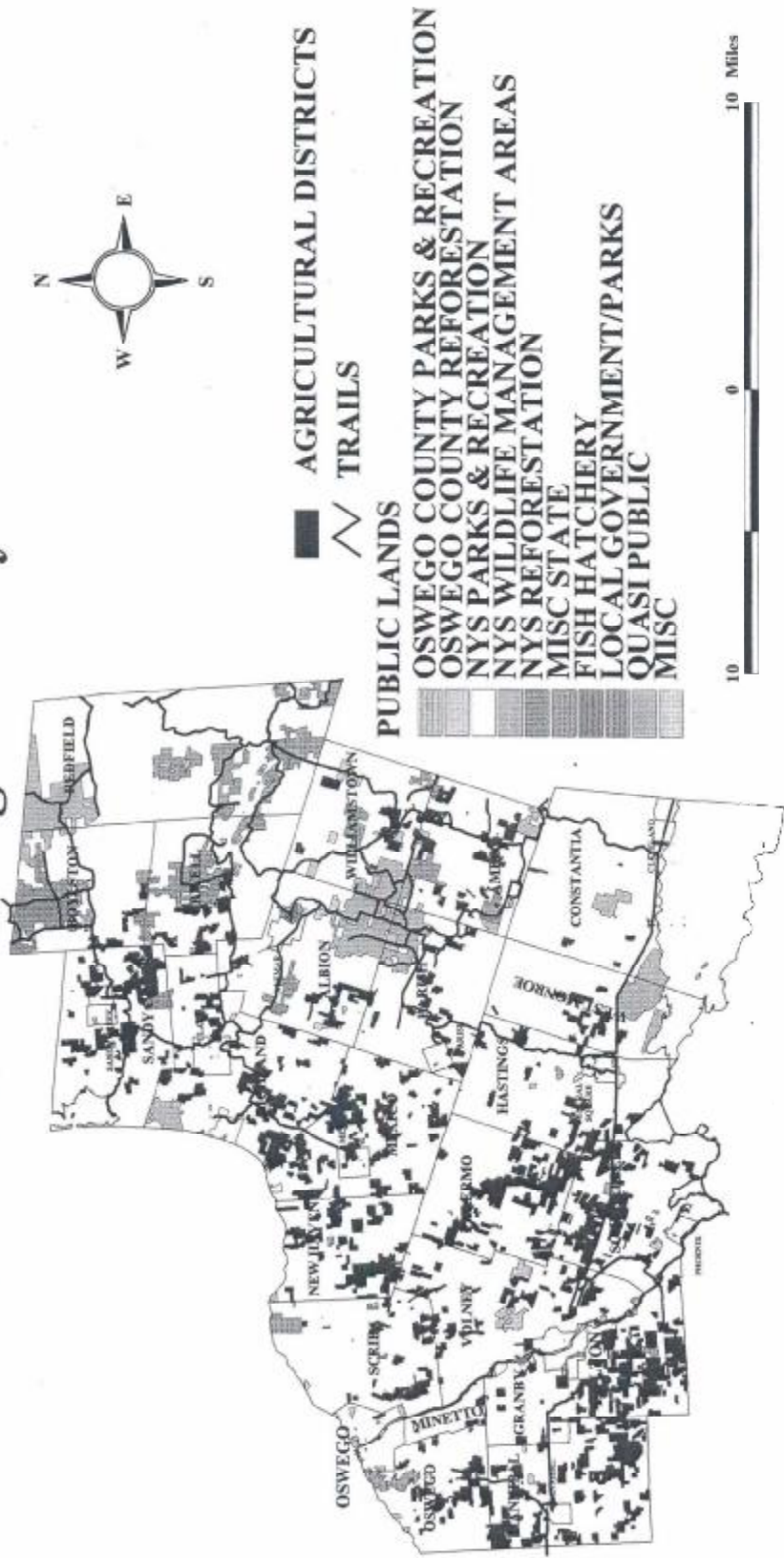
Important to Selection

- * Recreation and scenic qualities.
- * Concentration of agricultural lands.
- * Local support of plan and farming.
- * One of five or fewer farms surviving in a town where farming is becoming extinct.
- * Willingness to diversify into new products, crops and technology.

Preferred Criteria

- * Conversion pressure.
- * Proximity to other protected open space.
- * Reuse of an abandoned farm.

Public Lands, Trails, & Agricultural Districts in Oswego County



With these criteria for targeting farms to be protected, a plan with appropriate protection options can be developed. In the next section, the plan examines the experience of other counties which have developed farm plans and their chosen options.

VI. PROTECTION OPTIONS

In the face of development pressure, numerous New York State counties are seeing a loss of productive farmland and increasingly scarce open space. The results can be measured in environmental, social and economic terms. It is hoped that the negative impacts on farmland can be mitigated with the development of an Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan to preserve agriculture for future generations. Existing agricultural protection plans were studied to understand the methods of protection used by other counties. This section will look, in detail, at the plans of Cayuga, Erie, Orange, Washington and Suffolk Counties. From these and other sources a list of possible options for Oswego County was developed.

Cayuga County

In 1994, the Cayuga County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) was formed to protect farmland and agriculture in the county. The resulting plan was funded by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Cayuga County Legislature.

While there are circumstances unique to Cayuga County farms, many of the critical issues are common all over the state. For example, non-farm residential development demands services that increase the tax burden on agricultural landowners for services they do not demand. Sometimes, new residents dwelling next to working farms will complain about the nuisance of common place agricultural practices, like manure spreading and early morning or late night harvesting. These conflicts are the result of current urban sprawl to rural areas in Cayuga County. Development is attracted to the county's prime locations adjacent to waterbodies such as the Finger Lakes. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan was developed to control unmanaged growth with design criteria to protect Cayuga County's farmland. The resulting preservation activities are as follows:

- * Update land use inventories
- * Identify the nature of farming activity
- * Examine residential patterns
- * Review new policy
- * Education and training programs for the agriculture community, residents, and local officials.

These actions were designed to prevent development pressure on agricultural activity in Cayuga County by analyzing current assets of the county and patterns of development/conversion. From this data, new policy and education programs are developed.

After study of agriculture in Cayuga County, the results illustrated a decrease in the number of farms between 1982 and 1992. In addition, there was a decline in the

number of persons residing on farms in Cayuga County. However, the economics of agriculture was still lucrative for the few large farms remaining and had a significant impact on the local economy. This indicates a loss of agricultural land but not a loss of profitability. The resulting statistics showed that farms made up 57% of the land use in the county and brought in \$94 million annually.

The goal was to have farm protection policy that prevented conversion rather than reacted to lost land. It was concluded that the county should address issues of potential development pressure and future agricultural protection. Lands identified to be protected were part of currently viable farming operations, not those that might be viable for farming in the future. Negative influences, design policies and procedures were addressed to fit protection needs for possible future development. Land use patterns and trends were responded to by new policies for non-farm development impacts.

The new recommended policy elements for Cayuga County were comprehensive in scope. The new elements used design and land use regulation as a method to control growth and encourage the planning of sensitive residential and commercial development by the method of discouraging public investment in infrastructure servicing nonagricultural uses in farmland areas. They also helped farmers prepare "Whole Farm Plans" and develop new farming mechanisms to offset costs incurred by farmers in responding to new regulatory measures. Cayuga County monitored and informed responsible agencies concerning the location and rate of property splits resulting in new lot formation in agricultural districts. It also sought to keep urban activity out of rural areas by encouraging development in the Central Business District. To encourage a community's consensus and help with implementation, the plan identifies relationships between non-farm constituencies who share agriculture's agenda.

In Cayuga County, land use information and design concerns were implemented into policy that formed a farmland protection plan fitting their unique needs.

Washington County

Washington County realized that with 40% of their land involved in agriculture, it was a significant asset worth protecting. The result was the development of a well designed farm protection plan in 1995. The efforts of Washington County were based on research and analysis with policy formed from the collected information. Some of the first efforts included a survey of farmers and agricultural representatives, research and interpretation of issues and strategies, public focus meetings, intensive efforts of a working committee, and the selection and implementation of a pilot project.

The goal of the Washington County plan was to provide a "road map" so the county could retain the farmland base, to not only maintain the viability of agriculture, but also promote recognition and awareness of agriculture's importance by enhancing support networks with team strategies, and protecting the land base and natural

resources supporting agriculture. A result of this strategy was a group effort to build consensus among various parties. Another positive aspect of Washington's farmland protection plan is that the "road map" contained information on important soils, wildlife habitat, water recharge areas, scenic views, and open space to consider when deciding land to protect.

Agreed upon factors affecting the sustainability of agriculture in Washington County are:

- * Forecasted continuation of the decline in prices of agricultural products
- * Increase in the conflict over land use and interference with farms
- * Low public investment in agriculture in terms of money and appreciation
- * Fragmentation of the farm base
- * Difficulty of inter-generational transfer of farms
- * Agri-businesses serve suburban garden market rather than farmers needs
- * Low farmer morale

To address the factors affecting farm viability, the plan utilized numerous land use practices. These included clustering, PDR's, conservation easements, agricultural district law, right-to-farm law, and pre-approved development. Other implementation plans were to assemble funding for the development and establishment of agricultural businesses, establish networks of support for agriculture, increase educational and agricultural awareness efforts, assist in marketing farm sites, develop a marketing program to encourage producers, and encourage processors and agri-business to relocate to Washington County. Overall, the effort encouraged networking and partnerships in agriculture plans.

The agricultural preservation program focuses on the county's distinctive assets and characteristics. It was concluded that farming benefits the sustenance of the local economy, maintains environmental quality, preserves rural lifestyles, minimizes public costs, and provides fresh produce and other farm products. Elements of the Washington County plan included: a comprehensive list of agricultural services and businesses such as financial, general, government, and farm suppliers; a survey to learn views of interested and affected parties; well defined goals and strategies including implementation responsibilities and funding; and a detailed site assessment factor list. The steps to implementation were put into the county's plan.

Orange County

Orange County is located on the edge of the New York City metropolitan area and is still one of the State's most important agricultural areas. A major problem for agriculture, due to its geographic proximity to NYC, is land had become a farmer's major production cost. The county was greatly influenced by its geographic proximity to the city in terms of demand for agricultural products and for undeveloped land. In

juxtaposition with Orange County's valuable agriculture, it is one of the fastest growing counties in the state. Population growth caused conflict with agricultural land preservation.

Despite the encroaching sprawl, the county is a significant producer of agricultural products and diverse types of crops. Vegetable production is the number one crop in Orange County. There is also a thriving dairy, equine, fruits, and ornamental horticulture market. To protect agriculture, the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan was prepared in 1994. The plan expressed the need to take advantage of a rising population base, adjust to consumer demands, and adapt to new regulations on food safety. The goal was not to alienate the growing population, but rather turn the perceived liability into an asset to be used in the farmland plan.

Targeted themes in Orange County's plan to protect agriculture were land use regulations, public education and profitability. Planning efforts included planned development support, public policy, education and communication strategies. A survey was developed to gather information on the farm industry and the participant's views on current issues affecting the viability of agriculture. Land use law was another protection technique used by Orange County. These were similar practices to those used in other counties such as conservation easements, PDR, property tax relief, purchase or donation of land, right-to-farm laws, agricultural zoning, subdivision regulations, and land trusts. Another effort was the GIS mapping of agricultural districts with a natural resource inventory to locate areas for beginning protection efforts.

The Orange County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan utilized the connection between agricultural land and community character to validate preservation efforts.

Suffolk County

Suffolk County has experienced a rapid decline in farmland acreage in recent years. The goal of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan (1996) was to preserve agriculture as an important economic sector and natural resource. The Suffolk County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan stated that it was necessary to ensure that public policy was protecting, promoting and sustaining agriculture. The cultural continuity of farms and farm families is important to the metropolitan area. The goal was to save 20,000 acres of productive farmland in Suffolk County by the means of PDR's. This action, however, was an expensive undertaking and more land would be lost before enough money was raised. Suffolk County perceived local agriculture as having an important economic impact with the largest market value of products in New York State.

In Suffolk County, it was agreed agriculture must be preserved as an important industry. Agricultural preservation involves the adoption of "smart" public policy to

protect, encourage, promote and sustain agriculture for future generations. Farmland must be preserved as a natural resource, linked to the historic development of Long Island, and included in an economic analysis as part of the comprehensive plan. These efforts were needed because of land use conflicts, farmers paying for services they did not use, and the loss of scenic vistas, open space and tourism. Farm owners agreed the running of their operation was impeded by:

- * Zoning and subdivision regulations
- Building permit application guidelines
- * Health department regulations
- * New York State legislation on pesticides and other farm chemicals
- * Agricultural irrigation wells demanded of farm owners
- * Animal nuisance complaints by new neighbors

The Suffolk County protection plan included a study of the issues with an updated inventory and analysis of Suffolk County assets. After the inventory step was completed, the economic impact of agriculture in the county was examined. The result was many found land to be more economically valuable in real estate development, due to the county's proximity to NYC, than agricultural uses. The consequences of using agricultural land for residential and business development was a loss of market value in crops, loss of jobs, an increase in land use conflicts, and loss of open space. The plan's committee questioned if the monetary benefits of development outweighed the tangible and intangible value of farmland.

Farmland to be protected in Suffolk County was selected by specially chosen criteria. The rating system ranked the value of land by soil suitability, present land use, continuity of farmland, price or value of land, extent of development pressure in a location, land in or near an agricultural district and location relative to prime soils. After land was selected to be protected by the defined criteria, preservation methods were selected. The most effective preservation method involved the county buying development rights from the owner to stop conversion. Activities included agricultural districts, conservation easements, agricultural tax assessments, marketing, estate planning and education.

Erie County

Erie County adopted an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan in 1993. Agriculture has a significant impact at \$70.9 million annually in the county. The resulting plan is interesting as there are differing levels of options, from the simple, effective and low cost to the highly sophisticated and expensive protection method. The Erie County protection plan is flexible allowing for short and long term actions.

Low cost ideas included changes in behavior with self-education, public education programs, policy development, limited agricultural services, and donated products and

services. Farmers were educated about their options so they can make a choice about the future of their farm. Education can help them develop new choices that they did not realize existed. High priced strategies for agricultural protection include changes to municipal land use plans, technology-improvement grants or loans, and purchase of interest in land programs.

The general strategy of Erie County's Farmland Protection Program addressed monitoring, practicality, economics, and acceptability of the plan. Implementation includes completing immediate efforts, identifying high priority areas, and developing a model approach at the farm level. These solutions were arrived at by taking a look at the farming community including demographics of farmers. The Erie County Farm Protection Plan investigated the dynamics of agriculture in the county and tailored the policy to fit their needs.

The reasons for preservation of farmland in Erie County were numerous:

- * Preserve the local economic base
- * Maintain speciality crops
- * Conserve energy
- * Promote self-sufficiency
- * Maintain open space
- * Retain natural resources and natural processes
- * Redirect urban sprawl
- * Control public costs
- * Preserve farm and rural lifestyles
- * Maintain regional, state and national agricultural reserves

The methods used to preserve agriculture were diverse in Erie County. The Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board wanted to enhance agriculture as not just a piece of history, but a profitable enterprise not stifled by regulations and development. Concepts and categories recognized by the protection plan to preserve farmland were:

- * Policy-resolutions, laws, and ordinances
- * Land conservation and stewardship
- * Education and public relations
- * Land use planning and implementation
- * Taxation and compensation
- * Economic development of agriculture
- * Business, retirement and estate planning

Potential Protection Options

With evaluation of these plans, it became apparent that the issues that affected the viability of agriculture were similar. Low commodity prices and the high cost of

production make it difficult for the family farm to stay in business. The rise in property taxes and land values, in conjunction with more stringent regulations, aggravate the poor financial straits of agriculture. The current agricultural economy has forced the agricultural community to find new ways to make a profit. Many believe this to be caused by a lack of appreciation by policy makers and the general public. The result of the issues affecting farms is a decline in the farm community and agricultural lands.

An important element to any protection plan is to identify and study the assets and resources of the region. One step should be to update agricultural land use data in order to identify the nature of farming activity. Once this is done, a detailed farmland protection plan can be included as part of a town's comprehensive plan or zoning law.

There are numerous creative options to protect farmland from conversion or disuse. Many of the ideas used in other protection plans need further explanation. From this list are possible options to be used in Oswego County's farm plan (Appendix 3).

Conservation easements are a legally binding recorded interest in property giving a qualified public or private agency the right to prohibit any practice, use, subdivision or development that is contrary to conservation purposes. Terms are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. Landowners may be permitted to deduct the fair market value of donated easements for income tax purposes. An easement should also reduce local property taxes if the assessor recognizes that the limitation on future uses affects the taxable value of the property.

The purchase of development rights (PDR) is when the owner is paid for development rights that are lost. A government agency buys "development rights" or an easement that permits it to prohibit practices, uses and development of land in violation of the document. The government agency cannot develop the land and gives the landowner appropriate compensation. The key is a landowner retains other rights of ownership, but cannot subdivide or develop the farmland. This program preserves farmland for permanent agricultural use while keeping the parcel on the tax rolls and contributing to the tax base. PDR's offer an opportunity for a retiring farmer to realize the development value of the property while passing on or selling the farm operation. This can encourage agriculture to remain in the community.

Transfer of development rights (TDR) is when the owner sells the right to develop their land to another landowner who may then use the right to build additional structures. This method restricts future development of the property. The land to be protected from development or the "sending property" transfers its development rights to a "receiving property" thereby

increasing the development density legally permitted on the receiving property. TDR's are most effective in areas where development rights are in demand and developers will pay, and must be addressed in the local zoning ordinance.

Land trusts are non-profit tax exempt organizations legally authorized to own land or legally accept conservation easements for resource protection purposes. A land trust secures an economic return for the original owner and protects special environmental conditions.

Right-to-farm laws give local support and protection to farming practices when the ability to conduct farming businesses is threatened. The right-to-farm law is local or state legislation designed to protect a farmer conducting normally accepted agricultural practices. Normal operating activities are defined as plowing, spraying, manure application, or harvesting. This does not protect the negligent. In some cases, peer review is established to decrease neighborhood conflict. At the local level, complementary actions can include implementing consistent zoning policy, preventing restrictive zone changes on agricultural land and permitting zone changes that allow diversification of income sources on the farm.

The New York State Agricultural district law gives specific benefits to farm owners by enabling the formation of a legally recognized geographic area dedicated to protecting and promoting farmland. The district is reviewed and certified every eight years. It provides the farmer with some security that farming will continue in the area covered by the district. The agricultural district law allows property earning at least \$10,000 income from agricultural operations to apply to the town assessor for an agricultural exemption. Agricultural land tax exemptions are limited to land primarily used for agricultural production and exemption applies to special assessments and other fees imposed within improvement projects.

Zoning is another method used to protect farmland. Pre-approval of certain types of development is one way to encourage development in specified places and maintain existing farmland. Agricultural zoning is a legally binding designation of land uses, including type, amount, and location of development. It restricts uses to agriculture and related uses with a required large minimum lot size. Performance zoning allows residential development in an area when land accumulates enough "points" by virtue of available services, such as water, sewer or lights.

A bargain sale is when an owner will sell land at less than fair market value to government, non-profit, or private organization. The difference between the fair market value and agricultural value is considered a gift. In return, the seller receives tax breaks.

Tax assessment for agricultural uses was created to reduce tax burdens. The maximum tax rate or ceiling for agricultural land is set for an acre on the basis of soil type and its productive value. Presently, tax relief is given to farmers for new construction and additions. New farm buildings are tax exempt for a period of ten years, after which they are assessed and taxed at full market value. To be effective, a more intensive tax relief program is needed to save farmland.

Marketing has importance in many of the farm protection plans at the local and regional levels. Communities need to make sure residents know local farm products exist. The benefits of a public relations campaign can be increased sales, cheaper products, knowledge of the point-of-origin, and better quality. Local products could be used as part of a tourism campaign including point-of-origin labeling, farmers markets, agri-tourism and community supported agriculture.

Education was often used in other protection plans. Programs in schools can encourage an interest in agriculture at a young age and a continuing appreciation as adults. Today's farmer must be knowledgeable about the science of agriculture as well as schooled in the business aspects of running a farm. Organizations that offer education programs are BOCES, Future Farmers of America (FFA), and 4-H. Another idea is a mentor program that could match experienced farmers with a youngster. Willing farmers can pass on agricultural knowledge to the students who in return would provide extra labor. Public education is also important because the number of non-farmers far outnumber the number of farmers in a county. If a community does not appreciate agricultural resources and is not aware of the problems facing farmers, it is nearly impossible to gain the public support necessary to protect agriculture.

When examining possible protection options for Oswego County, it is important that the plan look at the preservation, conservation, and economics of farmland. Conservation can be accomplished by restricting development or using best management practices to protect farmland. Management needs to be addressed to increase farm profitability. This could include direct marketing, a clearing house/network of resources, new processing options, education and improvements in agriculture such as research and development to enhance productivity. In the next section, preferred protection options for Oswego County will be discussed.

VII. PREFERRED PROTECTION OPTIONS

In this section of the Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, chosen protection options are addressed. The following options were decided upon by analyzing the issues in Oswego County that make farming difficult and examining options used elsewhere in farm protection. After outlining criteria for identifying farms to be protected in Section III, this section describes protection initiatives fitting the needs of Oswego County. Options in this section include preservation, conservation, management, improvement, and land use regulation.

The list of potential protection options the plan recommends can and should be used in combination fitting the individual needs of each farm. Definitions below are not listed in any order of significance, but are elements that can be combined in many different ways to tailor an individualized, successful protection plan.

Land pooling to create recreation and tourism links

What: Connection of farmland to open space plans and recreation trails.

Who: County or state agencies such as Soil and Water Conservation District, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) and NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP).

Why: As a method to generate revenue, easements might be sold for the right to use land by clubs, schools, scouts, etc. Land is not developed and an economic return is still received by the owner. The public can benefit from continuous and unbroken trails and open lands. Some of the special features of farm land are its scenic views, waterways and historic sites.

State funded improvements

What: Request the State to establish low interest loans and revolving funds to provide low interest financing for farmers who make improvements to keep up with regulatory changes.

Who: State agencies, Oswego County Industrial Development Agency (IDA), county government.

Why: Farms are the protectors of the land yet are not provided with adequate funding to make technology changes that benefit the public. Beneficial financing is needed to make improvements more cost effective for the farmer.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

What: A voluntary Federal program that helps landowners restore and protect wetlands on private property with several choices to meet individual needs.

Who: United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA NRCS), U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), NYS DEC.

Why: The program provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal agricultural land. Muck farmers could utilize the banking of wetlands and reversion of old wetlands back to functional wetlands as part of an overall strategy to allow continuation of muck farming. The Federal program offers three options: permanent easements, 30 year easement and restoration cost-share agreement. A landowner continues to control access to the land. It may be used for hunting, fishing and other compatible recreational activities. Other activities can be requested such as hay cutting, grazing livestock or harvesting timber. In accordance with the Oswego County Comprehensive Plan, continue efforts to strike a balance between wetland and environmental protection and rural economic needs which will allow the continuation of a viable muck farming industry in the county.

Clean Air/Clean Water Bond Act and Environmental Protection Fund

What: Funding is available for open space protection and the control of agricultural non-point source pollution.

Who: NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets with implementation possibly by Soil and Water Conservation District.

Why: Through watershed based and individual farm assessment, use farmland as a way to improve water quality by funding best management practices to protect the environment.

Tourism development

What: Promote agritourism by maintaining active agriculture along tourism routes.

Who: Seaway Trail, Inc., Cornell Cooperative Extension, local governments, County Promotion and Tourism, Chambers of Commerce.

Why: By utilizing the charming qualities of bed and breakfasts, fruit and vegetable stands, and small shops, additional on-farm income can be generated. New York State is tapping into tourism attractions as a method of revitalization by funding economic development strategies. The Seaway Trail is using an agritourism theme so we should coordinate with trail restaurants to use and market local agricultural products. Give support to businesses which incorporate local agricultural products in their operations. Promoting agritourism is a strategy of the Oswego County Comprehensive Plan.

Farmlink/Farm match-up programs

What: Bring together potential young buyers with retiring farmers to purchase the business.

Who: County Board of Realtors, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau.

Why: Due to the trouble with finding a buyer and the reluctance of the next generation to continue farming, this process can potentially assist in the continuation of farming into the next generation. The individual match-making can lead to flexible land contracts meeting the needs of a cash strapped buyer and retirement income of the seller. Buyers and sellers can be identified by a data base outlining amount of land for sale or rent and type of crops. This may start as a county-wide data base, in time evolving to statewide and then country-wide information.

Rural New York Grant Program

What: Program targeted at rural land conservation, land use projects, environmental advocacy projects and historic preservation.

Who: Local municipalities, preservation groups and environmental advocates.

Why: A program such as this can be used to bring extra money into a farm. For example, grant funding could assist with the cost of fixing up a historic barn, both retaining its use and preserving a significant part of State and county history. Rural areas have conflicts unique unto themselves, necessitating special funding to keep rural features.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

What: A shareholder system where the farmer receives money up front and the shareholder gets a supply of fresh vegetables at wholesale prices.

Who: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm Associations, town organizations and farm support agencies.

Why: This type of program provides the farmer with a sure income, cuts out the "middle-man," and the consumer knows where their food came from and its quality. Another outcome is the enhancement of pride and respect in a community's farming tradition. The consumer has a personal attachment to the food they buy and the people who produce the products. With reference to the Oswego County Comprehensive Plan, promote farmers' markets and community based agriculture which offers locally produced agricultural products. A possible incubator business for food processing could be undertaken in Oswego County to expand markets for agricultural products.

Extend Ag District Boundaries

What: Assure that buyers receive notification of being near a working farm or in proximity to an ag district.

Who: County government, Board of Realtors, Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Why: Give notice to potential purchasers if real estate is in an ag district or near agricultural land. Notification would educate new residents about farming and hopefully lead to fewer complaints about farm operations. Also, the new districts could support a farm match-up program and local land use plans.

Coordination of plans

What: Distribute information from the completed farm protection plan to other agencies and municipalities.

Who: County Planning, town and village government, Planning Federation, Tug Hill Commission, CNY Regional Planning Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA NRCS.

Why: Coordination and implementation of new plan is important to its effectiveness. All levels of government, from the State to the local level, must be involved. Partnerships of differing governmental levels will strengthen the progress of implementation of a completed plan. Try to incorporate into land use practices, at a local level, with the provision of assistance to towns and villages in implementing strategies of the agricultural protection plan.

Historic and scenic designation programs

What: Funding sources to encourage the preservation of the farmstead and the nation's agricultural history with possible scenic easements along designated scenic highways.

Who: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Seaway Trail, Inc., State-funded preservation programs, local historic districts and non-profit groups.

Why: This income source both protects the physical farm and increases a region's farm awareness. Tax credits are given for the rehabilitation of historic barns or enrollment in National Trust for Historic Preservation Barn Programs or Century Farm program. Give an incentive to reuse old and abandoned farms or maintain views along scenic byways.

Estate and financial planning

What: At each individual business, set financial goals, define a management style after examining the feasibility of certain options, and organize business affairs.

Who: Cornell Cooperative Extension, local banks and financial institutions, Small Business Development Center.

Why: One goal is to reduce the value of the farm estate so the next generation can afford to inherit the farm. Start paying life insurance at a young age, refinance land contracts to get better interest rates or acquire more land, and make informed investment decisions. Also, set financial goals and define a management style for your operation.

Best Management Practices

What: Sound, scientific agricultural and environmental management practices on the farm.

Who: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA NRCS.

Why: In New York City water supply watershed areas, BMPs were used as an alternative to the construction of an expensive water filtration plant. The dual goal was one of protecting water supply from pollutants, and encouraging economic viability with investment in farms. With organized planning teams made up of scientific and policy partners, cooperating farmers received small stipends and 100% financial support for implementing recommended changes. The program targeted prevention rather than remediation of mistakes and environmental problems.

EQIP

What: Federal funds for specific water projects by targeting technical, financial and educational assistance to designated priority areas.

Who: USDA NRCS, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District.

Why: In Oswego County, Lake Ontario is a priority protection area. The watershed approach could be used on Sandy Pond, Lake Neatahwanta, the Oswego River and Salmon River.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

What: The Federal government funds the development of buffers on farmland. Monetary benefits differ depending on the type and amount of time a buffer is used.

Who: USDA NRCS.

Why: Buffers are already used in farm practices, and can give the added benefits of water filtration, air quality enhancement, serving as wind barriers, combatting erosion, providing wildlife habitat and adding to scenic beauty. There are different types of buffers available that can fit individual needs. These include the continuous sign-up program for normally cropped and planted farmland or scheduled sign up date every 10 years.

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Agricultural education in the school

What: Through local and State programs, give children an experience and appreciation of agriculture at a young age.

Who: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA NRCS, school districts, BOCES, 4-H.

Why: There are many benefits to using education as a tool for agricultural preservation. Cayuga County's experience with schools and agriculture included agriculture professionals speaking of their experience in the field. Students can learn about the need for a secondary education in farm business and do school year internships. Open farms to children for tours to show the daily life in agriculture or host city children to live in the country for a summer experience. Give children an appreciation and understanding of agriculture with farm-city projects and community or urban gardens. School programs can keep the farm way of life from disappearing by giving kids a fun experience and instilling pride in agriculture from a young age. A mentor program can match experienced farmers with a youngster so willing farmers can pass on agricultural knowledge to the students who in return provide extra labor. Also, educate at all levels as it relates to the available labor pool.

Buy local campaign

What: Promotion of regional farm products, farmers markets and community based agriculture.

Who: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Chambers of Commerce, farm organizations.

Why: Direct purchase of goods can decrease prices and increase customer satisfaction, while consumers receives better quality and know where their food comes from. Marketing assistance can be given to farmers with ideas such as advertising at places like the Elks Lodge or VFW or approaching grocery stores in the area about selling local farm products. This is all important to the consumer who wants to know the origin of their food. Point-of-sales information should be used in both retail and restaurants.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)/Conservation easement

What: Landowner can sell the right to develop their land, receiving cash for the value of development rights and tax reductions, while still using the land. An easement is an agreement between government and landowner to restrict the use of land.

Who: County government, Land Trusts, town and city agencies, non-profit groups, State and Federal government, Cornell Cooperative Extension, USDA NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation District.

Why: This method of protection gives funding to the farmer and allows continual use of the land with no change in ownership. Acreage can be acquired to increase open space for possible use as hunting, fishing and recreation trails. The county or other agencies need funds to purchase the rights from farmers. An easement still leaves the land on the tax rolls, but can decrease property taxes. It also can be used as a tax deductible, charitable gift.

Economic incentive programs

What: Use business retention or growth incentives for agriculture.

Who: Oswego County IDA, Empire State Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Why: Extension of traditional economic development incentive programs to agriculture and their support industries could be beneficial. It is logical to support agriculture with tax incentives and low interest loans for expansion because agriculture has a significant economic impact on the county.

Ag promotion specialist

What: Establish a staff person to promote agricultural economic development.

Who: County government, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Bureaus, USDA NRCS, Operation Oswego County, CNY Regional Planning and Development Board.

Why: Someone educated and informed on the issues can greatly help to enhance the county's agriculture base. The person can act as a clearing house for information acting as a source the agricultural community can use to answer questions. Possibly establish a regional specialist who could be shared among a few counties as a circuit rider.

Implementation subcommittee of AFPB

What: Committee with the power to see the recommendations of the plan implemented.

Who: AFPB members.

Why: Follow through with recommendations and make sure this is not just another plan that sits on a shelf after completion.

Local land use planning

What: Plan where and how development can occur in a community and not conflict with agricultural practices.

Who: County Planning Board, local towns and villages, Tug Hill Commission, CNY Regional Planning and Development Board.

Why: Prevent development which will lead to loss of agricultural land before it's too late. In local comprehensive/master plans and zoning/land use laws, define where buildings can be encouraged and restricted, discourage infrastructure construction in predominately agricultural areas and include agricultural notes on all zoning maps. For agricultural land, develop design requirements to keep the character of the area. Include in local land use ordinances design standards for minimum road frontage, minimum lot size, front yard, and maximum lot coverage (Table 4).

Right-to-farm laws

What: Local or state legislation designed to protect a farmer conducting normally accepted agricultural practices.

Who: Local government, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Bureau.

Why: These laws give local support and protection to farming practices when their ability to conduct normal agricultural activity is threatened. This law does not protect the negligent, just such things as plowing, spraying, manure spreading or harvesting. Establish a peer review to manage neighborhood conflict, have consistent zoning policy and prevent restrictive zone changes on agricultural land.

Public education on agriculture

What: Educate non-farmers about agricultural practices.

Who: Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA NRCS.

Why: If a community does not appreciate agricultural resources, and is not aware of the problems facing farmers, it is harder to protect them. We need to stop talking with ourselves and expand the dialogue.

The Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan recommends using a variety of strategies to support continuation of agriculture into the 21st Century. The diversity of options reflects the diversity of potential roles numerous agencies will play in implementing the plan. Many of these strategies are already in existence or are an expanded use of an existing program. What will be new is the creation of a "protection package" for a participating farm that incorporates and mutually reinforces the appropriate protection options, and the coordination and sharing of responsibilities by many agencies interested in farmland protection.

The Oswego County plan recommends an implementation committee be set up to follow through with the approved plan. Also, a specific person should be hired as an agriculture specialist to offer support to interested participants in the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. A contact person will be necessary that can offer information on new programs for farms and advise on application steps. This staff will be familiar

with the economics of agriculture, marketing, estate/financial planning and also the science of farming. They could be a circuit rider serving several counties and coordinating agricultural protection efforts in Oswego County.

Design Standards For Agricultural & Rural Land

Table 4

Town	Minimum Road Frontage	Minimum Lot Size	Minimum Front Yard	Maximum Lot Coverage
T. Boylston				
RR	300'	2.1 acres	75'	na
Forest	300'	12 acres	75'	na
T. Granby	150-200'	1 acre	50'	25%
T. Hastings				
AG/RESID.	150'	1 acre	50'	20%
T. Mexico				
Residential	150'	0.69 acres	40'	none
Non-Res. Use	200'	1.8 acres	50'	10%
T. Minetto				
Residential	150'	0.92 acres	35'	none
Non-Res. Use	200'	1.8 acres	50'	10%
T. Oswego				
O- Open Land	100'	0.92 acres	50'	20%
Non-Res. Use	200'	1.8 acres	50'	35%
T. Parish	200'	1.5 acres	50'	na
T. Richland				
Residential	120'	0.92 acres	40'	20%
Non-Res. Use	200'	1.8 acres	50'	20%
T. Volney	150'	2 acres	50'	20%

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION

Many partners need to work together to carry out the goal of protecting Oswego County farmland. The partners include local farmers, community leaders, local, county and state government, agri-business, financial institutions, and farm support agencies, among others. The plan recommends examining in greater detail, funding options, technical and educational resources, and local government roles and responsibilities.

A time line for implementation is included. After approval from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, the Oswego County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board will send a newsletter describing the plan and soliciting applicants for involvement. The next step will be to select candidates who fit the plan's criteria for lands to be protected. A specific plan will be developed to identify the strategies from the plan to be utilized on each farm. The appropriate agencies will then apply for grants and other funding sources to begin the protection process.

During the implementation of the plan, there will be a continuous review of the effectiveness of actions taken. It is also a goal of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board and plan to have a continuing presence within the farm community. This plan attempts to set up a long-term network of support for agriculture in Oswego County. The involvement of many partners and continuing encouragement to implement the Oswego County Farmland Protection Plan may bring about the goal of creating a strong agricultural base of "21st Century Farms."

Time Line for Implementation

Table 5

	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
Approval of AFPB	█									
Approval of Oswego County Planning Board		█								
Approval of County Legislature			█							
Approval of NYS Ag & Markets				█						
Apply for Grants						█				
Implementation Newsletter for support					█					
Select Farmland for Protection								█		

APPENDICES

Oswego County Farmland and Agriculture Protection Board Survey

Do you own agricultural land? Yes No
Is it in an Agricultural District? Yes No

If not, why?

Will you be signing land up in 1998 or 2000? Yes No

How many of your acres are currently signed up in an Ag District? _____

What towns do you have farmland in? _____

What type of farm do you own? _____

What is the age category of the present landowner (circle one) 20-40 40-60 60+

In your opinion what is reducing the amount of farmland in your town?

Circle up to five items that you believe are having an effect on farms going out of business in your town:

- Inadequate Resources (land, buildings, equipment, etc.)
- Taxes
- Profitability
- Regulations
- Willingness of the next generation to continue in farming
- Difficulty of finding the labor to complete the job
- Willingness of the present generation to make long term investments
- Lack of a willingness to adapt to change or apply new technology
- The lands perceived value for development is greater than the expectations as farmland
- The needs of the present landowner to receive a return to assist as a portion of retirement income
- Conflicts with neighboring land use

If you would be willing to discuss this further, please include your name, address and/or phone number.

My Life in Agriculture

By Jerry Fones

I have been involved with agriculture all of my nearly 79 years of life. I was born on a dairy and fruit farm at Demster Beach on Lake Ontario. Our nearest settlement was Demster, about one mile from our farm and about one mile north of New Haven Village. There were two stores, a post office, a grange hall, a car dealership, a feed mill, a milk plant, a machinery dealership, a coal shed and scales, a large ice house used to ice railroad cars that shipped strawberries to New York City, and most important a railroad station and siding. Today none of the above are still there.

We milked by hand about 15 cows, which in those days was considered a good sized dairy. We had 4 acres of fruit trees and raised about 1/4 acre of strawberries.

We didn't have electricity as the lines didn't come down our road until 1930. We had a carbide plant in the cellar which generated gas for our lights.

Almost everyone that lived in our Town had from one to ten cows, a few chickens, raised strawberries and had some fruit trees. I recall families

that were considered well off that never milked more than half a dozen cows, but raised strawberries and managed to save most of the money from their sale. The reason they could do this was their over head was next to nothing and they cut wood for fuel, for heat and the old cook stoves. They canned their meat, and fruit and vegetables and were nearly self sufficient. One neighbor's wife even made her own soap.

Farmers all made a trip to the milk plant each morning, some with horses, some with the old model T Fords. I remember days in the Spring when the frost first went out that our wagon bed dragged in the mud. In the Winter there were no roads plowed. Farmers worked together to fill the ice house for the Strawberry Association and usually took home a load of ice at noon and night to fill their own ice houses, as this was their only means of cooling their milk in the summer. I remember in one day five freight cars of strawberries were shipped out of the Demster station. This took considerable ice.

One thing that sticks in my mind was my father buying a 1912 model T Ford from a neighbor for \$5.00. He wanted the motor to put in his spray rig. That car was in good running condition. We only had to spray our apples about twice a year, and I had a lot of fun driving the old car around the farm, until my father got around to take the motor out.

In 1933 around Christmas time, we had a week or more that the temperature never got above 30° below zero and the ground had no snow protection. It ruined our orchard and most of the small orchards in the area. The 83-acre orchard, now owned by the Simplaar family, that bordered our farm suffered considerable damage, but they did replant the trees that were lost.

Not many years after this many of our neighbors stopped raising strawberries commercially. Because of the child labor laws, they couldn't get them picked. As you know, these small operations are a thing of the past.

Nothing was easy in those days. We cut and raked our hay with horses, cocked the windrows then pitched the hay on wagons by hand. It took a lot of it to fill our two big mows in the barn.

I graduated from High School in 1937 and purchased a 100-acre farm on County Route 1, about a mile from my father's farm. We spend a year working on the house, we married in June 1938 and moved in and started dairying. If we make it until this, June 16th we will have been there 60 years. It wasn't a good time to start the dairy business. In May 1939 the milk price was 89 cents per hundred. For those of us that grained our cows,

the milk checks didn't cover the feed bill. Fortunately I had some six-week-old pigs which I sold for \$2.00 each. This kept us eating for the month. You wonder how dairy farmers stayed in business. We had no choice. There were no jobs available except the C.C.C.'s or W.P.A. and you needed to be on public assistance to get on W.P.A. We didn't have the "Castle" in Mexico. Each town had a welfare officer and they weren't very busy. In those days most people thought it a disgrace to be on welfare and they only applied as a last resort.

This low milk price brought about a milk strike that turned quite violent and in some cases made life time enemies out of neighbors. Things did start getting better after the strike. A.S.C.S. now F.S.A. moved into an Oswego office in 1938 and was offering lime and fertilizer to farmers at very low prices, sometimes free, to encourage improved seedings and pasture. They mapped farm boundaries on aerial photos, had vegetable allotments, financially helped with seedings. I worked for them part time at sign ups and checking farms at \$6.00 per day and I furnished my car. Things continued to improve mainly because of World War II. Due to rationing money was made on sales of beef and chicken on the black market. About this time I bought my first tractor. I had done all farm work with horses and as much as I loved horses, it was a little discouraging to have to put in a real long day to plow one acre. I used to use five horses on a drag. First getting

them harnessed, coming in a noon washing under their collars, feeding and watering was real time consuming. It did seem like heaven when I got the tractor which was a John Deere B. With the plows and drag it cost \$1,149.00. My Last John Deere lawn mower, the smallest rider made, cost more than 1,800.00.

Early in 1944, I went to an Extension-sponsored meeting on Artificial breeding of dairy cattle. I went because I was interested in improving my herd. Artificial insemination was just getting started in the state and was an affordable way of making ~~the~~ use of superior sires available to the dairyman. As I remember, the average cow produced about 7,000 pounds of milk per year in Oswego County at that time. Due to some arm twisting from Professor Ray Albrectson of Cornell, I ended up at Cornell taking the A.I. course and starting February 4th, 1944 I spent the next 37 ½ years working as an artificial breeding technician along with keeping my farm going. It meant working some 16 hour days but I got to work with some great people and can truthfully say it was very rewarding. Due to better breeding, feeding and management, production per cow jumped dramatically which is why with fewer dairy cows and farms in the county total milk production has pretty much maintained. During this period of my life farm prices on the whole weren't bad. Farmers were able to replace worn machinery or buy a new car or pickup as needed. I remember walking into Percy Rose's barn

one morning and Percy saying, "I never thought I'd live to see the day I paid my current bills and paid cash for a new manure spreader out of this months milk check."

I retired August 1981 from A.I. At this time milk prices had leveled off but prices on everything the farmers were buying were sky rocketing. One farmer told me he had a 20-year old Massey Ferguson tractor that had to have a new rear axle. It cost more to put this new part in than he paid for the tractor new. The biggest problem today in Agriculture is farmers are trying to pay for their supplies at 1998 prices with their income at the 1978 level.

Farm Agencies have contributed so much toward the well being of agriculture in Oswego County. Extension has been around as long as I can remember and has done so much for so many people, sound technical advice on all types of agriculture and quick to help other farm agencies on projects. F.S.A. for their 60 years of helping farmers to carry out sound practices they couldn't afford to do on their own, for disaster loans and payments. The district conservationist NRCS for technical assistance to all other agencies. Soil and Water District assistance in drainage, no-till demonstrations, for helping to correct anything adversely affecting water quality such as manure handling, milk house waste, erosion, helping farmers in towns with 100% assessments with the use of soil survey information to get an agriculture

value assessment. In some cases it meant their being able to stay in business. Presently Soil and Water are in the process of taking over the management of the county's 38000 acre forest. Also, the county planning board for its present help with the Farm Protection Agency.

I know these are only some of the contributions these agencies make. I feel we need their help more than ever with some of the problems that will be facing us in the future.

When Kristin and Keith asked me to write on agriculture as I have seen it in my life time, I wasn't just sure what they wanted. I hope I haven't bored you. I didn't intend to be this long. I pray we can do something to save agriculture in Oswego County. It is very disheartening to drive around my old routes and see the once prosperous farms with barns falling in and field growing up to brush.

NY Counties with Approved Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plans

Appendix 3

Initiation Initiatives	Cayuga	Errie	Hamilton	Ulster	Sullivan
Local land use programs	X	X	X	X	X
Discourage & Limit Development on farmland	X	X			X
Educate @ NYS Ag District Laws	X	X	X		
Whole Farm Plans that respond to regulations	X				
Funding mechanisms for regulatory changes	X		X		
Alternatives to property based funding	X	X	X		
Alternative revenue sources for marginal farms	X				
Monitor & Inform agencies @ land division	X				
Encourage redevelopment in urban centers	X				
Partner with other agencies to encourage farming	X	X			X
Utilize historic/scenic designation programs		X			
Land Trusts		X			
Conservation Easements		X	X	X	X
Land Donations		X		X	X
TDR's and PDR's		X	X	X	X
Business Plans		X			X
Retirement & Transition Planning		X			X
Estate Planning		X			X
Voier Referendum					X
Update Land use inventory	X			X	X
Cluster Development			X	X	X
Agricultural Tax Assessments		X	X		X
Reduce farm operating costs				X	X
Marketing and promotion			X		X
Right of first refusal					X
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)					X
Farm link and farm match programs		X	X		X
Best Management Practices (BMP)	X				X
Integrated Pest Management (IPM)				X	X
Develop Academic and Technology Connections					X
Educate on the contributions of agriculture		X	X	X	
Classroom education, FFA, & 4-H Programs				X	
Include farm plans in Master Plan		X		X	
Adopt a fair tax policy for farmers			X	X	X
Endorse changing the value of ag soils				X	X
Lobby to decrease farm estate taxes				X	
Reaffirm NYS right-to- farm legislation		X	X	X	
Use buyer notification of ag land			X		
Use ag notes on zoning & subdivision maps				X	
Meetings to inform of regulatory changes				X	
Adopt a single inspection team				X	
Reform Worker's Compensation laws				X	
Educate assessors on agriculture procedures		X	X		
Town to apply for ag assessment of special districts			X		
Provide info to town level @ tax abatements			X		
Promote economic development of agriculture		X	X		
Cost sharing and CO-OPS					X
Innovative financing packages to farms			X		
Farm involvement in politics & decision making		X	X		
Hire a Agriculture Protection Specialist			X		
Assist private initiatives that protect land			X		
Utilize SEQRA		X	X		
Use IESA			X		
Strengthen technical support to agriculture			X		
Create an implementation sub-committee of AFPB			X		
Tax farmland at ag value, not development value		X		X	
Coordinate policies at all levels of government		X	X		
Educate on farm conservation tools		X	X		X
Community Reinvestment Act (CRA)			X		
Ag Friendly Zoning			X		
Start-up Assistance			X		
Peer review to decrease neighborhood conflict					
Update agricultural land use data on type of farms	X				
Early warning mechanism to ID endangered areas	X				