

REVIEW OF PROGRESS ON POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN 1999 PLAN

This appendix details the seven recommendations from the 1999 plan. Each recommendation states what was achieved during the past 18 years, and what still needs to be addressed. The items that still need to be addressed were reviewed during this planning process and either included or determined irrelevant or overcome by events.

1. Improve awareness and recognition of the importance of the economic, social, and environmental roles of agriculture in Otsego County.

Achieved SWCD holds an annual farm tour each year with invitations to local government officials. In addition, the county has two strong farmers' markets, Cooperstown and Oneonta, which now have expanded year-round in each location. Farmers' markets have also been established in Richfield Springs and Morris, with another effort underway in Hartwick.

Unachieved The Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) agriculture program no longer exists, and lack of funding to make staff available to elementary schools means reduced agricultural education opportunities. In addition, the suggested road signs and advertising campaigns did not materialize due to budget cuts and failure to follow through.

2. Improve profitability and the economic viability of farms in Otsego County. Encourage new farming and agricultural-related enterprises.

Items included under goal #2 were:

- Promote locally grown produce and products, including organic alternative products, forest products, and value-added products.
- Diversify agricultural operations and encourage sustainable farming practice to preserve smaller scale farms.
- Continue to support and actively advocate price re-structuring for dairy farms.
- Improve Marketing and profitability of agricultural activities and products.
- Encourage formation of buying cooperatives to reduce operational cost.
- Focus and coordinate rural service agencies agendas, including those of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schoharie and Otsego Counties (CCE), towards implementing the goals of the plan.
- Offer small start-up low interest loans to assist farmers.
- Initiate an Ag Business Retention and Expansion Project with CCE, Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau, Otsego County Planning Department (OPD) and others.

- Encourage farmers to complete business and financial plans.
- Encourage youth to go into farming.
- Foster diversity of high quality crops.
- Increase value-added farm-to-market.
- Increase direct markets and promote farm stands and “pick your own” operations.
- Promote diversity of farms into forest products, and provide educational materials as needed to help farmers and landowners establish or expand operations.
- Consult with Cooperative Extension Farming Alternatives program on an on-going basis to develop key strategies for new agricultural opportunities.

Achieved There have been measurable efforts to increase the availability of locally grown products in local grocery stores and restaurants in the county. Sloan’s steakhouse (Oneonta), The Empire House (Gilbertsville), and Origins Café (Middlefield), are three examples of restaurants that advertise locally grown food, while other restaurants have begun to use local products where they can afford to do so, though they may not advertise. One major grocery store chain, Hannaford (Oneonta) stocks local products on their shelves, including shelf stable items such as honey, maple syrup, and jams made locally. Upstate Creations (Oneonta) sells only local food products and crafted items.

There are two thriving year-round farmers’ markets in the county: the Cooperstown Farmers’ Market and the Oneonta Farmers’ Market, which provide local food and items for sale to the public weekly. The Village of Morris hosts a farmers’ market every Thursday in season, with a recently established weekly food hub, and Richfield Springs Farmers’ Market is also going strong on Saturdays in season.



The Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship’s (CADE) Value-Added Dairy Technical Assistance & Education Program offers technical assistance to farmers to develop and market value-added dairy products. Farmers can receive assistance in business planning and marketing, product development, brand development, sales outreach and more. Other programs include CADE’s Hop Aboard program for existing and aspiring hops farmers, and its Community Creameries for Value-Added Experimentation program which provides access to

processing facilities at three local farms to allow for participants to experiment with new products such as butter, bottled milk, yogurt, and ricotta.

Unachieved One item identified under Goal #2 of the 1999 AFPP was the “development of a regional or county-wide homegrown logo for locally grown produce.” As of yet, no Otsego County Homegrown logo or branding has been developed, but the idea still resonates and should remain a goal in the 2017 AFPP. The larger and broader scale goals of continuing to support and actively advocate for dairy price re-structuring, and improving marketing and profitability of agricultural activities and products, were rational but not realistically achievable. The county also did not move ahead with the establishment of a commercial kitchen as value-added product business incubator. One key ingredient lacking in the 1999 plan which may have contributed to not achieving these goals was clearly identifying at the outset which agency would be accountable for implementation of the recommended goals.

3. Ensure that farming can continue as an industry and strengthen the role of agriculture in Otsego County’s economic development. In order to enhance the profitability of agriculture, farms must be considered like other small businesses in Otsego County.

Items included under Goal #3 were:

- Be aggressive in including agriculture in economic development programs.
- Identify new markets and improve transportation to these markets.
- Make small farm machinery available, perhaps through sharing cooperatives.
- Increase efforts to develop agri-tourism.
- Take advantage of the vast and diverse marketplace in New York City.
- Join efforts to promote farming and protect farmland in New York State.
- Work toward developing public-private partnerships to promote agriculture.

Achieved In 2007, Otsego County and the Otsego Land Trust (OLT) obtained a Farmland Protection Grant to conserve a farm in the Town of Springfield. The project was completed in 2012, with approximately 300 acres of farmland protected by conservation easement.

In 2016, Otsego Now applied for and received a \$200,000 micro-enterprise grant from the New York State Office of Community Renewal to provide financial assistance to local farmers, with the county providing a 10% match. The County distributed funds to farms around Otsego County to assist in expansion, and discussions are currently underway regarding applying for additional micro-enterprise grants in the near future.

CADE's programs have also contributed to achieving Goal #3. Programs offered by CADE include the Farm and Food Business Incubator program, providing business training and value-added product development for new and developing farm and food entrepreneurs. The Lucky Dog Local Food Hub, a private farm business located in Delaware County, works with farm and food businesses from the Catskills to the Finger Lakes to offer high quality farm products to a growing number of chefs and retailers in New York City.

Unachieved Many of the recommendations of goal #3 have been addressed to some extent, yet there remains a strong need for more emphasis on economic development efforts to facilitate access to the major urban markets like New York City, and to make funding sources and innovative opportunities available to existing and new farmers and food producers.

4. Implement long-term, cost-effective farmland protection measures.

Items under Goal #4 were:

- Improve the functioning of and participation in the Agricultural District Program.
- Encourage the county to be an advocate for farmland preservation by lobbying for continued state improvements in tax reform.
- Provide for and encourage use of conservation easements, purchase of development rights (PDR) or lease development rights (LDR), and coordinate efforts with local land trusts to protect important and sensitive farmlands and open space in the county.
- Tie economic assistance to land protection programs. Offer five- to ten-year covenants prohibiting development in exchange for funding or assistance in management, marketing, product research.
- Lower taxes for those landowners who offer voluntary conservation easements for long-term protection.
- Control water and sewer infrastructure fees to road frontage and not entire property on farms.
- Review, update and encourage right-to-farm laws in local communities.
- In Agricultural Districts, charge a developer mitigation fees for new dwellings, earmarked for farmland protection efforts outlined in the plan.
- Seek county and local policy that any purchase of land for public purposes, (wellhead protection) be handled by purchasing development rights for that property to maintain land on the tax roll and allow future agricultural operations.

Achieved The County Planning Department staff continue to manage the Agricultural District Program. The annual 30-day enrollment and eight-year reviews are ongoing, with efforts to further consolidate districts to improve the efficiency of the program.

The County has supported and continues to support efforts of the Otsego Land Trust with the preservation of farmland in Otsego County. OLT provides conservation easements, purchase of development rights, and accepts donations of land. OLT has preserved over 10,000 acres in four surrounding counties; Otsego, Schoharie, Delaware and Herkimer.

Unachieved The County did little to lobby for state improvements in tax reform or to lower taxes for landowners with voluntary conservation easements. There was also little effort to review, update or encourage right-to-farm laws in local communities.

5. Protect lands for agriculture uses so that a critical mass of farmland is available. Ensure and improve sustainability of the agricultural infrastructure that supports farming in Otsego County.

Items under Goal #5 were:

- Develop a county comprehensive plan with portions dedicated to strategy for farm and farmland protection.
- Encourage and assist local governments in instituting zoning and planning techniques designed to allow continued agriculture while minimizing impacts of development on farms and the rural community.
- Monitor the number of farms and farmland acres annually by analyzing tax parcel information and statistics from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.
- Identify important locations to concentrate protection efforts.

Achieved Otsego County completed its first strategic plan in 2016. In the Strategic Plan, the County formally recognizes the importance of rural farms and the importance of agricultural markets.

The County continues to review projects subject to General Municipal Law 239, and requires agricultural data statements when a project is in or adjacent to active farmland.

The County Planning department continues to be the administrator of Agricultural District reviews and 30-day enrollments. The eight-year review provides a process for monitoring farmland gains or losses. In 2016, William Gibson, working with the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH), completed a detailed inventory of all active farms in Otsego County.

Unachieved The County made little progress in encouraging local municipalities to change their zoning and planning regulations for the preservation of active farmlands. The County did not implement a “no net loss” policy prohibiting conversion of agriculturally zoned land.

Greater efforts could have been made to encourage local municipalities to focus on the preservation of farms and farmland in their communities through the structuring of their zoning and planning regulations.

6. Enhance farm transfer programs so that needs of retiring and new farm operators are met and farms and farmland are protected.

Items under Goal #6 were:

- Keep land prices for farm expansion and entry of new, young farmers affordable.
- Recruit new farmers through coordination effort with an Agriculture Marketing specialist.
- Market farming opportunities in Otsego County to outside areas.

Achieved Since the 1999 AFPP was finalized, the opportunity for multimedia connections has grown tremendously. Facebook, New York Farm Link, and others offer a broad spectrum of opportunity for agriculture advertising and marketing.

Unachieved It is difficult to control land prices, particularly when tourism causes property values to escalate. For example, the construction of Cooperstown Dreams Park on State Highway 28 took hundreds of acres of farmland out of production. If a greater effort had been placed on zoning and land use tools to preserve agricultural land, this may have been prevented and a percentage of the land could have remained available for farming.

7. Sustain the rural landscape and natural resources that support both farm and non-farm uses. Seek to acknowledge the environmental benefits of farmland.

Items under Goal #7 were:

- Preserve farmlands that are critical to protecting water resources, open space, and scenic resources.
- Initiate a voluntary plan that adopts agriculture management standards set up by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, SWCD, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and supported by the Otsego County Board of Representatives.

Achieved The SWCD offers a variety of Best Management Practices (BMP) and environmentally sound programs for farmers to participate in.

