

**Town of Ancram**  
**Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan Project Team Meeting**  
**November 3, 2008**  
**6-7 PM**

**Present:** Art Bassin, Carl Butler, Harold Miller, Don MacLean, Marnie Maclean, Jerry Peele, Dennis Sigler, Bob Wilcox, Leah Wilcox, Nan Stolzenburg

**Absent:** Barry Chase, Judi Francis

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The first meeting of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Project (AFPP) Team was called to order by Art Bassin at 6 PM.

Background of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Grant Project – Mr. Bassin commented that this was the first year NYS had awarded grants to municipalities to work on agriculture and farmland protection. Ancram was one of the first communities to be involved in this program. The funds are to be used as this Committee determined to develop a town plan to support agriculture and protect farmland. The Committee’s role would be to decide what to do to achieve this objective and on how to use the funds available, which included \$25,000 from NY State and \$8333 from the town. Ms. Stolzenburg had assisted with the preparation of the grant application, and in consultation with John Brennan at the NYS Department of Ag and Markets had prepared a preliminary project plan which was submitted with the grant application, which is posted on the town web site. Mr. Bassin further noted:

1. Agriculture and farmland protection were identified as the most important issues in the Comp Plan survey done late last year, with about 90% of the survey’s 434 respondents indicating the town should do something to promote agriculture and protect farmland. In addition to being the traditional economic base of the community, farming creates the “rural character” everyone wants to preserve, and maintains open space and scenic environments we all appreciate so much.
2. Protecting farmland by buying development rights was relatively easy as long as you could get the money, but long term, farmland and open space was only going to be protected and used for farming if agriculture was a profitable business and owners of farmland wanted to keep land in farming, instead of developing it, because it made business sense to so.
3. Agriculture in Ancram, which according to “official” statistics employed about 100 people in Town, was probably the second largest employer in Ancram next to the Mill, and may be the largest employer of people who actually live in Town. Mr. Wilcox suggested that agriculture may be the largest employer in town, if you counted all the part time and family help that farms used which never got picked up on the agricultural or regular census reports.

4. Promoting farms and protecting farmland was identified by the community as its highest priority, which was why we are starting the Agriculture and Farmland Protection project.

Mr. Bassin asked for questions and comments on the AFPP project and the use of the grant funds. During the discussion which followed, the following issues and ideas were raised and discussed:

1. Mr. Peele asked if there were any restrictions on the use of the funds. Mr. Bassin indicated there were no restrictions he was aware of, and asked Ms. Stolzenburg if she was aware of any restrictions. Ms. Stolzenburg said it was very important to identify farmland in the town that should be considered for protection, and if a Plan did not cover this, the Plan would probably be rejected.

2. Mr. MacLean asked if doing an Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan improved a community's prospects for attracting state grants for actually buying development rights later. Ms. Stolzenburg indicated that it did.

3. Mr. Butler asked if once farmland was identified in the Plan as desirable to protect, did it have to be protected. Mr. Bassin noted that the decision to sell development rights and protect farmland was the landowners. Ms. Stolzenburg added that Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan was just a plan, and could not by itself force anything to happen. Mr. Bassin noted that it was important to balance protecting farmland with protecting property rights, and to develop solutions which did both to the satisfaction of the landowners and to the community.

4. Mr. Miller commented that to keep farms profitable and in operation it was important to promote agricultural support businesses like equipment servicing and large animal vets, because without services like these no one could stay in the farming business.

5. Mr. MacLean asked what the relationship was between the Comprehensive Plan and the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, and if the funding for the two efforts was separate. Mr. Bassin responded that the funding was totally separate, that the \$33,333 allocated for the AFPP effort was in addition to the \$60,000 which had been allocated for the Comp Plan. The "link" between the two programs is the AFPP effort was a direct result of the Comp Plan process identifying the community's priority to promote the profitability of agriculture and protect farmland. Developing an AFPP is an implementation recommendation of the Comp Plan, which the Town Board approved in February 2008.

6. Mr. Wilcox commented that the group participating in the development of the agriculture and farmland protection plan should also advise the Comp Plan committee and the Town on the agricultural goals and strategies of the Comp Plan.

7. Ms. MacLean suggested that we identify concerns and issues related to agriculture in Ancram. She indicated her two major concerns were 1) securing reductions in property tax rates for ag lands and buildings and 2) finding the next generation of farmers.

8. Mr. Miller suggested it was important to educate the community on how ag property tax exemptions worked, as many people do not seem to understand that process.

9. Mr. Sigler noted that finding the next generation of farmers could be a problem, and noted his children did not want to continue farming. He also noted that it was hard to find farm help, and hard to keep them. Ms. MacLean noted it was hard to pay people enough to keep them working on the farm. Mr. Sigler noted that even when he paid people competitively (\$15-\$20 an hour) it was hard to find them and keep them working. Ms. Stolzenburg noted that this was a problem everywhere.

10. Mr. Peele commented that there were young people interested in organic farming, but generally had no capital to get started and could benefit from CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs.

11. Mr. MacLean commented that good models for farm leases were needed, as increasingly farmers were not going to be landowners, and we had to be careful to manage the relationship between farmer and landowners so both sides benefited. The issues related to the farmer-landowner relationship included availability of farmer and farm worker housing, noise, smells, which crops to plant on which fields, and the duration and financial arrangements in the land lease. Mr. Wilcox commented that his work with Glynwood on farmer-landowner deals indicated that many landowners wanted to participate in the farming decisions made by their farmer tenants, and did not appreciate the need to treat their farm tenants as businessmen who wanted to run their own farm business without landowner interference. Mr. MacLean commented that if these landowner-farmer issues could be worked out, he was aware of several farm families who would move into the area to do fruit and vegetable farming.

11. Mr. Miller indicated he was aware of three farm families who wanted to move into the area and start dairy farms, but the problem was a lack of dairy facilities. New landowners who buy dairy farms in the area tend to tear down the barns and other structures needed to support a dairy operation because they are required to pay taxes on these structures, cannot secure ag exemptions on these properties, and cannot get paid enough to lease the facility to farmers to cover the property taxes. Mr. Miller suggested finding a way to preserve dairy facilities after a farm has been sold to a non-farming landowner could allow the next generation of farmers to operate locally in rented dairy facilities.

12. Mr. Wilcox suggested the AFPP accommodate the various farming models we were aware of in Ancram— traditional dairy, organic meat, organic fruit and vegetables, truck farming, specialty dairy (cheese, ice cream), crop farms (hay, corn) and horse operations. Mr. Miller and Mr. Sigler noted that some horse farms bought hay, which allowed former dairy farmers to sell hay to keep their land active.

13. Mr. Peele suggested we needed a slaughter house locally. There was not enough slaughterhouse capacity nearby to meet local needs now, and the situation was only going to get worse as more people went into raising livestock in the area. Mr. Wilcox commented that getting someone to run the slaughterhouse was going to be difficult, given slaughterhouses required good management to succeed economically, and faced lots of federal regulation and frequent inspections. No one knew how much of an investment would be needed to start up a slaughterhouse, and it was not clear how large a facility would be needed to serve local needs.

14. Mr. Wilcox suggested setting up a town “farming cooperative” to hire and share labor and equipment resources. Ms. Stolzenburg commented that a local coop could also get bulk buying discounts for feed, supplies, health care etc.

15. Mr. Wilcox suggested we develop a brochure on “Agriculture in Ancram” as one of the outputs of the planning effort, to help communicate the importance, diversity and complexity of farming in Ancram.

16. Mr. Wilcox also asked how long we were going to talk before we decided to do something, and when we were going to do the surveys and interviews indicated on the agenda. Mr. Bassin suggested we talk about the issues, concerns and opportunities for as long as the Project Team felt was useful, decide when and what to survey and who to interview, and then, once we have collected as much information as we feel is necessary, develop the Plan.

Next Meeting – The Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Project Team will meet again on Monday, December 1, at 6 PM at the Town Hall.