

Town of Windham

8 School Road
Windham, ME 04062

Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program Summary Report of Survey Responses Survey conducted December 2015 – 2016

Introduction:

The Planning and Assessing Departments have conducted a survey of local farm owners that may qualify for the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program to see if there is participation interest in the agricultural community. Under this program farmland owners could receive a property tax reduction of up to 100% of assessed value in exchange for a 20 year conservation easement. 107 Surveys were mailed with 26 responding.

Findings:

Question 1: Is your land being farmed?

Twenty (20) of the 26 respondents have properties that are currently being farmed.

Question 2: Is your land being farmed by you or someone else?

Fifteen (15) respondents are farming their own land and eight (8) are allowing others to farm their land for them (several both farm and allow others to farm their land).

Question 3: Is your farm property currently conserved with a farmland easement?

Four (4) respondents are currently in a conservation program and 22 are not.

Question 4: Are you interested in conserving all or a portion of your property?

Eighteen (18) respondents are interested in conserving all or part of their property, six are not interested and two are undecided.

Question 5: Is farming your primary source of income?

Six respondents use farming as their primary income source of income and 20 do not.

Question 6: Do you participate in any farmers markets?

Four respondents do participate in a farmers market and 21 do not.

Question 7: Do you think Windham should have its own farmers market?

Eleven respondents think Windham should have its own farmers market, one does not and 13 had no opinion.

Question 8: Where should a farmers market be located and what day of the week is best?

There were several suggestions:

1. 202/302/River Road – 7 days per week noon to 6 p.m.;
2. Saturday a.m.;
3. North Windham;
4. Near Town Hall Sat/Sun;
5. Windham Center Road – school or Town Office – Tuesday – Thursday;
6. Town Hall or Pantry parking lot – weekends work good for a few but you compete with others;
7. High school complex or Town Hall;
8. Large open area near other shopping – 7 days a week;
9. North Windham – mid-week

Question 9: Do you provide food for a local food pantry or soup kitchen?

Six respondents provide food for a local food pantry and 20 do not.

Question 10: Would you consider donating some of your produce to a local food pantry or soup kitchen?

Seven respondents would consider donating while six would not.

Question 11: If you farm, do you grown or provide:

Hay	14		Poultry	3
Vegetables	9		Nursery crops	3
Pasture	7		Fruit/Orchards	4
Dairy	5		Maple syrup	2
Livestock	4		Other	3
Grains	2			

Other classifications included woodlots; honey production and seedling production.

Question 12: Are you aware of tools and programs available to help farmers keep farmland in farming, including financial tools?

Farm and Open Space Current Use Tax Program	12
Maine Farms for the Future Program	7
Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund	2
Get Real! Get Maine!	8
Agriculture Development Grant Program	2
Farm Business Planning	1
UMaine Cooperative Extension	16
USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service programs	4
Maine FarmLink	9
Conservation easements	9
MOFGA programs for farmers	8

Question 13: What is your vision of the future of farming in Windham and the surrounding region?

The various answers are summarized:

- a) There were several responses stating they hope farming in Windham will continue into the future.
- b) Florence Hawkes wrote that they had closed their farm stand in 2015. The farm stand operated from 1932 – 2015 selling fresh vegetables.
- c) One respondent felt that the future of farming in Windham looked bleak with only three dairy farms left and just a few in Gorham and those farmers are losing land due to housing developments.
- d) Another hopes the land doesn't all get developed and sold.
- e) Still another respondent wrote "Farming in Windham will not exist if steps are not taken to protect our land from development. Rising costs for operations and taxes make our way of life very difficult. I want to preserve my land for future generations and public use for recreation."
- f) The common theme on many surveys referred to a future where farmland is sold and made into residential developments. One referenced supporting the organic farming community.
- g) One respondent submitted three articles (see attached) on agriculture. The first *Maine-Ly Agriculture*, published by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources dated August 30, 1991 and refers to Windham's Comprehensive Plan 1991. **"Recently we received Windham's draft plan, which includes one of the strongest philosophical arguments we've seen for maintaining farmland, even in a rapidly growing area."** The other articles submitted include: *Farmland & Forestry* and *What Farming Means to the Community*.
- h) Another response stated: "Unfortunately the number of working farms in Windham has decreased significantly over the years. Our hope is that the remaining farms will be able to continue and be viable in the future."

- i) One responder mentioned lowering taxes for farmers and yet another suggested forming a coalition of farmers and planning development that comes together to support viable crops through acres or greenhouse applications.

Question 14: What are your future plans for your agricultural lands?

The various answers are summarized:

- a) Continue in tree growth;
- b) Continue in current use;
- c) Diversified agriculture;
- d) To preserve it from development;
- e) A few respondents referred to advancing age making it difficult to maintain their farms;
- f) One response stated they would keep farming as long as they could survive;
- g) Protect and preserve our farmland so that future generations will have access to it;
- h) Milk cows – add to herd – add more beef and pork sales;
- i) Keep it in diversified agriculture;
- j) Create hiking trails; horseback riding ; creating a sanctuary or estuary;

Question 15: Do you have other thought or comments about farming in Windham or the region not included in this survey?

Various answers summarized:

- a. Increase the minimum lot size to 5 acres;
- b. ...the smaller farms are ok but the bigger farms that we really need like milk producers are in big trouble. Dairy farms all over the country are going out of business every day and we need to do something for our farmers, SOON!
- c. Taxes, development pressure and zoning are the three largest obstacles to farmers that the Town has influence over.
- d. It's hard to make a living and pay all the bills on small farms. Nobody seems to be buying farms to farm when they come up for sale.
- e. Easement duration of 20 years is a "thumb in the hole of the dike". Totally inadequate! We would only be dumping this "problem" in the laps of our grandchildren.