



# MAINE-LY AGRICULTURE

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## COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS

By Bernard W. Shaw, Commissioner of Agriculture

The Maine Department of Agriculture reviews each town's Comprehensive Plan as it is submitted under the State's Growth Management laws. 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 active participation of five farmers—Leon Cooper, Jr.; Bill Hager; Clayton Haskell; Frank Hawes; and Gary Winship—certainly must have helped the Town of Windham to reach this position. The relevant portions of the plan are as follows:

*Windham has a long history as an agricultural and forest area which supported the people and businesses of Portland. Industries in this town have served the same function. The early mills were flour, lumber, woolen and gun powder—getting their raw materials locally and selling their products in the city.*

*The economic death of downtown Portland, urban blight, and urban sprawl are all based on economic factors which maximize profits and give little consideration to any thoughts or programs which would prevent the crippling of "the hand that feeds it."*

*To know that a national week-long truckers strike would empty the supermarket shelves of New England (Maine Department of Agriculture), and that very little is being done to prevent development from eating up great chunks of farm and forest land, simply points to the fact that there are no policies for food, water and shelter security. Food, water, shelter—essential to life—and yet every day we*

*make decisions which allow the sources of these essentials to be put in real jeopardy. Once someone has built a home, we are not going to tear it down to plant corn. Once someone has built a home, we are not going to tear it down to plant some trees to insure our air and water quality. It is not necessary to create new buildings, or new areas for building when the ones already in existence are not being utilized. "Simple" economics may provide comfort for many in this day and age, but future generations are at ever greater risk unless we choose now to adopt security measures which are not based on economic factors alone for our food, water, and shelter.*

*Windham must take a stand now against "economic development" for the sake of economic development. "Economic development" which flies in the face of reason; "economic development" which should be taking place where it already has building and infrastructure; "economic development" which is speculative at best.*

*When Windham was founded and until the mid-1900's, most everyone was tied to the "economics of survival". Since then, most everyone has passed on to the "economics of comfort and leisure". The farther one gets into the scale of comfort and leisure, the farther removed one becomes from the economics of survival and begins to practice the "economics of self-destruction", not caring about such mundane things as food security—all the while believing that money can buy everything. We must not lose sight of the "economics of survival", and that means retaining these survival capabilities and their sources locally. We are two generations removed from the gas and food rationing of World War II and only our elders remember the sacrifices. Compla-*

*city has its heels well planted in today's society and no one wants to think about hard times, which can be created by man-made or natural events or catastrophes, not the least of which could be drought in the nation's farm belt.*

*Windham needs policies for food, water, and shelter security. The sources of these vital aspects of our life must be protected by actively seeking and adopting measures for forest protection, water protection and farmland protection. To not do this, is to put the noose around our children's necks, waiting for someone or something beyond their control to drop the platform under their feet.*

*The very least we can do for future generations, which we have fostered on this earth, is to allow them to have the proper tools to survive. This we can only do by proper planning at this juncture in time, ensuring that the land, the water, the air, and the forests are left to them in a better condition than we found these valuable resources.*

The Comprehensive Planning Board representing the people of the Town of Windham, giving full discussion to this issue and due consideration have opted to protect precious resources. Having viewed development during the 1980's which occurred at a nearly manic pace and wasted much of the natural resources of nearby areas, Windham has chosen long-term security over short-term economic gain. One-hundred years from now, anyone reading the Windham Comprehensive Plan would recognize the clear intent of this town to protect its natural resources.

B. W. S.

## FARMLAND & FORESTRY

**POLICIES:** The following is encouraged to preserve the irreplaceable and extremely important agricultural, forest and wetland areas in the Town of Windham.

The prevention of development on agricultural, forest and wetland areas.

The preservation of the viability of agricultural activity, forestry practices, and wetland ~~employment~~.  
**HABITAT.**

The preservation of the rural-agricultural character of the undeveloped portions of town.

A 1982 Maine State Planning Office study revealed that from 1962 to 1982 farmland (cropland and pasture) decreased from 5200 to 4300 acres. As of September, 1990 that acreage had decreased to 2063 acres as reflected by data at ASCS.

However, data developed by PROP and Greater Portland Council of Governments show a dramatic increase in agricultural employment figures - rising from 17 in 1980, to 93 in 1988.

Concern for the preservation of farmland has two primary components; avoiding land use conflicts between farming activities and suburban development, and the permanent preemption of farmland for other uses.

Zoning districts should be delineated to preserve the primacy of farming in areas conducive to farm activity and conflicting uses should be avoided. Current zoning permits single-family residences on two-acre lots and multi-family dwellings. Farm zones should never be changed to another type of zone because once farmland "is developed or built upon it is forever lost to farming." The loss of farmland is a major issue on the State and National level and the federal "Farmlands Protection Policy Act" was enacted in response. On the local level, the Town does provide differential property tax assessment for farmland through the Farm and Open Space Tax law.

The Town needs to take further steps to discourage the development of farmland and to encourage farmers to keep their farms active. The town should work with SCS to identify and evaluate farmland through the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) program. The Town should also enact ordinance changes that keep farmland contiguous even if some building does take place.

The town must give serious consideration to a Transfer of Development Rights program, raising the money through a formula whereby any deficit created in the town revenues by issuing a building permit shall remand a like amount to a TDR fund.

*PDR*

The benefits to the community are many: (include here the Dept of Ag bulletin "What Farming Means to the Community".)

The initial survey in 1989 showed that a large majority of those answering thought that the Town should buy agricultural and forest land to preserve it. An even greater percentage believe that the town should have a land trust. Most disagreed that zoning in the Town protected agricultural and forest land.

The Town should explore the possibility of a Farmers Market to assist local farmers in selling their produce.

Something should be in the Town Charter to the effect that no ordinance shall be enacted or enforced that will harm the agricultural viability in the Town of Windham.

*Right to Farm*

The Town should encourage interaction and education between the farmers and business people of the community. "Agriculture in the Classroom" is also a necessary part of any child's education and should be encouraged and supported by the Town.

Large scale development cannot take place in the Farm zones in Windham because the soils are not suitable for septic tanks and leachfields. Farm zones should be the last to have sewer lines in the Town, and then only if necessary to protect wells or ground water quality in the area.

*production figures -*

# What Farming Means To The Community

**F**arming is important to Maine. It is important economically to us, and it makes an important sociological imprint on the character of Maine's citizens. The Legislature in defining Maine's Growth Management Law established the "safeguarding" of Maine's agricultural and forest resources as one of ten major goals of the law. It is therefore essential that, as planners or involved citizens, you recognize the array of benefits agriculture and farmland offer your community. It is also essential that you are prepared to grant them proper importance in your long range plans. Consider the following.

## Food Security

While we take for granted incredible bounty on the shelves of local supermarkets, that bounty is only available because of a somewhat fragile network of unreliable factors. Such occurrences as reduced rainfall in the western mountains or a shift in federal fiscal policies would effect the availability and cost of California irrigation water and thus, California produce.

A long truckers strike would empty our northeast stores in less than a week. Accidental or malicious damage to the major bridges over the Mississippi would have the same effect. Any political upheaval or social unrest in Third World nations would have a major impact on the cost and availability of foods imported from those countries.

While it may be unrealistic to strive for total self sufficiency in food, local farms can take up the slack in times of stress. We tend not to think about it here, but European and Japanese governments recognize local farms as an important aspect of national defense and protect them even in times when food can be more cheaply imported.

## Economic Impact

Farming offers a measure of economic diversity and stability. Modern farming is input-intensive and requires a host of services such as fuel, tires, supplies, fertilizer, feeds, insurance, banking services and many others. Processing, packaging, transporting and marketing services are also involved in getting a product to the consumer. Each

dollar of farming production, on average, becomes seven dollars in its impact on the economy. This contributes significant economic vigor to a region and to a community.

## Quality of Life

Farming contributes to the quality of life in a community in several ways. Farmers are caretakers of the working landscape. Farmland provides open space and many aesthetic amenities prized by in-town residents. Well-maintained farmland is often a cherished possession of the whole community, though only the farmer holds title to it.

In many areas farms provide the first employment opportunities for school age children, where work habits lasting a lifetime are instilled.

Farmland can be an important part of a community's recreation base. Given a thoughtful, responsible, caring attitude on the part of the landowner and the public alike, such activities as hunting, cross-country skiing, hiking, horseback riding and others are compatible with agriculture.

## Farmland and the Local Environment

Farmers are also custodians of a great deal of the environment. While not all farmers live up to that responsibility in fullest measure, as a group they are more aware of the

consequences of their acts. They recognize how their success is intertwined with the health of the soil and water better than most people involved in other uses of land. By and large, farmland is environmentally nurtured land.

## Tourist Attraction

A working landscape, with its mix of woodland and tilled, mowed and grazed fields is a strong attraction to out-of-state visitors. Its air of purpose, its functional grooming, and the variety of color combinations it offers are more aesthetically appealing to a visitor's eye than woods alone or the overgrown, unused fields of abandoned agricultural land awaiting development with dead grasses interspersed with weeds and bushes.

## Municipal Balance Sheet

Farmland is a bargain to the community! It requires less services, i.e., police and fire protection, than it pays in tax revenue. Study after study has shown that, even with preferential "current use" valuation programs in place, farmland subsidizes residential land. Conversion of farmland to residential land add more to the costs of municipal services than it does to the tax base.

## A Specific Example

Bowdoinham, in Sagadahoc County, was recently faced with



the proposal to convert approximately 170 acres of farmland into a 150 unit residential development consisting of four-bedroom \$150,000 homes.

Selectman George Christopher did a simple analysis to test the impact of this conversion on Bowdoinham's municipal finances. He made some conservative assumptions, and only charged against it the estimated costs of education and solid waste disposal. He did not include estimates for school or classroom construction, road maintenance, increased fire and police protection, and all other municipal services that are provided. The figures follow:

#### Cost to the Town

**Tuition** **\$3800**  
per home per year

Assuming 2 Children per Home  
(Empty-nesters don't buy 4 bedroom homes). SAD 75 Tuition Rate of \$1,900.00 per pupil.

**Solid Waste Disposal** **\$228**  
per home per year

Assuming .5 ton per person per year and Bowdoinham's lowest disposal rate of \$114/ton.

**Total Cost** **\$4028.00**  
Total Cost per Home per Year

**Revenue** **\$2475.00**  
Per home per year

Assuming these homes are fully valued at the proposed selling price of \$150,000 and Bowdoinham's mil rate remains at 16.5.

**Deficit per Unit** **\$1553.00**  
per Unit

**Total Deficit** **\$232,950**  
per year

150 Units X \$1553 Deficit per Unit

#### Impact on Taxes

Each \$70,000 increase in municipal expenses equals a 1 mil increase in the tax rate, thus, this proposed development would increase the mil rate in Bowdoinham by 3.3 mils.

#### Conclusion

**B**e sure to give careful consideration to farmland as you plan for the future of your towns. Encourage farmers to participate in the planning process. You all stand to gain. Both the Maine Department of Agriculture and the Cooperative Extension can be of help. Phone Esther Lacognata at 289-3511 or call your local Extension office for further assistance. ☐

Maine Department of Agriculture,  
Food and Rural Resources

Bureau of Agricultural and  
Rural Resources

State House Station 28  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0028

Telephone: (207) 289-3511

Esther Lacognata, Director