Dutchess County
Agricultural and Farmland
Protection Plan
Executive Summary, March 2015

“It is an exciting time for agriculture in Dutchess County. I feel like my father must have felt during the 40s and 50s in the ‘heyday’ of farming. There are so many opportunities, some of which we never even thought of ten years ago such as farm-to-table, CSAs, breweries and distilleries. We even have new-to-the-area crops like hops and sunflowers. Farmers have a chance to utilize new technologies and opportunities for small and large scale farms. The future of agriculture in Dutchess County is growing!”

Gregg Pulver, Third Generation Farmer
Agriculture has been and continues to be one of Dutchess County's primary industries. Our economy, rural landscape, community character, environment, health of residents, and overall quality of life are all uniquely and positively affected by farms operating here. Although agriculture has changed through time and continues to evolve and diversify, it plays a significant role in both the economy and quality of life for Dutchess County residents.

Dutchess County has seen significant changes in its agricultural economy since the adoption of the last Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan in 1998. At that time the biggest concern was the continuing loss of farms and conversion of farmland into non-farm uses due to the high level of development pressure and to the lack of profitability of farm operations.

Fifteen years later there are signs that the loss of farmland has slowed and the agricultural economy is rebounding. This is due in part to:

- the depressed housing market that followed the 2008 recession,
- the tremendous successes in preserving farmland after the adoption of the 1998 plan,
- the invigorated and renewed interest by young farmers in farming and the emergence of various groups that are assisting younger farmers with training and access to land,
- the continuous promotion of buy local and connection of Hudson Valley farmers with ever growing local and city markets, and
- the emergence of information technologies and farm practices that expand the opportunity for larger farms to operate profitably.

There are now excellent prospects for a continuing and vital agricultural economy, based on new markets, growing interest in local agricultural products, and opportunities for continued land preservation for the next generation of farmers. This Plan’s purpose is to build on these strengths and successes.

Farmers and agriculture-related businesses in Dutchess County have continued to adapt to changing conditions in the economy and industry. The number of farms in Dutchess County is at its highest point since 1974. The total number of acres in farming has been stable for the last 20 years, and is now actually higher than it was in 1992. More farms on an essentially stable land base means smaller sized farms but average sales per farm also appear to be stable since the last plan was adopted in 1998.
Many long-established farms remain, and are growing in size and in profits. There is a newfound interest in locally produced foods on the part of consumers. New farms are starting with new farmers, and fresh ideas. Farmers are taking advantage of new technologies, and new ways of connecting with consumers. Farmers are becoming more integrated with the overall economy of the county, and the region. As the Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County service mark says: “Dutchess County Agriculture... It’s a Growing Thing℠”.

Why is it a great time for agriculture in Dutchess County?

Here are some reasons:

- 678 farms produce everything from dairy and hops, to wool and Christmas trees.
- The number of farms and acres used for farmland is increasing.
- There are over 112,000 acres of land reported as being farmed in the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture.
- Farms contribute about $50 million in sales to the County economy.
- There are 15 farmers’ markets in the County.
- The market value of agricultural products has increased 41% since 2007.
- Dutchess ranks #1 in the State in sales value of horses and ponies.
- Agri-tourism and direct sales are a growing part of agriculture.
- Over 31,000 acres of farmland in Dutchess County have been preserved through conservation easements.

Farms play an important role by providing:

- Fresh, safe, local foods and products to the County and region
- A sense of community and cultural identity
- An essential part of our community character
- A foundation for many tourism and recreational opportunities
- Open lands for wildlife habitat and migration
- Environmental protection through soil conservation, carbon sequestration, and conservation of biodiversity
- A quality of life that residents value highly
Highlights of the 2015 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

In 1998, Dutchess County adopted its first Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan with the support of a Farmland Protection Planning Grant (FPPG) from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. Given the dramatic changes that have occurred in the agriculture industry during the past 15 years, the Dutchess County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board decided to develop a new plan, again with funding support provided by the State’s FPPG Program and Dutchess County. The mission of the Steering Committee placed in charge of developing this new plan was to consider recent changes in agriculture, identify new needs and opportunities, evaluate past successes, and develop new strategies to use moving forward.

Dutchess County has an enthusiastic group of agricultural entrepreneurs who are passionate about farming. They are adept at finding new ways to solve old problems. Just as the farm producers have been able to change with the times, the agencies and government officials that support them must be able to adapt and quickly take advantage of opportunities as they arise. This Plan will help guide that process.

Brief Outline of the Planning Process

The planning process was organized by the Dutchess County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) with coordination by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development. Work began in the Fall of 2013 with the formation of a Steering Committee composed of AFPB members, farmers, staff from County Planning, Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County, Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Dutchess Land Conservancy. This Steering Committee then engaged a team of planning consultants to assist them in developing the plan. A Stakeholders Group consisting of farming and agribusiness professionals, representatives from economic development and tourism agencies, land conservancies, local officials and involved residents was invited to participate in an advisory capacity.

In order to ensure that this Plan meets the needs of Dutchess County farmers, it was prepared with extensive input from farmers, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and
the general public who attended a Public Information Meeting in December, 2013. Additional input was received through meetings of the Steering Committee and the AFPB, a Farm Operator’s Survey, a Public Survey, and a Municipal Officials Survey, as well as from interviews with members of the Stakeholders Group. From these activities the Steering Committee identified agricultural strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Dutchess County. Farmer input was critical to the development of the initial vision and subsequent goals and recommendations. A full outline of the planning process with dates can be found in Appendix 3.

There are many significant and positive features that make Dutchess County a great place to farm. A combination of climate, soils, supportive agencies and organizations, access to a large population, growing market demand for local products, and positive attitudes about farming’s future provides a strong foundation for enhancing agriculture in the County. Those positives should not be overlooked and are features that create many opportunities.

However, there are still some challenges to overcome – some are new, while others are long-standing issues that have been identified as barriers in the past. Lack of processing facilities, aging farmers and lack of next generation of farmers, and loss of farmland due to suburban growth are still significant issues. Other issues include a limited available labor force, the high cost of farm operations and of farmland coupled with low monetary returns, and complex regulatory requirements. Equally important is the general lack of awareness among the general public about agriculture and food systems, and the resulting disconnect between agricultural needs and economic development initiatives in the County.

The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board desired an action-oriented plan to help continue to move agriculture forward. Developing such a plan must build on the positive features in the County and address the remaining hurdles. That process begins with a vision for the future that helps to identify goals which in turn lead to a list of strategies required to achieve these goals.
Vision for Agriculture

Dutchess County has established a long-term vision that builds on the positive direction agriculture has taken in the County. The vision for the Plan is to inspire, foster commitment, and motivate high levels of performance for the future. Simply put, the County’s vision for its agricultural community is to have a diversity of profitable farms and agricultural businesses that continue to contribute significantly to our economy and quality of life.

More specifically, the County and its many partners will facilitate future programs so that farms can take advantage of emerging markets in the Hudson Valley and embrace new technologies and practices. Local conditions will encourage farming by preserving core areas of farmland, putting in place farm-friendly policies, and by having a supportive public that is aware of and appreciates local farms. Dutchess County will be known as a location where skilled workers are available, where young farmers are able to make a good living, and a place where new agricultural entrepreneurs want to be. The County, farmers, and farm-oriented organizations will work together in a collaborative way to support all these efforts.

Goals

Five topic areas with 19 specific goals have been established in the Plan to help Dutchess County attain this vision. Goals address agricultural economic development, technical assistance to farmers, protection of and access to farmland, promotion of farm-friendly regulatory policies, and fostering public awareness, education, and communication.

The 19 goals lay out a direction for increasing farm profitability and decreasing production costs. They call for diversifying agricultural products and increasing direct-to-consumer sales. Other goals are to provide technical and educational assistance, enhance purchase of development rights programs to preserve more farmland, and help towns update plans and zoning to be supportive of farm activities. Enhancing educational opportunities to recruit the next generation of farmers and increasing education and public awareness about farming are also among the goals. Finally, the goals establish the need to promote communication and collaboration among farmers, the public, and organizations and agencies in the County.
Recommended Initiatives

Five priority initiatives have been developed to help Dutchess County move forward in achieving these goals to foster the county’s agricultural economy and further protect farmland.

Initiative 1 - Coordination and Collaboration through an Agricultural Navigator & Agricultural Advisory Committee

Agriculture in Dutchess County is diverse and moving in multiple directions. The number of small farms is on the rise, and large farms are prospering. Some farmers are moving steadily into the local market place within the County, while others are going after regional markets throughout the Hudson River Valley or beyond with national and international markets. New types of crops, livestock, and products are being tried, grown, raised, and sold. Over the past years, a wide variety of governmental agencies and non-profit organizations having farmland protection or promotion of agriculture as part of their mission have been established.

While each organization and agency is unique, an ongoing issue has been lack of coordination, communication and collaboration among all these moving parts with risks of duplication of efforts. Agriculture does not always have a unified advocacy for itself. A disconnect between agricultural economic development and other traditional economic development programs has also proven to be a disadvantage to the promotion of the farming industry.

One of the primary recommendations of this Plan is to address the need for coordination and collaboration. This recommendation focuses on the need for an Agricultural Advisory Committee to provide organization and leadership in carrying out the vision of this Plan and the need for an Agricultural Navigator to advance agricultural economic development and coordinate existing programs. The Agricultural Advisory Committee would be a small five person committee that would report to and advise the County Executive on issues and policies regarding agriculture and agri-business. This committee would facilitate

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The aggregate multiplier for food manufacturing amounts to 3.17 using employment as a unit of measurement. This finding suggests that for every additional new job created in food manufacturing in New York State, an additional 2.2 jobs are supported in industries and sectors structurally linked to the food manufacturing sector. Similarly, the employment multiplier for agricultural and forestry services approaches a relatively robust 2.0, suggesting one additional job for every new job created in the sector.

The conclusion that employment benefits associated with expanded food manufacturing output in New York State are relatively robust is sustained when the frame of reference is the entire macro New York economy. Our results suggest that food manufacturing exerts one of the highest employment multiplier effects of any industry in the State.
implementation of the programs outlined in this plan. There should be a single chairperson or director that reports directly to the County Executive and Legislature.

The Plan offers different options to create the Navigator position. However it is formed, the need is strong to have a single person that continuously communicates with farmers and the existing agricultural agency/organization infrastructure to put this Plan’s recommendations to work. With leadership from an advisory committee, the Agriculture Navigator would take the lead in helping implement many of the other strategies included in this plan.

### Initiative 2 - Agricultural Economic Development and Business Retention & Expansion Program

Lack of agricultural economic development has been identified as a key weakness that challenges farms and the broader food system. While there is no lack of specific economic programs that have been developed to address this issue, lack of staff, institutional capacity and collaboration prevents positive movement. More emphasis on economic development and more coordination of that work is crucial. While other economic sectors have entities such as the IDA to coordinate and fund projects that benefit those industries, agriculture does not enjoy the same capability. This strategy focuses on agricultural economic development and building capacity to concentrate on economic initiatives.

The agricultural economy is complex and involves many businesses beyond farmers. Agriculture relies heavily on complex machinery, and continuing advances in technology. An extensive network of businesses are needed to support farms ranging from veterinarians to truck drivers. Other support comes from educators, schools, and non-profit groups – all part of the farm economy. This large network of inter-dependent businesses explains why agriculture has such a large and positive impact on the local economy. This is exemplified by the statewide economic multiplier for agriculture at 1.61. That means that for every dollar related to agriculture, the positive effect is multiplied 1.61 times.

As farm operations move toward a more localized food supply system, they become more tightly wound with other elements of the local economy. In turn, other local businesses become more integrated into the agricultural economy. As farms continue to grow, and expand
into the regional and global food supply system, they will continue to bring their profits into the County and the local economy.

This plan calls for an effort on the part of the County, and in particular, the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC), Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation (HVADC), and the Dutchess County Industrial Development Corporation (DCIDA) to recognize this growth and build on it. A robust agricultural economic development program is recommended. A key component of this is to develop an Agriculture Business and Retention Program to regularly communicate with farmers in order to understand, anticipate, and ultimately address their needs, challenges, and opportunities.

**Hudson Valley Fresh** is a farmer partnership dedicated to preserving the agricultural heritage of the Hudson River Valley. Farmer-owners produce premium dairy products from whole milk to heavy cream, yogurt, and ice cream. All milk is produced in Dutchess, Columbia and Ulster counties and locally processed in Kingston. Hudson Valley Fresh works to ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their product and that the highest quality is maintained. Products are available from the mid-Hudson region to Long Island, New York City, New Jersey and Connecticut.

**Initiative 3 - Farmland Preservation**

Dutchess County has a unique opportunity to build upon the success of preserving thousands of acres of farmland over the last 15 years. The plan emphasizes focusing on the creation and expansion of core areas protected farm land, and continued investing in PDR programs, while also broadening farmland preservation efforts to include the lease of development rights and affordability covenants. It also emphasizes the continuation of public/private partnerships between municipal and county governments and land trusts, and support of both ongoing private initiatives and action by local municipalities.

- Continue to purchase the development rights on key farm properties – through multiple funding partners including federal,
state, and local government, and local land
trusts. Judicious and balanced use of County
funding for PDR purposes should also be
considered – especially where there is an
opportunity to leverage funding from outside
sources bringing state, federal and private
dollars into the local farm economy.
• Encourage farm conservation organizations
and land trusts to continue to expand their
working partnerships in order to leverage
existing resources and coordinate
fundraising and grant opportunities.
• Initiate a Lease of Development Rights Program (LDR) based on the NYS Incentive
Payment program, and encourage and assist organizations that are willing to work
with farmers on term leases and payments by the State’s new funding program.
• Encourage and assist organizations and agencies that are willing to enhance
conservation easements with Affordability Covenants (also known as Options to
Purchase at Agricultural Value, or OPAV).
• Identify opportunities to create and/or build upon existing core areas of preserved
farmland – such as Red Hook’s “Bread Basket” – in each of the County’s farming
communities.
• Expand and support the existing Farmer/Landowner match programs including the
Dutchess Land Conservancy/Columbia Land Conservancy, the Winnakee Land Trust
and the American Farmland Trust Hudson Valley Farmlink Programs.
• Encourage local municipalities to consider adopting zoning and overlay measures that
support local agri-businesses and the preservation of farmland.
Initiative 4 - Farm Friendly Regulation

Agriculture is an enterprise unlike most other businesses. Its reliance on large swaths of land, often located adjacent to very different land uses, may place farm operations in conflict with neighbors and with local land use regulations. Municipal officials tasked with enforcing local laws are often not familiar with the unique needs of farms, nor aware of the unique State regulations and County programs and policies that apply to agricultural operations.

This Plan recommends that the various County agencies involved with educational efforts continue to provide agriculture-related training programs, farm-friendly land use regulation models and support materials for local officials. Model laws and policy documents provided by the County, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and others are available to assist towns and villages looking to update their regulations in support of their farms and farm businesses.

The 1998 plan included the recommendation that equitable assessment and taxation policies be instituted. Since then, many Dutchess municipalities have conducted reassessments, and many of those are now reassessing annually so that assessments remain equitable. Equitable assessment for property tax purposes affects the bottom line for all businesses, and land-intensive businesses like farming even more so. It is important that local assessors understand the agriculture-specific aspects of Real Property Tax Law and the pertinent parts of Agriculture and Markets Law, and that farm operators understand assessing practice as it pertains to them. Education on this topic for both groups as well as efforts to increase communication will help reduce assessment errors and friction between landowners and assessors.

Initiative 5 - Marketing, Public Relations and Awareness

One consistent issue that has been identified both in 1998 and now is the lack of understanding the non-farm community has about agriculture. As a result, agriculture faces challenges such as farm-unfriendly local regulations, conflicts and nuisance complaints, and loss of sales opportunities. Helping County residents understand how agriculture contributes to their quality of life and the economy is critical. Farmers themselves need a different kind of education related to being aware of programs, funding sources, market opportunities, and technical skills.
This Plan recommends a comprehensive and multi-audience marketing, public relations and education program. Projects are aimed at helping municipalities and the general public gain new appreciation for the role agriculture plays. This initiative also recommends increased coordination of agencies and organizations in the County and region and use of tools such as web-based resources that inform farmers about opportunities for technical education, funding sources, and market opportunities. To accomplish these projects, the Plan also recommends continued funding of key organizations such as Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The aging of farmers in the County means that in the next 10 to 15 years farm succession and transition will be a major issue facing agriculture. Unless there is a new generation of farmers, many active farms may go out of business and their land could be converted to non-farm uses. To counter this, the County needs to work with regional partners to promote farming as a viable career choice and to attract ag-entrepreneurs to Dutchess County. This Plan recommends enhancing mentor and apprenticeship programs, developing capital and financial incentives to attract interested young farmers to the County, and promoting agricultural education in County schools.

Regional Perspective

Although this Plan focuses specifically on farming and agri-business in Dutchess County, it also recognizes the importance of the agriculture industry throughout the Hudson Valley and the advantages to be gained by a regional approach to agricultural economic development. A regional perspective will enable Dutchess County to take advantage of opportunities to collaborate on initiatives that could include development of food processing facilities, food distribution systems, coordinated branding and marketing efforts, applications for state and federal funding, and land conservation efforts. Orange and Sullivan Counties are in the process of developing Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans; both Ulster and Columbia Counties are actively engaged in public and private efforts to support agri-business and protect farmland.

Specifically, the Plan recommends supporting the following regional activities:

- Identifying and providing support for a regional “Navigator” position to coordinate activities with regional significance, such as support for brick-and-mortar food processing operations.

- Establishing a regional task force to coordinate fund-raising efforts, developing substantive applications for major grants such as the NYS Consolidated Funding Awards for collaborative agri-business development and support.
• Coordinating development and distribution of county and regional economic data related to the agriculture industry.

• Coordinating the regional activities of partner agencies such as Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, recognizing and taking better advantage of the services they offer.

• Supporting establishment and expansion of existing multi-county technical and financial support systems for new farmers.

• Developing a regional brand identity.

• Working closely with County Tourism agencies to promote agri-tourism locally and throughout the region.

• Taking advantage of support offered by not-for profit organizations including Glynwood and the Local Economies Project, and local and regional land trusts that have developed plans that take a regional approach to resource protection and funding, such as Scenic Hudson’s Foodshed Conservation Plan for the Region.

This Plan recommends that the multi-county discussions that have taken place throughout this planning process be continued and expanded as appropriate to take full advantage of the forward momentum that agriculture in Dutchess County and the Mid-Hudson Valley is currently experiencing.

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The complete Draft Dutchess County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan is available on the following websites:

Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County, phone: 845-677-8223
www.ccedutchess.org/

Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District, phone: 845-677-8011 ext. 3
http://dutchessswcd.org/

Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, phone 845-486-3600
http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/countygov/departments/planning/plindex.htm