

What happens after passage of the agricultural commission by-law?

1. Steering committee and town leadership work together to solicit applicants for agricultural commission members.
2. Steering committee reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Select Board.
3. Select Board appoints members, assigns terms of service, and establishes date for convening first meeting.
4. First meeting business:
 - ✓ Identify facilitator and recorder.
 - ✓ Review by-law, focus on mission, membership, terms of service, and vote in officers.
 - ✓ Chair convenes first meeting:
 - Note Roberts Rules of Order.
 - Identify Needs, Priorities.
 - Establish goals
 - Begin development of work plan.
 - Implement Work Plan.
 - ☆ **Guiding principle:** Identify and work on achieving one or two measurable goals at a time... build success!
5. Seek involvement from community through a Circle of Friends.

Circle of Friends or Friends of Farmers

Agricultural Commission membership can leverage their resources by asking for help from others. Friends are people in the community (or connected to the community) that have skills and abilities that the Agricultural Commission needs to achieve their goals. A "friend" will be honored to assist if they are asked to volunteer time on a task that is focused, short term and achievable. Time volunteered by "friends" should be highly valued and respected.

Agricultural Commission Contacts

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A Guide to Organizing Town Agricultural Commissions

Provided by
The Pilgrim Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Area Council, Inc.
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What is a town agricultural commission?

A town agricultural commission is an appointed town standing committee whose members are primarily engaged in farming and are responsible for:

- Representing the farming community.
- Encouraging the pursuit of agriculture.
- Promoting agricultural-based economic opportunities.
- Preserving, revitalizing, and sustaining the communities' agricultural businesses and lands.

Communities are enabled by Massachusetts General Law to create standing committees through passage of a local by-law at Town Meeting.

Why are towns organizing agricultural commissions?

To address...

Master Plans: Protecting agricultural lands, preserving, rural character, and providing viable options for retaining the use of the land for agricultural purposes.

Open Space Surveys: 80 percent of respondents said that it is important to preserve farmland and agricultural businesses.

Town Planning: Retaining agricultural land and agricultural businesses happens by design and effort, not by chance.

Grassroots Advocacy: Providing a voice for farmers and farm businesses and improving the visibility of farming in your town.

What are town agricultural commissions doing?

Assessments

- ✓ Inventory farms, farmers and agricultural lands.

Information, education and outreach

- ✓ Identify farmer's needs, issues and concerns.
- ✓ Network with the agricultural community.
- ✓ Act as a point of contact.
- ✓ Inform farmers about where to get technical, educational, financial, and business assistance.

Networking, mediation and public awareness

- ✓ Develop trust and working relationships with farmers.
- ✓ Develop trust and working relationships with town boards, staff, environmental organizations, and legislators.
- ✓ Mediate and advocate on farming issues.
- ✓ Provide a voice and visibility for agriculture.
- ✓ Hold social gatherings and community events.

Farmland protection and agricultural economic development

- ✓ Request full use of your town's 120 day waiting period in Chapter 61 right-of-first-refusal process. Evaluate value of property for protection and publicize opportunity for its' agricultural use.
- ✓ Meet with farmers to explain farmland protection programs and connect farmers with appropriate resources.
- ✓ Connect farm owners and farm managers with available farm lands.
- ✓ Identify and establish sources of local funds for farmland protection.
- ✓ Leverage public and private funding for farmland protection.

How can my town organize an agricultural commission?

1. Identify leaders and organizers.
2. Assess interest. Talk to farmers, residents, boards and committees, and community decision makers.
3. Gather the support of farmers and town leadership.
4. Organize a public informational meeting.
5. Invite farmers through written letters of invitation, residents and the public through press releases and newspaper articles.
6. Request that members of established agricultural commissions speak about why they organized, what they do, and the benefits to agriculture.
7. Answer the questions: Is an agricultural commission important for our town? Do you think we should organize an agricultural commission in town?
8. Gain commitment from participants to serve on an agricultural commission steering committee.
9. Publicize newly established steering committee meetings.
10. Draft an agricultural commission by-law and town meeting warrant article with input from town boards and town counsel.
11. Research advocates and opposition.
12. Present article at Town Meeting for discussion and vote. Presentation is provided by well informed and prepared advocates.