

Ag Commission Newsletter #4 / February 2012

This is the 4th AgCom Newsletter and the first statewide newsletter, as previous newsletters have focused on western Mass. We will send these newsletters out periodically to keep AgComs up-to-date on current AgCom issues, upcoming events, ideas and projects of AgComs in western Mass, grant programs and deadlines, and other related items. Please let us know (at westover03@comcast.net) if your email address has changed or if you can provide email addresses for others on your AgCom. Thanks!

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1. **Mass Association of Ag Commissions (MAAC) Update**

The MAAC was organized last year to support Massachusetts' municipal Agricultural Commissions (AgComs). With help from local AgComs, the MAAC will strive to provide AgComs with the necessary services and education to bolster and advance their agricultural support work at the local level. MAAC will build support for agriculture in communities through effective relations with federal and state agencies, elected and appointed officials, private and nonprofit organizations and the public.

So far, more than 55 AgComs have joined the MAAC. Ideally, every AgCom in the commonwealth will join in the effort to make the MAAC an effective force in promoting local agriculture. MAAC plans a statewide AgCom conference roughly a year from now. The 2012 MAAC Annual Meeting will be held at the Sturbridge Host on the evening of Friday, Feb. 24.

All Massachusetts AgComs may become members of MAAC and no dues payment will be requested. Please take the time to discuss MAAC membership at your next meeting and vote on whether you choose to be a member. For more information on MAAC, Bylaws, and Board of Directors please visit <http://www.massagcom.org/about/maac.html> or contact Dick Ward at rjward7@comcast.net or (781) 361-5425.

MAAC Board members are:

Dick Ward, Carver AgCom, Plymouth County, President
Laura Sapienza-Grabski, Boxford AgCom, Essex County, Vice President
Laura Abrams, Sudbury AgCom, Middlesex County, Secretary,
Steve Damon, Gill AgCom, Franklin County
Mike Hogan, Ludlow AgCom, Hampden County
Jaime Wagner, Amherst AgCom, Hampshire County
Kathy Orlando, Sheffield AgCom, Berkshire County
Sue Guiducci, Dartmouth AgCom, Bristol County
Ed Lawton, Foxborough AgCom, Norfolk County
Mike Pineo, Sterling AgCom, Worcester County
Leslie Spencer, Barnstable AgCom, Barnstable County
Dwight Sipler, Mass Farm Bureau Federation
Steve Herbert, UMass School of Agriculture
Scott Soares, Commissioner, Mass Dept of Agricultural Resources

For more information on MAAC, Bylaws, and Board of Directors please visit:
<http://www.massagcom.org/about/maac.html>.

MAAC Membership Application

The Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions, Inc. (MAAC) was organized in 2010 to support local AgComs. With your input MAAC will strive to provide you with the necessary services and education to bolster and advance your work at the local level. All MA AgComs may become members of MAAC and no dues payment will be requested in 2011. Please take the time to discuss MAAC membership at your next meeting and vote on whether you choose to be a member. We look forward to your response.

On _____ the _____ Agricultural Commission voted:
(date) (town/city)

___ In favor of becoming a MAAC member ___ Not in favor of becoming a MAAC member

To help MAAC plan workshops, outreach and education, and training please check topics most important to your AgCom.

- ___ Laws affecting agriculture
- ___ "Backyard" farming issues
- ___ Agriculture & wetlands
- ___ Energy conservation & renewables
- ___ Ag & Boards of Health
- ___ Farmland Protection tools
- ___ Conflict management
- ___ Ag excise tax exemptions
- ___ Composting regulations
- ___ Funding AgCom activities
- ___ Network opportunities

Other: _____

Email Dick Ward at rjward7@comcast.net with any questions or other topics of importance to you. Please drop this application in the mail after your vote: Dick Ward, PO Box 74, Carver, MA 02330. Thank you!

2. Food Policy Councils

Urban municipalities in the commonwealth have established an urban analog of Agricultural Commissions known as Food Policy Councils. There are already Food Policy Councils in Boston, New Bedford, Worcester, and Holyoke, and a Regional Food Security Advisory Committee in Springfield. There is the possibility of Food Policy Councils for Fitchburg and other urban municipalities as well.

WHAT IS A CITY FOOD POLICY COUNCIL?

A food policy council is a local body whose members are primarily involved in food production, food systems, and food-related health and wellness issues. Food policy councils are urban analogs of agricultural commissions. They can be ad hoc citizen groups or, preferably, formally appointed city committees or commissions that are a part of city government.

WHAT DO FOOD POLICY COUNCILS DO?

- Work with AgComs in surrounding towns to strengthen connections between rural growers and urban consumers and retail outlets.
- Bring together low-income consumers, growers, non-profits, other businesses, food workers, community health centers, those involved in food processing and food waste management, and representatives of city government to create a city food policy.
- Identify and map neighborhoods where there is significant food insecurity.
- Encourage and assist growers with small-scale food production on vacant lots and other suitable land within the city, and mapping those sites for planning purposes.
- Support and publicize the creation, operation, and expansion of community gardens and farmers markets within the city and help increase the number of consumers of fresh food who will buy from those markets.
- Involve young people in food growing and food education.
- Farm to School: work with city schools to encourage the buying of fresh local food. Help schools replace junk-food vending machines with healthy snack-food supplies.
- Enlist the business community to help encourage the replacement of low-nutrition food outlets such as gas stations and convenience stores with stores and other outlets that carry fresh local produce.
- Support food demos and tasting to acquaint residents with hands-on healthy cooking.
- Improve the local food transportation system.
- Support the growing of ethnic crops.
- Support local composting, as with Milwaukee's "Growing Power."
- Develop opportunities for future greenhouses using waste heat from new or existing power generation facilities or businesses.
- Carry out networking with the Massachusetts Food Policy Councils and with other local food policy councils around the state.
- Work with other city boards to be sure that city zoning and other regulations are friendly to agriculture and contribute to a climate supportive of farming.

3. CISA Emergency Farm Fund

CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) has established an emergency zero-interest loan fund for western Mass farmers who have suffered agricultural loss and damage from Hurricane Irene. Loans of \$5,000 to \$10,000 with a 3-year repayment period are available for farms in Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden Counties whose gross sales for 2010 are \$20,000 or more. To apply for a loan or make a donation to the fund, visit www.buylocalfood.org. CISA is located at 1 Sugarloaf Street, South Deerfield, MA 01373, phone 413-665-7100.

4. The Land Access Project

Since last year, Land For Good of Keene, NH, has been coordinating a 2-1/2 year, New England-wide, USDA-funded effort called the Land Access Project. The project is intended to help beginning farmers make sound land acquisition choices; increase the number of exiting farm families prepared to transfer land to the next generation; make land held by non-farmers more available and affordable; connect farmers and property holders; and develop and promote innovative land acquisitions and transfer methods, models and contracts.

The project involves several task forces and will be publishing handbooks and website information on farmland leasing, farm transfer, and tenure innovations. The Listing and Linking Task Force is designing a new website designed to help farmers connect with available farmland throughout New England. The project has also started a series of workshops designed to encourage non-farming landowners (individuals, land trusts, towns, and institutions) to lease out their land and to guide them through the lease process. The next workshop will be held at the Mass Land Conservation Conference (run by the Mass Land Trust Coalition), to be held in Worcester on Saturday, March 24.

For more information about the Land Access Project, go to the Land for Good website, <http://www.landforgood.org/LAP/pages/whatsnew.html>.

5. Mass Farm Bureau White Paper on Proposed Legislation

2011- 2012 Legislative Session / April 19, 2011

An Act to promote farm viability – HB 1141 – Representative Kulik

- Creates a system by which municipal Board of Health regulations, which impact on agriculture, are submitted for review and approval to an Agricultural Review Board which includes experts in the fields of health and agriculture.
- The agricultural community has identified inappropriate BOH regulations as a major impediment to the growth and sustainability of agriculture in the Commonwealth.
- This bill does not pre-empt BOHs. It helps to ensure that municipal health regulations governing agriculture are written with a sound understanding of agriculture. This is simply good governance.

Bill to create a state meat inspection program at the Department of Agricultural Resources HB 3351 – Representative Kulik

- There is huge demand for local meat and there is sufficient production capacity on MA farms to meet this demand. However there are only 2 USDA inspected red meat processing facilities in MA (both in northern MA). There are no USDA inspected poultry processing facilities in MA.
- Regulatory uncertainty and quagmire is a major barrier to creating new meat processing facilities.
- Would combine state and federal oversight of slaughter, cutting and packing within DAR.
- USDA would pick up ½ the cost of the new program.
- Maine, Vermont and Connecticut have passed similar legislation. Maine, which is furthest along in their program, doubled the number of slaughter and processing facilities within the first few years of the program.

An act to promote economic stimulus in natural resource based small businesses – HB 3554 - Representative Dykema

- Expands an existing 3% tax credit for *incorporated* agriculture and fishing operations to those which are not incorporated.
- The vast majority of MA farms and many small fishing operations are **not** incorporated.
- This modest tax break could provide significant stimulus and tax revenue in rural communities which are currently suffering more than urban areas in the down economy. A new barn means work for carpenters and electricians and sales for lumberyards, etc.
- Farms will never pickup and move overseas! This is a sound investment for the Commonwealth and helps to build infrastructure for the local food system and food security.

An act to strengthen and expand the Board of Agriculture – HB 3221 Representative Hogan

- The Board of Agriculture provides oversight and guidance to the Department of Agricultural Resources. The current Board is too small to represent the increasing diversity of Massachusetts agriculture.
- The bill would expand the Board of Agriculture from 7 to 13 members to better represent the diversity of Massachusetts Agriculture.
- It would also set term limits to ensure fresh membership and perspectives.

An act relative to the distribution of raw milk – HB 1995 – Representative Gobi

- Farmers may currently only sell raw milk from the farm.
- The bill would allow them to deliver milk to customers, either themselves or through a contractor.
- This would expand the ability of dairy farmers to sell directly to the consumer – often a key in Massachusetts where land, labor and regulatory costs are among the highest in the nation.
- The Farmer would maintain a contractual relationship with the end consumer.
- All existing labeling and notifications would remain in place.
- DAR would have authority to regulate storage, transportation, etc.

An Act to promote the care and well-being of livestock – SB 335 – Senator Brewer

- Creates a Livestock Care and Standards Board which consists of farmers, humane groups, veterinarians and other interested parties.
- DAR, with 2/3 concurrence of the board may promulgate guidance and/or regulations governing the keeping and care of livestock.
- As MA farmers more frequently deal directly with consumers, they want to be able to point to a local system by which humane issues are addressed in an open public forum.
- Washington-based special interest groups are active in MA trying to push their agenda through legislation and PR. The Livestock Care and Standards Board would help ensure decisions impacting local agriculture are also made locally!

An Act to promote environmentally sound transportation of agricultural products – SB 1725 – Senator Brewer

- Current law prohibits trucks and trailers with farm plates from carrying in excess of 60,000 lbs (including the weight of the trailer), even if the vehicle is rated to carry more than this.
- This limit results in increased use of fossil fuels and related emissions, as well as increased labor costs and wear on equipment.
- The bill would allow vehicles with farm plates to carry up to their rated capacity. Bridge and local road weight limits would remain in effect.

Note that as of publication of this bulletin, there may be bills that have been filed that we would support that we are not aware of yet. For an updated bulletin, please contact Brad Mitchell at 508.481.4766.

6. APRs and the Role of AgComs in Using the Community Preservation Act (CPA)

Many AgComs have been instrumental in helping their towns approve the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to generate local funds (matched by state funds) to help protect open space and agricultural land. Towns that have the CPA in place can use CPA funds to provide the local match for Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs). AgComs will need to educate CPA Committees about the importance of facilitating APR applications to make sure the chance to protect farmland is not lost. Towns can also reserve CPA funds for use in future years if there are no APR applications ready to go.

For more information about the CPA, go to the website of the Community Preservation Coalition, <http://www.communitypreservation.org/>.

7. Mass Office of Dispute Resolution's Agricultural Mediation Clinic

The Mass Office of Dispute Resolution offers the following free service for AgComs and others:

Agricultural Mediation Clinic

The Agricultural Mediation "AgMed" Clinic was created by the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) in order to respond to the agricultural community's need for professional mediation, conflict resolution and meeting facilitation services. This clinic was made possible by a grant from the University of MA Boston. [Link to Brochure describing Agricultural Clinic \(pdf\)](#)

The goal of MOPC's AgMed Clinic is to support sustainable agriculture in the Commonwealth by helping individuals and organizations engaged in agriculture to come together in a constructive way to resolve their disputes and disagreements. The AgMed Clinic will provide a variety of professional services at no cost to farmers. Some of the services that are offered by the AgMed Clinic are:

Mediation

Mediation is a voluntary, confidential and flexible process in which a neutral third party mediator assists negotiations between two or more disputing parties. Parties in mediation are able to devise creative solutions, often in **less time** at **less cost** and with **greater satisfaction** than through litigation. Equally important benefits of mediation lie in the high quality of settlements and the durability of agreements, which result from the process.

MOPC has assembled a small panel of highly trained mediators who have education/background in substantive areas such as **agriculture, land use, zoning, and environmental issues**. MOPC also has mediators available through the clinic who have expertise in resolving **family and interpersonal disputes** which can arise in the context of the "family farm".

An example of some of the issues that can be mediated through the AgMed Program are:

- Land use and zoning disputes
- Nuisance disputes with neighbors (noise, smell, traffic, etc.)
- Environmental issues
- Other issues involving farmers or those engaged in agriculture which, if not resolved, threaten the economic viability of the farm

MOPC's AgMed mediators are chosen through a vigorous selection process and are held to the highest ethical standards of practice. **Mediators have no decision-making authority**. Therefore, if all of the parties do not

voluntarily and cooperatively reach an agreement, the mediation is closed and all parties remain free to pursue other legal actions.

There are several benefits to mediation including:

- Mediation is an opportunity for the parties themselves, not a judge to determine the outcome;
- Mediation is an opportunity for the parties to come together to clarify issues and explore options for possible settlement;
- Mediation can usually be done at no cost to the parties;
- Mediation can often help to mend personal and professional relationships;
- Mediation is informal and confidential

Facilitation

Group facilitation is a process in which a person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral, and has no decision-making authority intervenes to help a group improve the way this group identifies and solves the problem and makes decisions, in order to increase the group's effectiveness. Facilitator builds agenda and procedures of meetings so that members, responsible for the decision making, can focus on the content. It is extremely useful when important meetings involving numerous participants are held.

Through the AgMed Clinic, MOPC can provide trained, professional facilitators who can work with groups, such as an Agricultural Commission or other town boards, to help plan and organize their work in a collaborative and efficient way. A facilitator can also be utilized to make public meetings and decision making processes go more smoothly. MOPC Facilitators are well trained in helping group set an effective agenda, define problems, resolve these problems through brain-storming, and make final decisions by consensus or other agreed upon process.

Training

The AgMed Clinic can also provide low cost or when funding permits, no cost training and skill-building workshops for the agricultural community on a variety of topics including:

- Conflict Resolution & Prevention
- Effective Meeting Management
- Negotiation
- Consensus Building

MOPC is fortunate to have a cadre of very experienced dispute resolution professionals and trainers who have particular context area expertise. They can teach farmers and members of the agricultural community how to prevent conflict in their every day life and how to effectively manage and resolve conflict once it has occurred. Our workshops will help participants to learn how to understand conflict, how to listen effectively, deal with anger and emotions, and how to negotiate and craft durable agreement settlements.

Participants have an opportunity to learn real skills that will help them handle conflicts and are able to practice these newly learned skills through role-plays that mirror the conflict situations they face in their daily work. Skill building can focus on a variety of areas, from conflict analysis and prevention, to creative problem solving, to negotiating with challenging personalities.

How to access AgMED Clinic Services

To access services through MOPC's AgMed Clinic or to refer a matter, please contact:

Loraine M. Della Porta, Clinic Director at: (617) 287-4040 or Toll Free at (888) 869-1898

You may also mail requests to: MOPC UMass Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, M-1-627, Boston, MA 02125 or fax requests to (617) 287-4049.

Examples of MOPC's Work:

- **Workshops on Conflict Resolution and Effective Meeting Management** for Agricultural Commissions in southeastern and western Massachusetts
- **Communication Workshop** for the Department of Agricultural Resources' Farm Viability Enhancement Program
- **Conference Workshops on Negotiation** for the South Eastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership's Business to Business Conference and National Organic Farmers Association
- **Mediation re Family-owned Orchard** - Farm Viability experts discovered that the financial situation of farm that had applied for their program was much more complicated than previously understood, and that the family, who owned the farm, had to make a strategic decision as to how the farm will be managed. Family mediation, requested by Farm Viability, was completed in three sessions. The family agreed to sell the farm, thereby saving their houses from foreclosure.

AGRICULTURAL LINKS

Coalition of Agricultural Mediation Programs: agecon.nmsu.edu/mediation/camp.htm

USDA Farm Service Agency, Agricultural Mediation: www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/html/mediate02.htm

8. Local Purchasing Resolutions

Cambridge City Council passed the following resolution on Feb 11, 2008:

WHEREAS: The City of Cambridge is promoting eating fresh fruits and vegetables by all its residents and especially its children; and

WHEREAS: The freshest fruits and vegetables are those that area grown locally by Massachusetts farmers; and

WHEREAS: The Massachusetts state legislature has allowed local municipalities to express a local preference; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That pursuant to MGO c.30b (Purchases of Massachusetts Agricultural Products), it is the stated preference of the City of Cambridge that all government bodies, including the city's schools, make every effort to purchase agricultural products, grown or produced as part of a Massachusetts farming operation. This preference extends to stating such preference when any governmental body is advertising for bids or contracts for purchases of agricultural products of \$25,000 or more.

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Following are some from the recent Massachusetts Farm to School Legislation (School Nutrition Bill) courtesy of the Farm to School Project:

State agencies INCLUDING PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES “...*shall, in advertising for bids, contracts or otherwise procuring products of agriculture, make reasonable efforts to facilitate the purchase of such products of agriculture grown or produced... in the commonwealth. The state purchasing agent... shall purchase the products of agriculture grown ...in the commonwealth, unless the price of the goods exceeds, by more than 10 percent, the price of products of agriculture grown... outside of the commonwealth.*”

For public school systems, governed by Chapter 30B, an amendment was written to clarify that they can make multiple purchases from Mass. Farmers during the course of a year. “*A procurement officer who follows sound business practices may award contracts which include individual purchases of less than \$25,000 to Massachusetts farm operations for the procurement of products of agriculture... that are grown in the commonwealth... without seeking quotations....*”

For the complete text of the School Nutrition Bill go to:

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/house/186/ht04pdf/ht04919.pdf>.

9. Notes from Recent Regional AgCom Gatherings - Hancock Shaker Village Jan 14, 2012 / Deerfield Dec 10, 2011 / Halifax Nov 16, 2011

Notes from Hancock AgCom Gathering Jan 14, 2012

Speakers:

Judy Leab, Hancock AgCom - welcomed participants to Hancock and talked about Hancock AgCom.

Dick Ward, MAAC President - (couldn't attend but sent remarks):

"I'm Dick Ward President of our Mass Association of AgComs. I enjoy coming to meetings of AgComs more than any other meeting that I can think of. I feel like I am surrounded by friends!!!! We are the salt of the earth!!!! Agricultural needs to stay around. I say that because, preserving Agriculture or conserving Agriculture sounds like we are dealing with something about the past. Although we do want to preserve and conserve Ag, it is here now and in simple terms we want to keep it rolling and expand it if we can for the sake of our children, our grandchildren, and our state and its citizens. Furthermore we cannot fight amongst our selves. I'm not going to mention the different types of farmers we are, but remember it is the job of our enemies (if we have enemies) to divide, and so to speak, conquer us. So it is the job of the MAAC to advocate and fight for Agriculture through the whole state - all forms of Agriculture.

We need to encourage towns with any Agricultural interests to establish an AgCom in their town. It will put farming in their town on the map and keep you at the table with other town boards and committees. My terminology, and I stole this from a car add I saw in TV, is "THE POWER OF PRESENCE." Once you establish yourself and have reached out to your neighbors and asked for their support, you will be surprised at the support you will receive back from them. We have nearly 150 Town AgComs around the state now, more than 55 of which are members of the MAAC. There is simple a need to expand our state organization's membership. We can be a lot more effective in fighting for issues for farmers if we can show strength in numbers. So if your town is not a member of the MAAC, please go back to your AgCom and strongly consider joining the Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions. Remember there is no dollar cost to join us. We need your support. Thank you!!

Commissioner Scott Soares - Scott cited the state map showing 148 AgComs, 117 towns with Right to Farm Bylaws, and a handful of Food Policy Councils, which are the urban analogs of AgComs who are in a position to advocate for Farm to School and make the connection between urban food consumers and rural producers. Scott went over many of the Dept of Ag Resources' 40 main programs and current projects:

- Communications: The Farm and Market Report is sent out periodically and is available on the Dept's website, www.mass.gov/agr/. Also on the website is the "MassGrown" homepage, a complete list of Mass Grown or produced products. The mobile version of MassGrown has a QR code that helps you find food and farm destinations through your smartphone.
- Educating Legislators: A new Agriculture Report will be out by Ag Day. It shows the impact of agriculture and the Green Communities Act on economic development and job growth. There has been a 30% growth in farm income between 2007 and 2011. The Dept's goal is to educate a large public sector about agriculture in the state.
- Development of a Year-Round Public Market at 136 Blackstone St, Boston: funding comes from a \$10 million bond issue and is expected to bring \$18 million a year in revenue. It will tie in with farmers markets and the agriculture, fishing, and forestry

communities.

- The Mass Food Policy Council started last year, is chaired by Scott, and identifies areas that will strengthen agriculture in the commonwealth.
- Dairy Support: as a result of errors determined by the Massachusetts Board of Food and Agriculture in the calculation of the 2010 Dairy Farmer Tax Credit due to data provided by the USDA, The Dept engaged Dan Lass to recalculate the Massachusetts dairy cost-of-production for 2010. This recalculation resulted in a dairy tax credit for 2010 of \$3 million that has already been distributed to Massachusetts dairy farmers. As a result of the federal milk market order, milk prices have been as low as an average of \$1 a gallon, with an average cost of \$1.80 to produce. Dairy is regarded as a cornerstone industry, with 150 dairy farms in Massachusetts. Among other things, dairies are important for the land base they support. The Dairy Farm Preservation Act includes other dairy-support provisions: a low-interest loan program, a dairy farm income tax credit, the extension of farm viability funds to APR farms, a dairy promotion board, and a local option to exempt farms from personal property tax on farm animals and equipment.
- Cost Reductions: as an example The Dept is using on-line instead of expensive printed publications. Contributions from commodity groups like the Nursery and Landscape Association help offset costs for the development of market and promotion campaigns such as that using “QR” codes that link users to an online map of agricultural operations across the Commonwealth.
- The Commonwealth Quality Program is intended to an alternative to the federal GAP program relative to the implementation of food safety measures and it is intended to help get premium prices for agricultural products. The Dept is also working to achieve better access to food (e.g. through the SNAP program) for those who can't afford premium prices.
- APR program is the oldest in the country; Mass is the top state in the country in leveraging federal FRPP funds with its APR program.
- The Mass Ag Energy Program awarded 32 grants in 2011, leverages additional federal funds for solar, wind, other farm energy improvements, and now in Rutland a dairy anaerobic digester.
- The Mass Gleaning Network includes farms, volunteers, service agencies, food banks and other organizations. MDAR serves as a clearinghouse for the network where members can tap into a vetted and extensive database to facilitate participation in gleaning projects in their own communities. MDAR's mission is to educate constituents about gleaning and the impact they can make in their community by participating.
- The Farm to School Project has helped provide access to local products for more than 60% of Massachusetts registered students in School Districts across the Commonwealth.
- Disaster Relief. Viewed some Valley farms that had lost 8 feet of topsoil. Governor's request for a disaster declaration was granted and funding has been made available as a result through the USDA FSA. CISA has a \$100,000 no-interest storm relief loan fund.
- Budget for FY 2013 - not rosy. State revenues are up but higher costs for health care and union contracts make thing tight. MDAR lost 8 staff last year and is looking out for other partnerships to help out. Upcoming budget hearings are important - all constituents need to show up. Worcester County Beekeepers have set a good example. Once the governor's budget comes out, the legislature will develop its budget.
- Energy and health are priorities for the coming year. The Dept is emphasizing health, e.g. taking the stairs instead of the elevator through it's 'two for you' campaign where club members are encouraged to add at least two 'healthy lifestyle' activities to the daily routines. Support for wholesale food sales is also a priority.
- MDAR has met with representatives from UMass to discuss the development of a report that presents the economic impact of Massachusetts agriculture.
- The federal Farm Bill may be postponed until after the November election.

Roundtable Discussion: Resource people included Bob Ritchie, Frank DiLuna, Rick Chandler, Barbara Zheutlin, Amy Kacala, Melissa Adams, Aimee Thayer.

There is the possibility of a small-grant program for AgComs. Kathy Orlando asked how many AgComs present have a budget (only 3, and those are for \$250, \$400, and \$2,000 (Great Barrington). Sheffield's is \$250; another \$250 was rejected by Town Meeting. Lanesboro promised to do other things to raise funds, e.g. an upcoming rabies clinic.

Rick Chandler mentioned the MDAR business training courses. Demand is up, especially among young career changers and older folks chasing their dreams. Courses are held in Amherst, Marlboro, and SE Mass.

Berkshire Regional Farm Plan. Aimee Thayer at FSA is a co-partner with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission in a BRPC sustainability grant. Barbara Zheutlin at Berkshire Grown is working closely with Glynwood Center's Keep Farming initiative. Amy Kacala at BRPC is the project manager for the Sustainable Berkshires Regional Plan.

Signs. Towns are still having trouble getting Mass Highway permission to put up Right to Farm signs. BRPC and MAAC might help put pressure on. Ashfield puts RTF notice on tax bills. Berkshire County realtors get notice of Right to Farm. Bob Ritchie suggests using private land just off the state right-of-way. Mass Highway will help locate the edge of the highway layout. Ownership of town-line signs is probably with the state. Bruce Howden reported that the state will take down un-permitted signs and posts. He had to spend \$2,000 for the purchase and installation of 3 farm signs. Frank recommended that legislators be kept informed of the interest in getting farm signs allowed, possibly at Ag Day at the State House. Jim Kelly recommended that MAAC help design a standard sign for all towns to use and suggested a sign contest. Signs could be permitted by executive order of the governor (which Bob Ritchie says is "a law the governor can't get passed."). Sarah Hudson recommended including the names of sponsoring organizations. Peter Gallant recommended sending in signatures of Select Board members; Frank suggested doing that through the Mass Municipal Association. Dave Sheldon suggested a standard wording - "Egremont, A Right to Farm Community." Private speech protected by the First Amendment trumps zoning so if the sign's language is political it can't be prohibited. It was left that the MAAC will coordinate an effort to get signs permitted.

Solar Installations on Farmland. Richard Jaeske from Northampton asked about review of proposed solar installations on open farmland. MDAR will post a legal memo (along with others already on the dept's website) on renewable energy and its impact on ag resources, with the emphasis on avoiding a reduction in agricultural production and a shift in the primary use of the land. Frank reported that farmers are being inundated with proposals from energy developers who want green credits by converting ag land to energy development. If land thus changed is under 61A the change will trigger rollback payments. APR land is not eligible for solar installations unless they produce electricity just for the farm. In Harvard is an example of a solar array that offsets orchard costs. MaryBeth Merritt reported that Great Barrington is working on an overlay district for renewable energy. Towns do not qualify for green-energy tax-break credits. Private developers value the tax credits higher than the sale of the electricity generated. Northampton AgCom does site plan review for solar arrays.

Bob Ritchie suggested keeping an eye on CLURPA, the proposed land use reform bill. Section 5N governs alternative energy on farms. The Dept can designate where a facility goes and how large it is. Runaway revenues from energy development will not be allowed. Third party investors are trying to come in to take energy profits out. Bruce Howden said that the utility does not write checks for the electricity generated by the solar panels he owns, just records it on the meter against electricity consumed. Barbara Zheutlin asked which towns have written provisions to deal with renewable energy. Rick said the Ashfield and Shutesbury Planning

Boards are working on draft bylaws. BRPC can help with sample bylaws for large-scale ground-mounted solar installations. Gerry Palano, Alternative Energy Specialist for MDAR, can help advise on energy questions and grant assistance and can explain how the Green Communities Act works. Info is needed on the websites of Mass Farm Bureau and MAAC (www.massagcom.org).

Bob mentioned the **Agricultural Law Memos** hidden (like potatoes in a field) in the A-Z list on the MDAR website. MDAR can't help advise on specific cases but can provide general interpretations. Frank DiLuna, who is general counsel for Mass Farm Bureau, the Cranberry Growers Association, and others, can help on specific cases. On Tuesday is a hearing in Haverhill, which is misguidedly trying to ban pigs.

Other issues: Food sovereignty. Having the MAAC website provide links and resources and heads-ups.

Jesse-Nathan Steadman, a Tufts University graduate student who is working at New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, described the New Entry programs. New Entry helps small-scale farmers start up. Challenges are access to capital, land and health care. Mass has lost 100,000 acres of farmland since 1982, now has 517,000 acres including 187,000 acres in cropland in production. Farmers who lease land tend to have higher net income than those who own. New Entry runs a farm business planning course, an incubator farm site in Dracut, and a Farmland Matching Service.

New Entry recently mapped potential farmland in all of Middlesex County, starting with Groton and Littleton. Groton, which is adjacent to Lowell and near the New Entry Lowell office, is #8 in the state in recent farmland lost. The mapping project started with prime soils and added land being farmed. The AgCom helped refine the map with ground-truth information. A workshop on the mapping project attracted 50 people, including 4 new landowners interested in leasing their land out. New Entry is looking for more project areas for the mapping effort. Jesse's email is jesse-nathan.steadman@tufts.edu.

Peter Gallant mentioned the importance of lease-to-purchase arrangements, which New Entry includes in its recommendations. SPIN farming is another effort. Sheffield is working to identify locally important (as opposed to state-important and prime) soils. The mapping is a way to kickstart AgCom activity. Question: could mapping of processing sites be done? Yes - not yet but potentially in the future.

Amy Kacala is with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. Melissa Adams is a contractor with MDAR working on the APR Viability Program, works for Glynwood in the Keep Farming project, and works with the Farm to School Program. Keep Farming emphasizes getting local data to inform farm planning decisions. A regional approach with BRPC helps locals make sure things get implemented. The routine for Keep Farming projects, which have taken place in Great Barrington, Northampton, and other towns, includes (1) organizing, (2) analyzing data, and (3) developing an action plan with advice from farmers.

A three-year Berkshire planning project has focused on 2 of the 5 Berkshire planning areas (southwest Berkshires and northern Berkshires), with north-central next. Great Barrington started the ball rolling, since it wanted to work with adjacent Egremont and Sheffield. The project set up task forces on (1) local foods (where are they sold? are needs unmet?) (2) urban and natural habitat (community gardens etc), (3) agricultural economics (who farms? what is economic impact?) and (4) health and nutrition (health challenges and the role of food). The project involves many Berkshire County AgComs and some of the colleges. North Adams has a Comprehensive Plan in the works.

Melissa Adams gave an update on the Farm to School Project. Farm to School has been operating for 5 to 6 years, and is now involved with 217 school districts. Over the past 2 years the number of colleges and private schools involved has gone from 19 to 81. Farms selling to schools have gone from 25 to 110. Farm to School knows which farms and which schools are enrolled and can help make contacts. Farmers involved tend to sell to more than one school district each, and most already have a wholesale route. Mass Harvest Week is set for September, with samples, posters, and education for students and families. Farm to School will help with regulations, budgets, contracts, and distributors. A recent survey of participating farmers showed that most want to continue, most are showing a profit from school sales, and the 42 farmers responding to the survey have shown a total gross of \$1.3 million. The top products are apples, tomatoes, and winter lettuce and other greens grown through season-extending greenhouses etc. Schools do not have to buy the cheapest food. Cambridge, Amherst, and Hatfield have passed local preferential buying ordinances.

Suggestions

For future workshops (e.g. Spring 2013 MAAC Statewide Conference): farm signs, insurance liability for self-pick by schools, urban agriculture (opportunities and challenges), season-extension structures & zoning (e.g. zoning to allow hoop-houses and greenhouses), role of AgComs and how to chair, AgCom roles and responsibilities, networking, crossing municipal lines & working together, Board of Health regs and advice, policy and farm bill, farm business planning (tips & success stories), Food Policy Councils, legal issues, Right to Farm and signage issues, include a young farmer story, how to interest school children and young, busy families; basics of AgCom purpose, model AgComs making presentations on what they have done; what do AgComs do best? (a,b,c, and why and workshops on a,b,c) as opposed to dead-ends and quicksand, where and why are they most effective - to help AgComs understand their role and mission; info analyzing stages of development (years one-two pass Right to Farm, year three-five...); understanding beginning farmer issues, farm-to-school partnerships, tips for dealing with and working with larger collaboratives; green-energy, wind, solar.

What would you use a small AgCom grant for?

Community outreach to schools and seniors; research, survey and community forum to develop urban agriculture policy for Great Barrington; local ag fair, seed exchange, advertising; signage; promotional leaflets, Ag promotion; supporting seeds to students program and the establishment of a school garden; creation of a marketing map of local farms and businesses that support farms and sell local products; support Keep Farming initiative; advertising of farms, orchards, greenhouses with locations and seasons.

Notes from Deerfield AgCom Gathering Dec 10, 2011

Speakers:

Cheryl Lekstrom, Mass Farm Bureau and MDAR Contractor (cheryl@mfbf.net) - AgComs can request free membership in Mass Farm Bureau. Email Cheryl for details.

Bob Ritchie, MDAR General Counsel (bob.ritchie@state.ma.us) - described a wide range of MDAR programs:

- Support for Food Policy Councils, which are AgCom equivalents in urban areas like New Bedford, Holyoke, Springfield.
- Support for AgComs and creation of updated state AgCom map showing 148 AgComs and 116 Right to Farm Bylaws plus a handful of Food Policy Councils.
- Commonwealth Quality Program, which is MDAR's equivalent of GAP but with less

paperwork.

- Dairy Farm Tax Credit program – federal price constraints have kept Mass dairy prices low; the tax credit program, through the Ag Board and MDAR, resets the trigger price to benefit 235 dairies for the year 2010.
- Technology Review Committee – will report back to the governor and legislature on new ag technologies and regulatory impediments to farm operations.
- Ag Energy Grants - \$455,000 were awarded (from more than a million in applications).
- Other Programs: Gleaning Program, Ag Business Training Courses.

Jaime Wagner and Steve Damon, MAAC Board: 56 AgComs are MAAC members (dues are free). To join, contact MAAC Chair Dick Ward of the Carver AgCom, rjward7@verizon.net. There will be a winter or spring 2013 MAAC-sponsored statewide AgCom conference with various workshops. This coming winter MAAC will hold its annual board meeting on Feb 24 at the Sturbridge Host.

Roundtable – reports from each Ag Commission moderated by Phil Korman.

- Phil Korman, CISA & Northampton (Phil@buylocalfood.org): CISA now represents 318 businesses and puts out 55,000 copies of its farm publication, Locally Grown Farm Products Guide. Phil described the new revolving loan fund recently established for farmers who experienced flooding and other damage from Hurricane Irene and other storms. The loan fund has \$100,000 to allocate as no-interest loans with a 3-year payback and no payments the first year. The loan fund expects repayment so it can continue in future years as other needs arise. There is a 3-week application turnover time. The hyperlink for the loan fund for farmers who want to apply is <http://www.buylocalfood.org/page.php?id=619>.
- Northampton AgCom recently supported a townwide referendum vote that came out 70-30 in favor of retaining the city's CPA (Community Preservation Act). CPA funds are often used to provide the local match for APR purchases. Another issue is making the farmers market accessible to more towns and to those with food stamps and SNAP cards.
- David Schochet, Shelburne Open Space Committee: The OS Committee is working closely with the AgCom.
- Jaime Wagner, Amherst: Amherst has recently focused on leasing town land for farming and new Wednesday and winter farmers markets.
- Bill Obear, Whately: CPA is providing the local match for APR's. Whately is searching for a way of streamlining the CPA allocation process to make it more predictable. Bob Wagner of Hatfield suggested that the town request a vote to establish a standing APR fund in which CPA funds could accumulate and be spent by the AgCom as needed. The AgCom helped pass an ag overlay zoning district with tuned-up, more attractive cluster housing, double-acreage back land requirement with resultant fewer houses. Whately has also coped with a rooster complaint issue.
- Bob Mizula and Donna Francis, Montague: working on a draft Right to Farm Bylaw. Their challenge is letting the town know they are in business. Montague also held a public forum to sound out residents about the role of the revived AgCom.
- Dave Freeman, Heath: This year they have installed "Heath - Right to Farm Community" signs using a laminated design over old highway sign and showing a tractor, a bull, and a rooster. (See a photo of the signs on the last page of these notes.) The lamination was created by Marty's Repair in Colrain, 413-624-3083. The Select Board has also tried to set a minimum setback distance for fences, which the AgCom was not consulted about but is opposing (stone walls don't move). Heath has been coping with neighbor issues: yard lights (a new neighbor has complained and the AgCom helped explain standard practices), and a property with trash everywhere (beyond normal practices, so the Board of Health was called in).

- Pete Mitchell and Lisa Turner, Hawley: Hoping to do a farm inventory, wrestling with the definition of a farm, working on a farmers market.
- Laurel and Bill Facey, Wendell: Have wrestled with bee and turkey farm issues. The town energy committee has hired a person (who next year will be Judy Hall, the 2nd in the position) to work with community gardens, set up a harvest dinner, run annual events. The National Animal Identification System has reared its head again, and raw milk sales are also an issue.
- Andrea Burns, Easthampton: The fairly new AgCom has a good mix of old and new farmers. It started by sponsoring a chicken ordinance to allow backyard chickens. Easthampton also passed a Farm to School resolution and has community gardens and a farmers market that may be moved to a better location. Smith College students are soon presenting an inventory of farms in town.
- Anna Hanchett, Plainfield: Hoping to get new people involved. Interested in a mapping effort. Other boards consult with the AgCom.
- Melissa Adams, Williamsburg and MDAR: She runs the APR Improvement Program and will be regular staff for the Keep Farming Program of Glynwood, replacing Andrea Burns in western Mass. Williamsburg's challenge is to keep things going. A farmers group is focusing on finding a gathering place and is now working with the AgCom.
- Pat Skaza, New Salem: Has passed a Right to Farm Bylaw, done a survey for community gardens, is collecting farm information and is thinking about fundraisers.
- Steve Taylor and Carolyn Ness, Deerfield: Have coped with environmental disputes, are working on highway signs and a farm map. Carolyn is working on watershed planning with DEP, DOT, and others, and discussing disaster relief with FEMA and EPA. She is chair of the Association of Conservation Districts and involved with NEW (New England Watersheds) with a focus on the Connecticut River. We are seeing a 20% increase in precipitation from 200 years ago.
- Grace Adzima, Belchertown: The AgCom is working with the school purchasing agent to maintain the farm-to-school connection. They have held forums on estate planning, forestry, other subjects.
- Tom Petcen and Bob Wagner, Hatfield: Many farmers have less than 5 acres and still operate farmstands. They would like to find a way, maybe through legislation that could be pushed by Farm Bureau through county resolutions, to tax farms with 2 or more acres under Chap 61A. They have held a forestry workshop, an annual harvest festival, a 5K race, and sponsor a mural project with the high school art department. Murals have been displayed at the Mass Building at the Big E. They also are involved in the Farm to School program and have a farmstand guide. With advice from the Community Preservation Coalition, the town has set aside \$300,000 of CPA funds to be used for future APRs.
- George Hunt, Orange: Question about APR eligibility for farms like the Moore farm with a high percentage of woods.
- Brenda Putney, Royalston: AgCom is just starting, the town has passed the CPA and Right to Farm Bylaw. They are concerned with the need to educate townspeople about buying from local farms, as they seem to have a supermarket mentality.
- Cindy Camp, Montgomery: The challenge is getting people to meetings. Montgomery has Right to Farm and road signs.
- Carrie Novak, FSA and Templeton: Working with Beginning Farmer program. Templeton made contact with Dick Ward of MAAC for assistance. Earlier Templeton had helped Phillipston farmers persuade the SelectBoard of the need for an AgCom.
- Wendy Abramson and Gloria Meluleni, Bernardston: Have held a farm forum to hear from farmers and others about goals. Non-farmers can be valuable members of AgComs if they are pro-farming. The town just lost one of its last two dairy farms. AgCom is working on passing an excise tax exemption.
- Discussion of farmers markets: There is now a glut of farmers markets. CISA is working

on the need to increase demand for local food. Discussion of Bernardston's "Farm Table" restaurant; its chef buys locally using farm guides and CISA's Local Hero list.

- Steve Damon reporting on Greenfield AgCom: The town passed Right to Farm, the mayor vetoed it, the Town Council overrode the veto so the bylaw is now in place.
- Steve Damon, Gill: The town has a state grant for drains; is working on getting an FFA member from Franklin County Tech School as a member of the AgCom.
- Frank DiLuna and Bob Ritchie re the definition of a farm: The state has no 5-acre minimum other than to qualify for Chap 61A and the APR program. Under legislation passed last year, farms are protected from being zoned out of business if they are over 2 acres and gross at least \$1,000. Boxford recognizes recreational farms (horse farms). Bob Wagner asked if a town can vote to allow 61A designation for farms of less than 5 acres. Bob Ritchie: no, unless there is new legislation; Farm Bureau would typically work to gather county resolutions to create and pass such legislation. There is no statutory authority for AgComs or Right to Farm Bylaws except Home Rule. Bill Obear reported that Whately has decided that a farm is a farm if it files a Schedule F tax report. Other towns have said that a farm is a farm if it has an NRCS farm plan. Frank DiLuna: it is important to work closely with Boards of Health and to help them understand Best Management Practices. The Select Board is the civil authority, the Board of Health the regulatory authority.
- Mediation function: For help recommending resolutions to disputes, AgComs should call Loraine Della Porta at the Mass Office of Dispute Resolution. That office offers a free mediation clinic service for AgComs. Under the Open Meeting Law, site visits are allowed by an unadvertised quorum as long as no deliberation takes place at the visit.
- Meeting location: Can AgCom meetings be held at a private home? Yes, if it is accessible to handicapped and can accommodate everyone who might want to attend, but it is not necessarily recommended practice.
- Possible small-grant program for AgComs: Steve Kulik and his aide Paul Dunphy are working on the possibility, with the proviso that any state-budgeted funds for the purpose must not subtract from funds that would ordinarily go to MDAR. On a questionnaire passed around by Phil Korman, AgComs at the meeting said that such a grant program would be helpful for items like the following which were listed on the questionnaire and suggested a \$100 match to be put up by each AgCom receiving a grant:
 - Town match for regional planning agency services
 - Mailings
 - Public outreach
 - Establishing a website or webpage on town website
 - Business cards
 - Training workshops
 - Right-to-Farm road signs
 - Purchasing books and other resources
 - Creating and printing farm brochures to promote local produce
 - Creating a brochure on living near a farm
 - "Slow-tractor" signs
 - Projects and activities with local schools
 - Surveys and inventories of farms and town land
 - Food for local events
 - Advertising
 - Speaker fees and workshops expenses
 - Community events
 - Conference attendance for AgCom members
 - Sponsoring a 4-H club
 - Surveys of farmers to determine areas of greatest need
 - Supporting agricultural projects and activities with local schools
 - Matching funds for other grants
 - Getting community gardens off the ground

- Community education.

Dianne Doherty, Director of the Mass Small Business Development Center: spoke about services offered by MSBDC (with offices in Springfield and Northampton and staff visits to Greenfield): confidential one-on-one business advisory services, help with business plan development, marketing and sales strategies, other issues; training programs; and help with loan applications and financial statements. MSBDC is part of the Isenberg School of Management at UMass. The website is www.msdbc.org/wmass. Dianne Doherty's email address is ddoherty@msdbc.umass.edu.

Becca Weaver, Farmland Matching Service Coordinator at New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (offices in Lowell and Boston): Becca and New Entry have recently mapped with GIS all the land in Groton and Littleton, MA, that might be used for farming. About 1/3 of the parcels mapped are not currently farmed and might be leased out by the present owners. Becca is also involved with the USDA-funded Land Access Project (through Land for Good of Keene, NH), which is active in all 6 New England states assisting non-farming landowners in establishing leases to farmers. New Entry hopes to work with AgComs in other towns to do the same kind of mapping. Becca's email address is bweaver@comteam.org.

Amy Kacala, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission: described the work she and BRPC have been doing in cooperation with the Glynwood Center's Keep Farming Program (staffed in western Mass by **Andrea Burns**, who is also a city councilor in Easthampton and originator of the Easthampton AgCom) to prepare a county-wide Berkshire County farm plan. Keep Farming has done pilot projects in Great Barrington and Northampton and is hoping to work with other towns in western Mass. Melissa Adams, who coordinates the MDAR APR Viability Program, will be the new staff person for Keep Farming in western Mass. Berkshire County has a higher hunger level than the state average. The project is involved with (1) inventory (where does food in Berkshire County come from, how is it distributed, where is local food sold, what food does the local population buy); (2) evaluating urban and natural habitat (community gardens, farms); (3) looking at ag economics: who is farming, factors and trends that influence business decisions, and the economic impact of farming; and (4) health and nutrition. The plan is to come up with goals and strategies using volunteers for much of the work. AgComs are important in providing letters of support and volunteers and acting as a local face for the project. Partner groups include Berkshire Grown, Chambers of Commerce, land trusts, local foundations, boards of health, schools and colleges, especially Williams College. The plan will be integrated into municipal plans for North Adams and Great Barrington and developed as 5 regional plans for subregions of the county. Amy's email address is akacala@berkshireplanning.org. She will make a power point available.

Kyle Bostrom, Greenfield AgCom and manager of the UMass Deerfield Farm on marketing: restaurants want consistency and quality, meat with USDA grades. The Bostrom Farm sells porkchops as a specialty through a beef-and-pork CSA, through which they can market cuts of substandard size. Greenfield has a winter farmers market. A recent event was a Taste of Bostrom Farm dinner. Market differentiation is important: figure out what cuts work.

Emily French, Farm to School Program (Emily@massfarmtoschool.org): Farm to School has been active for 7 years; more than 60 percent of Mass public school children now eat at least some local farm food at school (from 110 farms). Schools find that costs can be lower partly because trucking is cheaper than shipping from out-of-state. This year, partly because of the growing-season weather, there was trouble finding enough product to meet the school demand. Fewer farms are into wholesale: 60 years ago the mix was 20% retail, 80% wholesale. Now that is reversed. Some towns have passed resolutions in favor of local food purchasing, esp Hatfield, Amherst, Cambridge, others. The focus is largely on fall crops, potatoes, winter storage. Some big districts have summer eating programs. Institutions like hospitals (e.g.

Baystate) need food year-round. In some cases schools have to re-tool their kitchens. Sedexo and Chartwell are two of the big food services that work in schools, and they both, esp Chartwell, are emphasizing local produce more than they used to.

Notes from Bristol-Plymouth County AgCom Gathering Nov 16, 2011

More than 40 people from 22 different towns drove through the rain to attend the meeting. The gathering was sponsored by the Plymouth County Farm Bureau (thanks to Jim Hayward and the Monponsett Inn staff!), Bristol County Farm Bureau, the Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC), the Mass Dept of Agricultural Resources, SEMAP, Mass Audubon, and The Trustees of Reservations. The names and email addresses or phone numbers of attendees are included at the end of these notes.

Towns represented were these:

Carver	Dartmouth	Marshfield
Acushnet	West Bridgewater	Halifax
Easton	Middleboro	Rochester
Seekonk	Kingston	East Bridgewater
Raynham	Duxbury	Plympton
Rehoboth	Berkley	Bridgewater
Swansea	Westport	Boxford
Lancaster		

Mass Audubon land preservation discussion. Priscilla Chapman of the Mass Audubon Society (pchapman@massaudubon.org) presented information about loss of farmland in this region from Mass Audubon's *Losing Ground* report and about the importance of agricultural land to declining species of grassland birds. Both Mass Audubon and AgComs have been very much involved in farmland preservation. There are now 148 AgComs in Massachusetts, with more anticipated by next year. Mass Audubon partners regularly with other groups who are involved with farmland protection, and has been highly supportive of Ag Commissions.

Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC). Chair Dick Ward described the MAAC, which started a year ago and works to coordinate and facilitate communication among the 148 AgComs. The MAAC has one board member from each of the 14 counties. Each AgCom should take a vote to join the MAAC and inform Dick Ward of its vote (rjward7@verizon.net). Fifty-four AgComs have joined so far. Dues are free. The 2012 annual meeting of the MAAC will be held on Friday, Feb 24, at the Sturbridge Host. AgCom members are welcome but should pre-register with Dick Ward or Sue Guiducci. The statewide AgCom website is www.massagcom.org. Additional information is available from the MDAR website, www.mass.gov/agr/.

The Trustees of Reservations and Land Protection Resources: 1) Community Preservation Act. Kelley Whitmore (kwhitmore@ttor.org) of The Trustees of Reservations discussed the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and its role in helping preserve farmland at the local level. Contact Kelley Whitmore or Kim Gilman (kim.gilman@tpl.org) if you would like to learn more about CPA adoption in your community. Go to www.communitypreservation.org for more information. 2) Land Protection. Kelley also said that staff at local land trusts are available if you or someone you know is interested in exploring conservation options for property. Land protection staff are familiar with the funding sources and tax benefits related to conserving land. Contact Kelley if you'd like the name of a land protection specialist in your area.

Farm to School Project. Simca Horwitz (simca@massfarmtoschool.org) discussed the Farm to School Project, which has helped 60 percent of the state's public schools purchase local farm

produce. Many towns have passed local purchasing resolutions, and model language is available from Simca and others. The statewide Farm to School conference will be held on March 15. The website for the project is www.mass.gov/agr/markets/Farm_to_School.

Roundtable Discussion – Reports from Individual AgComs

- Dartmouth: has passed a Right to Farm Bylaw, now working to adjust to a new town administrator, has sponsored town Right to Farm signs. The Dartmouth AgCom was established in 1987; local cable TV station has included programs on local chefs. Sue Guiducci emphasized “don’t let your guard down” – keep working with other boards so they know you’re out there, keeping your connections active.
- Duxbury: the Duxbury Conservation Commission has been quite supportive of the AgCom. The AgCom has a website, has produced fliers on town farms, has sponsored a vote to establish the CPA in Duxbury, has sponsored a Right to Farm Bylaw, works on land preservation, is coping with dog issues, and is involved in field rehabilitation and a possible lease of the Bay Farm property.
- Rehoboth: is working to address zoning issues around a proposed solar installation.
- Marshfield: AgCom was formed in 2006. Sponsors 36 community garden plots (they ask for donations to cover costs), has put out Right to Farm brochures and a publication on Living Near a Farm (passed the hat for contributions to cover costs), has had no conflict situations to deal with, is building outreach by sponsoring a series on healthy agriculture (2012 series to include chicken raising, pruning, goats and sheep), is putting in a request to the CPA Committee for funds to help with deer fencing for community gardens, sends reminders to Chap. 61A owners to reapply each fall.
- Plympton: has an active AgCom.
- Middleboro: is “rebuilding” by getting new members and establishing a bond with other departments, recently passed the CPA, working on 61A issues.
- Kingston: the AgCom started around gravel-removal issues, have horse people on board but have recently lost some farms in the flower business, has sponsored agricultural fairs for backyard farmers with good publicity, K-9s, and homemade ice cream (but cost \$500 for police detail), and have mailed out brochures.
- East Bridgewater: has passed Right to Farm, sponsors road signs (through the town DPW) for each farm business (each farm pays \$90 for its signs), has produced farm pamphlets, has gotten in as part of the Selectmen’s budget, working on CPA and a farm map.
- Westport: has prepared a town farm brochure, suggested thinking creatively about who can serve on local AgCom (i.e. have Trustees of Reservations staff on the commission), reviews the town's 61a release requests, maintains a list of farms and works with the Board of Health to address farm complaints.
- West Bridgewater: passed the CPA and used CPA funds to complete an APR purchase; is still in the beginning stages; Julie Amaral is also on the Open Space Committee.
- Rochester: no appointments to the AgCom have been made yet but they are working on getting them done; no Right to Farm yet; attempted to pass CPA 5 years ago; completed the purchase of the \$2 million Eastover Farm.
- Boxford (north shore): has worked on getting the Board of Health to recognize and understand farm issues, especially regarding stable permitting; has sponsored a cable TV series to promote farming, including items like small gardening, beekeeping; AgCom meetings are televised.
- Carver: sponsors a farmers market and has a town cranberry bog. Dick Ward is also chair of the Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions.

Towns that have not yet established an AgCom: Voting to establish an AgCom puts farming on the map in your town and makes you part of a network of nearly 150 AgComs around the state.

For assistance in starting an AgCom, call Pete Westover, MDAR Contractor, 413-665-4077, westover03@comcast.net; Cheryl Lekstrom, MDAR Contractor and Mass Farm Bureau Federation Membership Director, cheryl@mfbf.net; or Dick Ward or Sue Guiducci of the MAAC Board. Also talk to your neighboring towns that have already established AgComs.

10. Request for Assistance – Food Survey for Local Food Hub

Farm Survey for Connecticut River Valley Food Hub - Needs Your Help

What could farms in your town produce for an expanded market if transportation, storage and sales were coordinated by a local food hub? The Wellspring Initiative is carrying out a feasibility study about the creation of a Hampshire-Franklin-Hampden County regional food hub that would source from area farms and supply large institutional purchasers including hospitals, colleges and universities and other markets. A food hub can enable farms of all sizes to pool their production to meet larger scale demand from multiple markets. Wellspring is a collaboration of large institutions and community organizations working to create jobs by shifting purchases to the local community.

Could you help reach out to farms in your town to gather information about their potential to supply for new markets through a food hub? If so, please contact Fred Rose at the Center for Public Policy and Administration at the University of Massachusetts, frose@pubpol.umass.edu or 545-6574.