

Ag Commission Newsletter #6 / March 2015

This is the 6th AgCom Newsletter, focusing on activities of Agricultural Commissions around the state. We send these newsletters out periodically to keep AgComs up-to-date on current AgCom issues, upcoming events, ideas and projects of AgComs, grant programs and deadlines, and other related items. Please let us know (at westover03@comcast.net or cleckstrom@me.com) if your email address has changed or if you can provide email addresses for others on your AgCom. Thanks for your assistance. Note that resources in this newsletter are for informational purposes and do not constitute an endorsement of specific programs by MAAC.

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1. Mass Association of Agricultural Commissions (MAAC) Update

MAAC was organized in 2010 to support Massachusetts Agricultural Commissions (AgComs). With help from local AgComs, MAAC strives to provide AgComs with services and education to bolster and advance their agricultural support work at the local level. MAAC builds 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, 65 of the statewide total of 164 AgComs have joined MAAC. Ideally, every AgCom in the commonwealth will join in the effort to make the MAAC an effective force in promoting AgComs and local agriculture. MAAC sponsors regional AgCom conferences each year, and will hold its **2015 Annual Meeting** at the Harvest New England Gathering, at the Sturbridge Host in Sturbridge, February 25 and 26, 2015.

All Massachusetts AgComs may become members of MAAC - no dues payment is required. 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>. A form included on the MAAC website will tell you what information to send to join the association. For more information on MAAC, please visit: www.massagcom.org/AboutMAAC.php.

MAAC Board members are:

Laura Sapienza-Grabski, Boxford AgCom, Essex County, President
Richard F. Ward, Carver AgCom, Past President
Mike Pineo, Sterling AgCom, Worcester County, 1st Vice President
Sue Guiducci, Dartmouth AgCom, Vice President for Advocacy
Steve Damon, Gill AgCom, Franklin County, Vice President of Education
Kathy Orlando, Sheffield AgCom, Berkshire County, Treasurer
Laura Abrams, Sudbury AgCom, Middlesex County, Secretary
Mike Hogan, Ludlow AgCom, Hampden County
Jaime Wagner, Amherst AgCom, Hampshire County
Ed Lawton, Foxborough AgCom, Norfolk County
Leslie Spencer, Barnstable AgCom, Barnstable County
Fred Dabney, Westport AgCom, Bristol County
Bruce Howden, Sheffield AgCom, Berkshire County
George Moore, Groton Agcom, Middlesex County
Matthew Goode, Suffolk County
Randy Johnson, Boxford AgCom, Essex County
Sara Garretson Lowry, Marshfield AgCom, Plymouth County
Eugene L'Etoile, Northfield AgCom, Franklin County
Dwight Sipler, Mass. Farm Bureau Federation designee
Stephen Herbert, UMass Stockbridge School of Agriculture designee
John Lebeaux, Commissioner, Mass Dept of Agricultural Resources

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 is required. 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.

Farm Bureau Membership Application

Have Your Agricultural Commission vote to be a member of Farm Bureau and designate a contact.

The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation supports Agricultural Commissions and encourages farmers to be active on their local town AgComs. Farm Bureau has valuable resources to offer AgComs which include access to staff and technical assistance for issues such as Chapter 61 land tax valuation, animal health and welfare, regulatory assistance, farm exemptions, food safety, forestry resources, trespass, wildlife, letters of support for grant applications, alternative energy, energy discounts, zoning, education, intervention, and speaking points on local issues and much more. AgComs may join at no charge.

Visit www.mfbf.net, or <http://mfbf.net/Portals/0/pdf/AgCom%20Membership%20Brochure.pdf> for an application to take to your next meeting.

2. January 2015 Regional AgCom Conferences, Meetings, and Roundtables

Northampton Regional AgCom Roundtable January 10

At least 15 AgComs were represented at the Northampton Regional AgCom Roundtable on January 10, hosted by the Northampton AgCom and Smith Vocational School. Another dozen or more AgComs were present at the January 31 Regional AgCom Roundtable at the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield. Here are some of the points and issues that came up:

Reports from AgComs:

Brookfield:

Achievements: formed Commission, passed Right to Farm Bylaw, published brochure.

Working on: land mapping, advisory role, work with town boards esp conservation & health, promote green forests.

2015 goals: strengthen farmers market & market outlets, promote farms in schools, work with the new Central Mass Grown group.

Challenges: developing community support for local products; educating townspeople on how and why to help; including backyard farmers in farm discussions; chicken issues.

Northampton:

Goals: stabilizing the right to farm for local farmers due to constant changes and many new people moving into the city; continuing right to farm duties and handle situations as they occur; creating and posting right-to-farm signs; continued communication with Conservation Commission; maintaining public access to the "Meadows" without damage to farm operations (continuing to mediate a conflict in the Meadows between current farmers and the public who want access to the Meadows in many ways).

Challenge: continued maintenance of Meadow Road.

Achievements: sponsoring two regional AgCom gatherings at the Smith School

Williamsburg:

Recent accomplishments: AgCom website, right-to-farm signs

2015 plans: farm film series at the town library, participation in regional Keep Farming Initiative for the Hilltowns; farm survey.

Challenge: adding non-farmers to the AgCom

Hatfield:

Accomplishments: set aside CPA funds for APRs, revisions to Ag Building Permit Fees, funded school garden; worked with MDAR Counsel to establish a town agricultural water rate; publish a Hatfield Ag Brochure every other year.

2015 plans: deal with art room ventilation, expand FRESH program.

Challenge: need an advocate in the schools for the Farm to School Program.

Greenfield:

Achievements: signage "Welcome to Greenfield, a Right to Farm Community" (the Greenfield DPW helped procure the necessary permits); use of a broad definition of farming.

2015 goal: new members (currently have no farmers as members of the AgCom). Whately suggestion: knock on farmers' doors, chase them down, and check with next-door Shelburne farmers who farm land in Greenfield. Goal: find out what farmers in town need.

Easthampton:

2014 accomplishments: re-filled two membership spots, worked with two disputes and assisted the health agent, and obtained a town ordinance allowing wells for ag purposes.

2015 goals: trying to better integrate with other town commissions and departments; education about pesticide history and use.

2015 challenges: keeping the AgCom together, as there are not many farmers; looking at town-owned land that could be leased; avoiding a rift between farmers and environmentalists.

Brimfield:

Recently started a new AgCom at the instigation of the Board of Health.

2015 goals: deciding how best to begin work and to get a handle on the definition of a farm; public education.

2016 goal: bring a Right to Farm Bylaw to Town Meeting.

Montague:

2014 accomplishments: sponsorship & management of the Farmers Market in Turners Falls; getting set up to accept SNAP benefits.

2015 plans: design and put into place Right-to-Farm community road signs with help from an AgCom Small Grant; find a manager for the Farmers Market.

Ongoing: education of Board of Health and Building Inspector about Right to Farm and other farm issues. Use of a very inclusive definition of farming.

Sheffield:

2014 goal: put up signs on roads entering the town (still not finished due to budget constraints).

2015 plan: continue with signs, finish the farm brochure; voted to support the Farmers Market with town AgCom funds and small grant assistance.

Northfield:

Recent accomplishment: stopped a road in town from being closed to ag use by trucks and tractors, a story with a peaceful resolution.

2015-16: keeping members and getting a new one; working on a history of farming.

Leyden:

Accomplishments: 2014 annual sugar-on-snow supper for ag support and fundraising; holding the line.

Recommendation: to broaden AgCom membership, consider including people who own land in town but live out of town as AgCom members.

2015 goal: adding town entrance signs and refurbishing and relocating the original signs to the Town Common.

Challenges: forest and farmland preservation; natural resource protection zoning; getting a quorum at AgCom meetings.

Whately:

2014 accomplishment: published and distributed Whately Agricultural Brochure based on a 100 percent survey of farmers in town; the brochure included total gross farm income and farm jobs within Whately.

2015 goal: continue to support APR projects.

2015 challenge: figure out a way to work more effectively with the Whately Community Preservation Committee re the use of CPA funds for APR projects.

Heath:

2014: an uneventful year but with nothing negative.

2015: working on possible agricultural uses of town-owned lands.

Challenges: lack of funding and individual interest in ag issues in town.

Plainfield:

Challenge: how to support farming in town without taking sides on the GMO issue (an issue that may require mediation).

Plans: work with the Hilltown Keep Farming effort.

Ludlow:

Goals: helping farmers with DEP issues; farm signage.

Noted: CPA was previously voted down by the town but another try may be coming up.

Worcester County Regional Agricultural Commissions Meeting January 14

The Worcester County Area Agricultural Commissions (AgComs) meet quarterly to discuss pertinent issues and opportunities in the region. About thirty AgCom members and guests met in the conference room at the Westminster Police and Fire Safety Building on January 14, 2015. The meeting was hosted by the Worcester County Conservation District and the Westminster AgCom. Susan Phinney, Vice Chair of the Sterling AgCom, facilitated.

There was plenty of discussion about the new Buy-Local initiative, Central Mass Grown (CMG). Trish Settles of the CMRPC (Central Mass Regional Planning Commission) presented the logo and website and encouraged those present to log-on and join up. Using CISA's successful business model, CMG plans to produce a local directory, on-line data base and mobile app, <http://centralmassgrown.org/>. Regional producers are excited to have an organization to market the farms in Central Massachusetts. There are about 125 members, and several organizations support the initiative, including Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, Brookfield AgCom, Sterling AgCom, and North Country Land Trust.

The North County Land Trust (<http://www.northcountylandtrust.org/>) based in Leominster is willing and able to help AgComs in its target region with a farm inventory in their communities. Contact Janet Morrison, Executive Director, 978-466-3900. This will help them complete their farmland inventory projects.

In the roundtable discussion, AgCom members talked about their projects, from adding greenhouses and dirt at schools in Rutland to making YouTube videos, establishing gift accounts, concerns about the FSM (food safety modernization) act. The Westminster AgCom has several successful projects going on with their speakers and movie viewing and Farmers' Market Backyard Growing Series and events. A land matching resource was identified: newenglandfarmlandfinder.org - currently listing land in ME, NH and VT.

The AgCom group plans to meet again in April. To add your name to the notification list, please send an email to Lisa Trotto, Lisa.Trotto@ma.usda.gov or Cheryl Lekstrom, cleckstrom@me.com.

Duxbury Regional AgCom Gathering January 21. The following notes from the Duxbury AgCom Gathering held January 21 at the Community Center are from MAAC Board member and Barnstable AgCom member Leslie Spencer:

There were 30 attendees with a potluck supper. Speakers included Annie from Island Creek Oysters. Duxbury is the largest Bay producer in the state of oysters. They ship oysters all over the country and have the Island Creek Oyster Bar in Boston. The potluck dinner featured a wonderful oyster bar. Representative Josh Cutler spoke, with this advice: "Don't be shy - he wants to know about agricultural issues". Dick Ward talked about MAAC: "We are here to help you." Suzie Schortmann spoke about The Historic O'Neil Farm (a dairy farm 40 milking cows on 146 acres). They give tours and teach children where milk comes from. Cranberry grower Earl Ricker showed a 30-minute film about cranberry growing, a nice film similar to the ones Makepeace produces. Another farmer made the comment that "whether we have 2 acres or 2,000, we're all buddies." My impression is that it was a wonderful gathering, with lots of educational information for attendees and great camaraderie among everyone.

Berkshire AgCom Gathering January 31 in Pittsfield.

Folks from AgComs and other farm-related organizations gathered at the Berkshire Athenaeum on January 31 for a roundtable discussion of local farm and AgCom issues. For detailed AgCom reports, see below.

At the roundtable, Barbara Zheutlin of Berkshire Grown brought up the following program now available for farmers:

* **New Berkshire County Grant Program to help with Farm Transfers and Farmland Access.** The deadline for applications has been extended to February 28. The program, administered by American Farmland Trust, helps farm families concerned with farm transfer and gaining access to farmland. The John P Farkas Fund offers grants of up to \$2500 to help defray the costs of professional services for farm transfer and succession planning, farmland protection, selling or leasing farmland to a farmer, or farm business planning associated with any of the above.

For more information, go to www.berkshirefarmland.org or call Peggy McCabe at American Farmland Trust, 413-586-9330 x 17 or pmccabe@farmland.org. Applications should be submitted by February 28 to Cris Coffin at American Farmland Trust, ccoffin@farmland.org.

*** Reports from Attendees.**

Richmond AgCom:

Goal: listing of farms.

Challenges: Richmond has an aging population with backyard gardens declining; farmers aren't sure where to bring surplus products; providing needed information to the community.

Pittsfield AgCom:

Goals: farm brochure, Right-to-Farm signs, getting city-owned lands into production.

Challenges: busy AgCom members have no time to find people to lease land.

Accomplishments: used small-grant funds to produce beautiful Right-to-Farm signs, which were displayed at the meeting.

Sheffield AgCom:

Recently put up \$200 to sponsor Farmers Market. The AgCom is now allowed to put up larger Right-to-Farm signs on roughly a dozen roads. Town-approved signs are exempt from the Sheffield sign bylaw. The AgCom has an annual budget of \$500 from taxation. Young blood is coming into the town.

Williamstown AgCom:

Has been active for 5 or 6 years. The AgCom hosts an annual farmers dinner that brings old and young farmers together. The AgCom also assigns liaisons to sit in on meetings of other town boards. The Board of Health is now working on stable and livestock regulations. The AgCom has weighed in to try to keep concerns over too many animals on a given farm from affecting other farms.

Great Barrington AgCom:

The AgCom has pushed for a local slaughter facility. Center-of-town Forest Garden is in the planning stage. The AgCom used small-grant funds to pay an organizer to put on a public farm event.

Pittsfield Farmers Market:

Has made SNAP available this year, receives donations of thousands of pounds of food.

Food Justice Project:

This project is funded by Berkshire Community Action, reaching out to low-income families.

Other issues brought up:

Rick Chandler: supplementary federal funding for the APR program has been cut in half, but there is still about \$11 million that MDAR will use for APRs. Rick also mentioned the MEGA grant program and the Farm Viability program.

For additional notes from the Berkshire roundtable, see the last pages of this newsletter.

The Cape & Islands Regional AgCom Roundtable, February 21, East Falmouth. Several Resource providers were in attendance as well as four AgCom members from Barnstable, Falmouth and Orleans.

The Falmouth AgCom of seven members has worked with the Conservation Commission (ConCom) to put conservation land into farm use. They hope to offer a template to other AgComs who are working with ConComs to put conservation land into agricultural production.

The Orleans Agricultural Advisory Council of five members represents the town's agricultural community with regard to sustainable agriculture-based economic activities. Its charge includes advising and collaborating with boards, committees, and other local organizations on matters consistent with the Agricultural Task Force Final Report and the Orleans Comprehensive Plan. The group worked to adopt the Right to Farm bylaw and collaborated with the Conservation Administrator and the Conservation Commission in preparing the former Putnam Farm for agricultural leases. The Council is working on a trifold brochure that would draw attention to unique aspects of Orleans agriculture—the shellfish grants, the farmers' market (Cape Cod's oldest!), and developments at Putnam Farm. The Middle School built a greenhouse.

The Barnstable AgCom of seven members works to maintain an agricultural environment conducive to sustainable economic development in Barnstable. The commission works towards the preservation and improvement of private and public agricultural land and resources. The group brings private and public sector support and volunteers together to develop and carry out specific agricultural plans, where feasible, throughout the town. They have spent several years working with the Town Manager and the Procurement and Legal Departments to create an RFP for redeveloping organic farming for a portion of the Danforth property in Marstons Mills. They asked for and received recommendations for this project from conservation organizations, land trusts and town departments. They produced a booklet, Keeping Backyard Chickens, designed to inform residents on best practices for keeping and raising chickens of their own.

<http://www.town.barnstable.ma.us/AgriculturalCommission/Ag%20Comm%20brochure%20FINAL%20tamperproof.pdf>. It has been a big success with multiple printings and distribution. They also produced a "Plan Bee" flyer about honeybees which has also had multiple printings and distribution. <http://massagcom.org/Documents/Plan%20Bee%20Barnstable%20Ag%20Comm%20flyer.pdf>

Resource providers in attendance at the regional gathering included:

Russ Norton, Cape Cod Cooperative Extension, Barnstable, rnorton@barnstablecounty.org

Mia Halter, District Conservationist, USDA, NRCS, West Yarmouth, mia.halter@ma.usda.gov

Leslie Spencer, Barnstable AgCom, Director, MA Assoc. of Agricultural Commissions, Cotuit

Dick Ward, Past President MA Assoc. Agricultural Commissions, Carver AgCom, rjward@comcast.net

Frank Di Luna, Esq., Murtha Cullina LLP, MAAC Technical Advisor, Woburn, fdiluna@murthalaw.com

Mary Greendale, Mass. Office of Public Collaboration, Holliston, mmgreendale@gmail.com

Tara Zadeh, Esq., Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Boston, tara.zadeh@state.ma.us.

Discussion topics included wind turbines, methane digesters, solar installations, permits, cranberry situation, the current oyster situation, distribution channels, green crabs, proposed bills affecting AgComs and chapter-land, Best Management Practices (BMPs), stable regulations, animal regulations, piggeries, Department of Public Health, zoning, HASOP, Boards of Health, Division of Marine Fisheries, Farmers' Markets, Buy Fresh Buy Local Cape Cod, SEMAP, 2014 Farm Bill, EQIP, Food Security Act, hydroponics, aquaponics, farming in wetlands, Urban Ag as in Freight Farm hydroponics (<http://freightfarms.com/company/>), young farmers and micro farms, value added products, GIS mapping and farm inventory, and the importance of getting a farm conservation plan.

3. Ag Mediation Program

Help with Ag Conflicts – by Courtney Breese, Mass Office of Public Collaboration

Have you ever found yourself in a conflict with local government or a state agency, say DEP? Or maybe you and neighbors have had some disagreement over your farm stand traffic, your spraying with pesticides or your animals' smells? Or maybe you have an issue with USDA over regulations or a loan payment or an organic certification.

Either way let me introduce you to the Agricultural Mediation Program at the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration's (MOPC). Susan Jeghelian is the Director of this program that used to be called the Mass Office of Dispute Resolution. And she says that, "The AgMed Program promotes the use of mediation as a tool to prevent or minimize escalation of conflicts and to resolve conflicts at the earliest possible stage."

The Ag Mediation Program has two parts. One is funded through a grant from USDA to resolve issues with that agency and the USDA subsidizes the mediation. The other half of the program deals with conflicts that are not related to USDA but are agricultural in nature. The costs for these services vary.

MOPC is also available to help train local Agricultural Commissions in resolving local conflicts. In partnership with the MA Dept. of Agriculture (MDAR) and other agricultural organizations, MOPC provides outreach and mediation services, conflict resolution training and support to Agricultural Commissions to help sustain the community's farm businesses and farmlands. MOPC teaches commissioners how to prevent and manage conflict effectively, and provides access to professional mediators if they are not able to resolve the conflicts themselves.

The agency is housed at UMass Boston and offers services through several regional mediation centers. For information about services for Ag Commissions or producers, contact Courtney Breese, Program Manager, Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC), (formerly Massachusetts Office of Dispute Resolution – MODR), UMass Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., M-1-627, Boston, MA 02125, 617-287-4046, Courtney.Breese@umb.edu, www.mopc.umb.edu.

Feb 4 note from Courtney Breese: The Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) is proud to announce the completion of the Massachusetts Municipal Conflict Resolution Needs Assessment Study Interim Report. The report and an executive summary are available on MOPC's website for download: <http://www.umb.edu/mopc/needs>.

* **Rick Chandler of MDAR** (rick.chandler@state.ma.us) discussed at the regional roundtables the MDAR program called Exploring the Small Farm Dream 2015, which includes 5-session evening courses as follows:

Marlborough – Tuesdays March 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31
Amherst – Thursdays March 5, 12, 19, 26, and April 2

For registration or additional information, visit the Agricultural Business Training (ABTP) Section of the MDAR website or contact Rick Chandler at MDAR, 101 University Drive Suite C-4, Amherst, MA 01004 or at the above website.

Rick also discussed his thoughts about AgComs from the state perspective:

- (1) AgCom relationships with town government and key boards should be pro-active and regular.
- (2) AgComs should do something visible each year – events, brochures, and the like.
- (3) AgComs should keep convening. New farmers and inter-farm communications are key.
- (4) Links with schools are important.
- (5) AgComs need to figure out what to do if the “thrill” is gone.

* **Melissa Adams of MDAR and Keep Berkshire Farming** discussed the Hilltown Keep Farming Program, on which she is working under a grant from the Hilltown CDC (Community Development Corporation). Here is her report:

The Hilltown Community Development Corporation (HCDC) has been selected to receive a grant from the Local Food Promotion Program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The grant is supporting “Keep Farming in the Hilltowns”, a community planning initiative to assess existing agricultural conditions and develop strategies to help local farms succeed and keep more local food in the region.

The program will be based on Keep Farming, a community led planning process developed by Glynwood, in Cold Spring NY, that has been successful in Berkshire County. Over the next year, volunteers will inventory farms to determine what and how much is being produced and survey residents, stores and institutions to understand the level of demand for local food in the region. The process will result in a plan of action with strategies to support local farms and strengthen the regional food system.

The Hilltown CDC is partnering with the Creamery Coop, town Agricultural Commissions and local Planning Consultant Melissa Adams, who has worked with farmers through Massachusetts Department of Agriculture programs for more than 10 years and provided guidance to the countywide Keep Berkshires Farming initiative.

To learn more about the project, and how you can be involved, contact Teri at the Hilltown CDC at terir@hilltowncdc.org or 413-296-4536 x110.

4. Ag Day March 31!

Mass Ag Day this year is on Tuesday, March 31, at the State House in Boston. This is a chance to meet with your legislators about farm and AgCom issues. MAAC will have a table at the gathering and can help organize those who want to join together to see their state senators and representatives.

Each year on Ag Day, farmers and agricultural groups bring a *Taste of Massachusetts* agriculture to the State House. Coordinated by the Massachusetts Agricultural Promotion Board, the day is an opportunity for farmers to meet with their representatives to discuss issues important to the agricultural community. The Ag Promo Board works hard to survey the agricultural community through commodity groups to come up with pertinent priority issues that everyone is in agreement on such as: funding for a strong Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Buy Locals, and UMass Extension. Last year's priorities included support for local meat processing operations to meet the increasing demand. These priorities are known as the "White Paper." There is usually a morning briefing so that everyone can be on the same page when they speak to their representatives individually or in coordinated groups. A number of awards and recognitions are made in a speaking program. Then the feasting begins with a "Taste of Massachusetts". This is a "taste", not a "meal". Ingredients are sourced through farmers across the state with coordination provided by CISA, Northeast Harvest and a variety of volunteers.

5. MAAC Small Grant Program

Over the past year and a half, MAAC has provided "small grants" for Ag Commissions around the state with funding from the Berkshire Taconic Foundation and the Mass Society for Promoting Agriculture. We are grateful for their support! We hope to secure funding for future rounds and will announce these to all AgComs when funds become available.

AgComs that have received grants for special projects are these:

- * Barnstable AgCom – Bee Flier
- * Amherst AgCom - Social Gathering and Workshop Series
- * Hardwick AgCom - Right to Farm Signage
- * Shelburne AgCom - “Shelburne Grown” dinner launch
- * Greenfield AgCom - Greenfield: A Farm Friendly Town signage
- * Northampton AgCom - Right-to-Farm signage
- * Acushnet AgCom - Right-to-Farm road signs and community education
- * Plymouth Ag Committee - Signage, website maintenance, and shirts
- * Gill AgCom - Right to Farm Sign welcoming Bernardston Travelers
- * Westford AgCom - Farm lunch to celebrate National Food Day Oct 24, 2014
- * New Salem AgCom - Building a shed for the New Salem Community Garden
- * Marshfield AgCom - Community Agricultural Forum with Featured Lecture on Backyard Fruit
- * Montague AgCom - Right-to Farm Road Signs for Town of Montague
- * Belchertown AgCom - Farmers Market Signs
- * Lunenburg - “A Right-to-Farm Community” Signs
- * Rutland AgCom - Update and Refresh Rutland AgCom’s Town Presence: Brochure & Website - Improvement and development of related materials
- * Boxford AgCom - Equine Road Safety
- * Concord AgCom - Town of Concord Outreach and Promotion of Local Agriculture – Concord Farms Brochure & Farm Friendly Neighbor Brochure
- * Huntington AgCom - Farm Survey and Tri-fold Brochures
- * Westminster AgCom - Backyard Growing Series & Right to Farm Signs
- * Holden AgCom - Raffle for Hand-crafted Raised Beds

- * Lanesborough AgCom - “Marketing Your Local Agricultural Products”
- * Sheffield AgCom - Sheffield Agricultural Brochure
- * Richmond AgCom - ‘Peas on Earth’ Community Garden
- * Lee AgCom - Lee Farm Brochure
- * Williamstown AgCom - Right to Farm Signs, Website Creation, Brochure, and Farmers’ Social
- * Pittsfield AgCom - Pittsfield Agricultural Awareness Brochure
- * Great Barrington AgCom - Outreach Campaign and Community Forums
- * Cheshire AgCom - Farm signs
- * Lanesborough AgCom - School Garden Improvements
- * Williamstown AgCom - Williamstown Farmers Market Manager Stipend
- * Great Barrington AgCom - Land Access and Farm Viability in the Berkshires
- * Pittsfield AgCom - Right to Farm Road Signs
- * Adams AgCom - Marketing the Adams Farmers Market

Additional Notes from the January 31 Berkshire AgCom Gathering – taken by Kathy Orlando, Treasurer, MAAC, and Moderator, Berkshire County Roundtable

Successes mentioned by participants:

- * Outreach to low-income families and providing info on what to do with fresh food.
- * Installation of 32 raised beds with funding assistance.
- * Community gardens – getting kids outside and growing (kids are sponges, eager to learn).
- * Farmers Market (Berkshire Grown is 501(c)3 sponsor) and Winter Market has worked on teen outreach, SNAP and double-value program, donations of food through Farm-to-Table program.
- * AgCom successes, issues, and challenges:
 - Right to Farm signs
 - Getting people to farm on city park and school land
 - Lease programs in CT River Valley towns as examples (South Hadley, Northampton, Amherst)
 - Keep Berkshire Farming surveys and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Sustainable Berkshires effort
 - Getting Agriculture into town master plan (award-winning effort)
 - Symposium on farmland access and follow-up
 - Opposition to Trans-Pacific Trade Agreement issue
 - Liaison work with other boards: sent initial letter to other boards that AgCom was doing this
 - AgComs need staff support, funds, resources
 - One challenge is organizing farmers either town-by-town or regionally
 - Keeping AgComs active and focused requires a spearhead person
 - Important to support all types of farming
 - AgComs need to use the Ag Mediation Program (described above)
 - Several towns have “how to be a good farm neighbor” brochures
 - Problem: Dept of Fish and Game not renewing farm licenses so as to put land into early successional habitat
 - Can DFG and MDAR work together to address ag/habitat conflicts? Can local and regional differences be taken into account?
 - Need for ag representation on Economic Development Committees to make sure economic of strength and agri-tourism are taken into account
 - Question: how to encourage towns to look to AgComs to encourage better management practices, provide a forum for discussion, assist with farmer-to-farmer education?
 - Need for Mass Office of Public Collaboration to do training sessions on problem-solving
 - Addressing barriers to access to healthy food: link to CSAs with subsidized shares, Running gleaning programs, etc
 - Challenge: how to ensure that in looking to address hunger and food access, farmers are not put in a position of having to sacrifice important income
 - Access to education for growing future farmers: webinars, classes, certificate programs, teacher-training programs, FFA, Green Agers apprenticeship program
 - How to encourage younger generation to explore ag as a career
 - Aging farmer demographic: AgComs can help link generations
 - Need information on backyard chicken regulations of various towns for website
 - Contact people for sharing info:
 - Cheryl Lekstrom, MDAR Contractor, clekstrom@me.com
 - Pete Westover, MDAR Contractor, westover03@comcast.net

6. MARSHFIELD BACKYARD GARDENER SERIES

This press release comes from Lorrie Gampp Dahlen of the Marshfield Ag Commission:

Press release for weeks of March 16, 23, 30, April 6th.

Registration is open for 4 workshops to help the backyard gardener with opportunities for growing Grapes, Apples, Blueberries or Mushrooms. Courses include classroom and hands-on outdoor sessions plus plenty of time for questions and answers with the educators, all of whom are experts in their field. All workshops will be held at the fairgrounds with classroom sessions to start being held indoors at the administration building located at the corner of South River and Main Street (140 Main Street). All courses are sponsored by the Marshfield Agricultural and Horticultural Society.

April 18th from 10 am – 2 pm Jon Clements of UMASS Amherst Extension will lead a 4 hour class on *Backyard "Fruiting Wall" Apple Orchard*. His method for planting a fruiting wall permits the home grower to yield 5 bushels each of 5 different types of apples while using only 100 square feet of backyard space! He'll lead the class through everything you need including variety and rootstock selection, soil preparation, pest management, pruning, annual care and how to properly plant and support the structures. BYO lunch or purchase a hot lunch at the Farmers' Market, running concurrently on the grounds.

The following day, Sunday, April 19th, two different courses will be taught by Sonia Schloemann, a small fruit specialist from UMASS Amherst. The *Blueberry Gardens* session will run 10 am – noon and the *Growing Grapes* workshop will be held 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm. Schloemann will cover all aspects of setting up these different gardens including variety selection, soil health, pest management, pruning, training, and more. Attendees are invited to a BYO lunch session with Schloemann whether participating in one or both courses.

On Saturday, April 25th, educator, farmer, and devoted foodie Dan Bensonoff will lead a course on *Mushroom Gardening* from 11:00 am to 1:30 pm with a BYO lunch break included. He'll speak on how to integrate mushroom gardens within existing spaces, create separate beds, and by using logs. Bensonhof will focus on 2 particular types of mushrooms but the methods and materials needed apply to most varieties. The class will make two different types of gardens, creating a hands-on understanding how to layer, prepare, inoculate and seal the spores. Dan will also teach how to force fruiting, stock management, and harvesting. Participants can take home an inoculated log, to grow shitake mushrooms.

Registration instructions and course information at <http://www.marshfieldfair.org/workshop2015.htm> or call Lorrie at 781 635 0889. Registration required.