

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Meeting
April 17, 2019
Meeting Minutes

Ag Board members present: J. Hoeffner, L. DeBuck, D. Church, S. Najac (for M. Ullrich), D. Smith, S. Soons.

Ag Board members excused via e-mail: P. Ruszkiewicz.

Ag Board members excused via phone: J. McCarey, J. Sanford, M. Simpson, J. Wright.

Guests present: K. Apostolides – OC Farm Market Coordinator, E. Barnett – Ag District Applicant, M. Cordilla – Office of Senator Jen Metzger, A. Hughes – Farmer, J. MacLeod – OC Planning, J. Powell, F.J. Spinelli – Ag District Applicant.

Call to order – 5:28 pm.

March Minutes

S. Soons mentioned that it appears that there was a typo in the second to last sentence of the first paragraph under Ag Plan Implementation – General (p. 3), and that the sentence should read, “M. Ullrich stated that this might be an issue because some farmers *complained* that the transactions take too long.” D. Smith moved to accept the March minutes with the above correction, L. DeBuck seconded, unanimously approved.

Summary of Accounts

D. Church stated that the Ag Board has only had costs related to postage so far this year. He noted that K. Apostolides’ contract is up in May and that the Ag Board should consider a different, more permanent payment setup in the future, rather than the current approach utilizing 2 to 3 contracts per year. J. Hoeffner stated that this might be a way to get more funding for the Board in the future. General discussion ensued.

Inquiries & Correspondence

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a copy of a resolution from the Orange County Legislature opposing the New York State Senate Bill 2837 / Assembly Bill 2750 of 2019. According to the County Legislature, this bill would “among other things, provide for collective bargaining rights of farm workers and require overtime pay.” The County Legislature also noted that “the effect of a labor strike on a farm could destroy an entire year’s worth of crops, rendering perishable food not edible.” The Legislature indicates that the reduced or lost profitability could cause some family farms to stop operating. General discussion ensued. Senator Jen Metzger is in favor of hearings related to this topic and she is hoping to have farmers heard at the hearings. Any written testimony to J. Metzger is due on May 3 by 5 pm. D. Church asked if the Ag Board should take a position on this bill. S. Soons moved to draft a letter to growers and farmers for informational purposes and taking a position against New York State Senate Bill 2837 / Assembly Bill 2750, D. Church seconded, roll call – J. Hoeffner – Aye, L. DeBuck – Aye, D. Church – Aye, J. McCarey – Absent, S. Najac (for M. Ullrich) – Abstain, P. Ruszkiewicz – Absent, J. Sanford – Absent, M. Simpson – Absent, D. Smith – Aye, S. Soons – Aye, J. Wright – Absent, absent Board Members to be polled tomorrow.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board received a copy of a letter from the Orange County Legislature to Gilbert J. Piaquadio (Supervisor of the Town of Newburgh) regarding the property that is proposed to be included in Orange County Agricultural District 1. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

J. MacLeod stated that the Ag Board also received a copy of a letter from the Orange County Legislature to Robert Valentine (Supervisor of the Town of Chester) regarding the property that is proposed to be included in Orange County Agricultural District 1. General discussion ensued. No action taken.

New Business

Dairy Farm Survivability

Discussion ensued about the survivability of dairy farms in Orange County. S. Najac stated that there is a study on agriculture in the Northeast that was put out by Farm Credit East in 2019. Although the study is not specific to Orange County, it can give the Ag Board an idea of how the dairy industry is doing in the Northeast. Pages 14 to 15 address the dairy industry. D. Church stated that this information is based on the Ag Census, which is not always accurate for dairy since responses from farmers are voluntary. J. Hoeffner stated that some farmers do not respond because if the sector gets too small, the information accessible to the public becomes too personal.

D. Church stated that the County wants to educate the public about what the landscape will look like if all of the dairy farms fail in Orange County. He noted that each farm uses at least 1,000 acres to operate. If the remaining dairy farms go out of business, then the County is likely to become more built up. He stated that the land that is currently used for dairy farming would be developed with houses, developed with commercial uses, used for some agricultural uses, and used for some other things. The County's goal is to make the public aware of the potential impacts of the loss of the dairy industry.

The Ag Board members agreed that more needs to be done to help the dairy industry in Orange County. For example, schools in New York City should buy food produced in New York. The Board members agreed that if an organization gets state funds, then a certain amount of the products it buys should be New York State sourced. The Ag Board asked what the status is of the dairy study. D. Church stated that the Orange County Legislature still needs to put aside \$20,000 for the Orange County portion of the dairy study. K. Apostolides stated that the situation with the dairy industry is different in Orange County than it is in Sullivan County. She said that even through Sullivan County has fewer dairy farmers than Orange County, it has people stepping up to resolve the issues facing the dairy industry. She said that this is not the case in Orange County. She noted that Pike County, Pennsylvania is also doing a dairy study. There should be an effort to come up with a solution for all three counties. K. Apostolides stated that it might help to convince the County Legislature to allocate the \$20,000 that is still needed for the dairy study in Orange County if the Legislature knows how many acres are in the dairy industry in the County. General discussion ensued. No further action taken at this time.

Old Business

Annual Agricultural District Update

Discussion turned to the annual County Agricultural District update. D. Church stated that J. McCarey is ill and will not be coordinating the site visits. He recommended that the Ag Board members visit the sites on their own, if they want to see the sites. The Ag Board members discussed

the site visits and agreed that the information in the packets is sufficient to prove the agricultural viability of both sites. Thus, the site visits will not be necessary this year, given the situation.

The Ag Board members then discussed the specific properties proposed for inclusion in the County Agricultural Districts. The first property discussed was the Spinelli property (SBL 20-4-3.2), in the Town of Newburgh. It is adjacent to other properties that are in County Agricultural District 1 and it contains some Statewide Important soils. This property was the subject of a former 15 lot subdivision. However, the current owners are farming the property, instead. This property is a Christmas tree farm and nursery and there are currently approximately 1,000 trees being grown on this property. No personal conflicts were identified between the Ag Board members and the applicant. D. Smith moved to recommend that the County Legislature add the Spinelli property to Orange County Agricultural District 1, N. Stiles seconded, unanimously approved.

The second property discussed is the Richardson Barnett property (SBL 5-1-1.4), in the Town of Chester. It is not adjacent to any properties in the County Agricultural District. However, most of the site does contain Statewide Important soils. The owner of this property will be growing strawberries and ethnic food. The owner will also be raising goats, cows, chickens, horses, pigs, bees and flowers. The owner was a farmer in Jamaica. No personal conflicts were identified between the Ag Board members and the applicant. D. Smith moved to recommend that the County Legislature add the Richardson Barnett property to Orange County Agricultural District 1, L. DeBuck seconded, unanimously approved.

Ag Plan Implementation – Priority Project 3

Discussion then ensued about the Ag Plan implementation of Priority Project 3. The goal of Priority Project 3 is to “develop a specific agricultural economics program to increase the profitability of farms.” K. Apostolides stated that there have been efforts to address this during the past year. She stated that the Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District worked with dairy farmers to replace the covers and tires that had been used with special tarps that are designed to cover silage pits. The new tarps were bought in response to a recent requirement by New York State to remove the tires or drill holes in them to let the water drain out in order to reduce standing water and the related health issues from mosquitos breeding. K. Apostolides stated that the County has also promoted National Dairy Month and is planning a meeting with public officials later in 2019. The meeting will be designed to educate public officials about current issues that farmers in Orange County are facing.

K. Apostolides stated that the County has also been working to address dairy economic development. She stated that members of Cornell Cooperative Extension and farmers went on a tour of a milk / ice cream processing plant at Cornell University to see if such a processing plant is feasible in Orange County. She stated that HVADC and SUNY Cobleskill are also working on a small dairy processing plant. In the summer of 2018, there was a conversation with dairy farmers about solutions to their problems. The County is still seeking to get \$20,000 from the Orange County Legislature for the dairy study.

During the past year, there has also been efforts to coordinate with agriculture related agencies and organizations to continue to populate and maintain the agricultural website. K. Apostolides stated that there has been an effort to maintain easily accessible websites and to work with the Orange County Planning Department to address issues with the agricultural resources page on the website. She stated that the County has partnered with other agencies for farmers market advertising. Social media was also regularly populated with information to drive internet traffic to the Orange County tourism website. D. Church stated that some of the information on the Orange County tourism website is not accurate and needs to be updated. K. Apostolides stated that there is a need to get

more Orange County information on the state tourism website. S. Soons stated that advertisements should be put on facebook. D. Church stated that such an advertisement would have to be pro-ag. He also noted that Tourism won't put something up on the website for dairy unless there is a farm that allows people on the farm. This is an issue because a lot of dairy farmers do not let the public on their farms. However, this idea could be discussed further in the future.

K. Apostolides stated that there have also been efforts to expand the help offered to farms to diversify and to add value-added products. She noted that Cornell Cooperative Extension has offered education and training throughout the year, including a training opportunity for raising beef on a dairy farm, a growing hemp workshop, and individual farm consultations. General discussion ensued. No action taken at this time.

Meeting adjourned: 7:51 pm.