Dear Friend:

Welcome to our Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, the blueprint for Orange County’s rural space preservation. Agriculture provides jobs, supports local businesses, and promotes a culture of stewardship that ties us to generations of New Yorkers from our distant past as well as those yet to be born. Orange County’s Plan is an essential part of preserving this shared heritage for future generations of farmers and conservationists. The Hudson Valley has been called the breadbasket of our state for good reason: without farms there is no food. In my short time as your County Executive, we have created a series of initiatives and programs designed to keep farming strong in Orange County. There are currently 57 protected farms in Orange County consisting of 7,324 acres.

We also developed access to fresh, local produce throughout the year thanks to our award under the USDA’s Farmers Market Promotion Program. The program’s funds will be used to support Orange County’s 15 farmers markets through promotional efforts, create a new winter and summer market, and expand access to fresh local goods in lower-income areas. When you buy from local producers, you support our neighbors, friends, and Orange County businesses. That’s why I am delighted to announce the development of these winter and summer farmers markets that will expand opportunities for our residents to access fresh, healthy food from local and regional producers and farmers.

Farms and agriculture create jobs and continue a Hudson Valley tradition. Thanks to the hard work of the Orange County Department of Planning and interest from concerned citizens like you, this tradition endures. Thank you for being a part of our heritage.

Sincerely,

Steven M. Neuhaus
County Executive
Acknowledgements

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OC Land Trust
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OC Planning Department
OC Soil & Water Conservation District
OC Farm Bureau
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February 2015
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Introduction

Orange County has long been a leader in support of agriculture and farmland preservation efforts. This is demonstrated by its adoption of New York State’s first Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan in 1996, funding of a County-level purchase of development rights program in the mid-2000s, development of an Agricultural Economic Development Plan in 2004, and adoption of a Right-to-Farm Law in 2006. Much progress has been made and the fruits of those efforts are showing with increased numbers and types of farms and higher farm profits in the County. The buy-local movement and Orange County’s proximity to large urban markets offer new opportunities for area farmers.

There are about 658 farms working 88,000 acres of land – about 17% of the County. Although today there is much less farmland and many fewer farms than historical highs, farming remains a dynamic, growing, and viable industry in the County. Between 2007 and 2012 there has been a 2.5% increase in the number of farms and a 9% increase in the number of acres being farmed. Farming is a significant economic contributor not to be ignored. In 2012, it contributed $100.7 million in cash receipts and over 2,200 employees in the County. Data shows that more farms are making a profit now and while livestock and dairy farms, unfortunately, continue to decline, others are growing. There is a greater diversity of farms, more value-added products, and more farms with direct sales to consumers. Direct to consumer sales have increased dramatically and in 2012, had $7.6 million in sales.

The County recognizes, however, that farm viability remains a challenge for many reasons and is committed to continue efforts to sustain farming. The primary goal of this Plan is to address ways to improve the economic vitality and diversity of agricultural pursuits in the County and to address those challenges. This Plan is designed to offer the County a toolbox of ideas and actions that can be implemented over time to improve agricultural opportunities, preserve important farmlands, and maintain or enhance agriculture’s role in the local economy.

Through the leadership of the County’s Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, the County received a New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Farmland Planning Grant to support development of this update to its 1996/1998 Agriculture Plan.

This new Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan will give the County:

- a long-term vision and direction to guide policies and programs that enhance agriculture;
- strategies to maintain agriculture as a critical land use and economic driver;
- a framework for organization and collaboration to promote existing and new farm operations;
- identification of potential project partners and sources of funding;
- data, maps, and other information that can be used to support public relations, marketing, grant writing, and other programs related to agriculture; and
- a resource about agriculture for county staff, elected officials, and farmers.
The New Plan and Process

The planning process was coordinated by the Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board with staff coordination by the Planning Department. Work began with formation of an Advisory committee composed of farmers, Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board members, staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension and Soil and Water Conservation District, and agriculture-related organizations and County representatives. A planning consultant team was hired to assist (See Acknowledgement Section).

To make sure that the plan meets the needs of Orange County agriculture, a database was developed to identify important and vulnerable farmlands, critical issues and trends affecting agriculture here and potential solutions. The Plan’s critical pieces were informed by input received from farmers, agencies, organizations, and the general public. This input was received through meetings of the committee, the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, a farmer/farmland owner survey, a general public survey, interviews with several other stakeholders, and focus group meetings with farmers, land trust organizations and economic development interests.

From these activities, agricultural issues, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in Orange County were identified. Farmer input was also critical to the development of the vision and specific goals. Most importantly, the Advisory Committee developed a prioritized list of actions to achieve this vision for agriculture in Orange County.

The planning process began in September 2013:

1. Data and maps (Appendix 1 of Part 2) were collected to document current types, conditions, and characteristics of farms and farmland in the County.

2. Farmers and farmland owners were surveyed to identify issues, needs, and future plans (Appendix 4 of Part 2). 105 farm operators participated in the survey. Forty attended a farmers’ workshop. Several personal interviews were also conducted. Eighteen individual interviews were held with stakeholders including land trust organizations. An economic development focus group was held representing 12 different agencies or organizations. The general public was also surveyed to identify the role they feel agriculture plays in the County and to gauge support for farm and farmland protection, and 367 individuals participated.

3. Information learned from all public input and collected data was analyzed to identify Orange County agricultural strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. See SWOT Section (Page 35) and Appendix 5 of Part 2 for results of this input.

4. A long-term vision and a set of goals were established based on that public input. See Vision and Goals Section (Page 37).

5. Specific strategies were identified to help the County meet its long-term goals. See Recommended Projects (Page 40).

6. A full document was drafted that meets the statutory requirements of Section 324-a of Article 25-aa of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law, along with Circular 1500.
7. A public meeting was conducted to present the plan and hear comments from the public and farmers.

8. The Plan was submitted to the County Legislature for adoption.

Existing Plans, Programs and Initiatives

Planning for agriculture and farmland protection is not new to Orange County or the Hudson Valley region. Numerous plans, studies, and initiatives have been developed over the past two decades that directly or indirectly address agriculture. Agencies and organizations including, but not limited to the County Planning Department, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Orange County Land Trust, the County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, and the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation are all involved in the business of helping ensure our farms are profitable and sustainable.

Through these efforts, a great deal of data had already been collected to characterize agriculture’s issues and needs, and strategies articulated. This Plan attempts to update, integrate and build on those past and current efforts. Appendix 3 contains a detailed inventory of programs and resources that can and should be used in concert with this Plan. The intent is not to reproduce that information but refer the interested reader to those resources.

However, it is important to identify the most relevant plans and studies that have been developed in the County and region. Noteworthy is the Town of Wallkill, which completed and adopted an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan in 2012. Like this County Plan, the Town’s Plan was also partially funded by NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. The recommendations in the Plan have been reviewed and are in line with those of this Plan, and the Town of Wallkill is currently working to implement their Plan at the town level through various means.

The following is a brief highlight of past and current efforts that address agriculture.

County Planning Initiatives

The 1996 Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan was the first of its kind in New York State. It was updated in 1998. Following that effort, the County initiated its Purchase of Development Rights program and continued its commitment to agriculture by development of the 2004 Agricultural Economic Development Plan. That was an in-depth study of issues and solutions to improve the agricultural economy. Although the 2004 data is not up-to-date, most of the findings and recommendations are still relevant today.

The County’s Comprehensive Plan, including its Open Space Plan addendum and Economic Development Strategy, all include and recognize the importance of agriculture to the County and offer varying degrees of solutions to maintain farming.
This Plan has been informed by these other efforts, and its’ findings and recommendations are consistent and coordinated so that they work together to advance agriculture from different perspectives. This integrated approach is consistent with the fact that agriculture is also integrated into the economy and fabric of life in Orange County.

Agricultural-related plans and studies reviewed for this Plan were:

- 1996 Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan
- 1998 Update to the Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan
- 2004 Orange County Agricultural Economic Development Plan
- 2004 Orange County Open Space Plan
- 2006 Orange County passed Local Law #5 - a Right-to-Farm law
- 2008 Case Study Report – Orange County, NY – One of 15 Case Studies for the Research Project on Farm Viability in Urbanizing Areas
- 2010 Orange County Comprehensive Plan
- 2010 Orange County Agriculture Portrait (Cornell Cooperative Extension)
- 2010 Wallkill River Watershed Conservation and Management Plan
- 2012 8-Year Review of Orange County Agricultural Districts #1 and #2
- 2013 Orange County Greenway Compact
- 2014 Orange County Economic Development Plan (Draft)
Specific Agricultural Program Initiatives in Orange County

Farmers, landowners, buyers, agri-businesses and the general public benefit from a robust set of agriculturally-related programs and services available in Orange County. More than 15 different organizations currently provide dozens of programs that range from consumer horticulture to farm worker housing loan programs. Appendix 3 offers details about these programs.

This level of farm infrastructure is an indication of both the demand for and the importance of agriculture in the County. Although many programs are already designed to address the core themes of this Plan including economic development, education, public awareness, farmland protection and supporting the next generation of farmers, challenges still face farms. There are some gaps in programs and others need additional support to ensure agriculture remains a significant and sustainable activity in the County.

The following list of agencies and major programs highlights the current agricultural initiatives taking place in Orange County. It is important to note that most of the programs categorized under “education, training and support” are essentially economic development programs because they are ultimately designed to enhance the production, profitability, and sustainability of farmers.

Economic Development-Oriented Programs

- Cornell Cooperative Ext. - Orange County
  - Virtual Food Hub- Market Maker – interactive database
  - Farm to School – promoting use of local produce in schools
- Farm Credit East
  - Dairy and Winery Benchmarks – data analysis to help farms benchmark progress
- Glynwood Center
  - Hudson Valley Food Program – production and marketing support
- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
  - Incubator Without Walls – services to accelerate farm growth and expansion
  - Hudson Valley Bounty – connecting farms and culinary businesses
- Orange County Farm Bureau
  - Policy Development to promote agriculture
- USDA Farm Service Agency – loans and technical assistance
  - Disaster Assistance Program
  - Tree Assistance Program for Orchardists
  - Biomass Crop Assistance Program
  - Farm Storage Facility Loan Program
  - Marketing Assistance Loans
  - Margin Protection Program for Dairy
  - Agricultural Risk Coverage
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – financial and technical assistance
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Education, Training and Support-Oriented Programs

- Cornell Cooperative Ext. - Orange County – education and technical assistance
Orange County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan

- 4-H Youth program
- Master Gardener Program
- Small Farms Program
- Gleaning Program for Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens
- Dairy and Livestock
- General Horticulture
- Equine Program
- Water resources and environmental stewardship

- Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program
- Glynwood Center
  - Convening Changemakers – research, meetings and forums to promote sustainable food and farming
- Orange County Planning Department
  - Facilitates development of Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan
  - NYS GML 239 Reviews
  - Farm Market Postcards – information about local produce and farmers markets in the County
- Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board
  - Agricultural District Reviews
- Orange County Citizens Foundation
  - Agribusiness Tours – annual private tour of farms and agri-businesses
  - General advocacy and awareness programs
- Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District – financial and technical assistance
  - New York State Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control
  - Agricultural Environmental Management
  - New York State Agricultural Assessment Program
  - Technical Assistance related to land drainage, water resources
  - Agricultural Equipment Rental
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – financial and technical assistance
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - Agricultural Management Assistance Program

Farmland Protection-Oriented Programs

- Orange County Land Trust, Scenic Hudson, Open Space Institute and other land trusts
  - Conservation easements and land purchases to protect farmlands and open spaces
- Orange County Planning Department
  - Management of the County Purchase of Development Rights program
  - Planning assistance to local municipalities
- USDA – Farm Service Agency
  - Conservation Programs such as Conservation Reserve, Farmable Wetlands Program, Emergency Conservation Reserve Program
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
  - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
- Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District
  - Wallkill River Drainage programs
**Programs Oriented to Develop New and the Next Generation of Farmers**

American Farmland Trust – Hudson Valley Farmlink Network
- Cornell Cooperative Ext. - Orange County
  - New Farmers Manual
  - 4-H Youth Program
  - Northeast Beginning Farmer Project
- Farm Credit East
  - FarmStart – capital investments
  - Young, Beginning, Small, and Veteran Incentive Program
  - Generation Next – business and management seminars
  - NYS Farm Worker Housing Loan Program
  - Financial Partner Magazine
- Glynwood Center
  - Apprenticeships and training

These existing agencies and organizations highlighted above form the core group of partners that should continue working together with Orange County to implement the priority actions outlined in this Plan.
Agricultural Resources

Definitions

New York State Agriculture and Markets Law 25-AA, Section 301 defines a farm operation as “the land and on-farm buildings, equipment, manure processing and handling facilities, and practices which contribute to the production, preparation and marketing of crops, livestock and livestock products as a commercial enterprise, including a "commercial horse boarding operation" as defined in subdivision thirteen of this section, a "timber operation" as defined in subdivision fourteen of this section and "compost, mulch or other biomass crops" as defined in subdivision sixteen of this section and "commercial equine operation” as defined in subdivision seventeen of this section. Such farm operation may consist of one or more parcels of owned or rented land, which parcels may be contiguous or noncontiguous to each other.”

In addition to ‘farm operation’, this Plan also refers to ‘Agriculture’ and ‘Agribusiness’ throughout. While those terms are not defined in 25-AA, Section 301, the following definitions have been developed with input from the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Steering Committee and from the Orange County Right to Farm Law (Local Law #5 of 2006):

**Agriculture**, for purposes of this plan, refers broadly to any land use activity that produces or supports food, crops, fiber, greenhouse products, animal husbandry and products, timber, and other goods and products from the land as a commercial enterprise. An agricultural operation includes the land and on-farm buildings, equipment, manure processing and handling facilities, and practices which contribute to the production, preparation, processing, and marketing of food, crops, livestock and livestock products, timber operations, commercial horse boarding and equine operations, composting, and biomass crops.

**Farms** are locations where these agricultural activities take place and may consist of one or more parcels of owned or rented land.

**Agribusiness** is a business engaged in the producing operations of a farm, the manufacture and distribution of farm equipment and supplies, and the processing, storage, and distribution of farm commodities.

**Farmland** is land used primarily for bona fide agricultural production, for commercial purposes, of all those items and products.
Orange County has a long history of farming, and agriculture has shaped many aspects of the County as it exists today. Agriculture has been a key part of the County’s economy from the beginning. Land use patterns and roads developed originally to serve farms. Development of transportation routes across the County, including the railroads and shipping on the Hudson River and the Delaware and Hudson Canals facilitated the movement of agricultural products to markets in metropolitan centers.

At the opening of the 20th Century, approximately 75% of Orange County’s land was being farmed. Since that time however, with the exception of the decade of the Great Depression, there has been a steady decline in the amount of land in farms in the County. The same transportation routes that served for transportation of Orange County agricultural products contributed to the growth of Orange County villages and cities. From 1950-1970, the decline in agriculture in the county was rapid and the number of farms dropped from approximately 3,000 to 1,000 with acres under cultivation from about 275,000 to 150,000.

Since the 1970’s, the rate of decline in farmland has slowed but not stopped. In 1997, the USDA Census of Agriculture accounted for approximately 95,000 acres of farmland (approximately 19% of the total area of the county) distributed among only 624 farms. By 2012, the most current year of the Census of Agriculture, there were about 658 farms working 88,000 acres of land. Today, the County’s farmlands

Activities Defined as Agriculture in the Orange County Right to Farm Law (Local Law #5 of 2006)

- Field crops including corn, wheat, oats, rye, barley, hay, potatoes, dry beans and sod;
- Vegetables including tomatoes, snap beans, cabbage, carrots, beets, onions and corn;
- Fruits including apples, berries, cherries, peaches and pumpkins;
- Horticultural ornamental specialties including nursery stock, shrubs, ornamental trees, flowers and vegetables;
- Livestock and livestock products, including cattle, sheep, hogs, goats, horses, poultry, ratites such as ostriches, emus, rheas, kiwis, farmed deer, farmed buffalo, fur bearing animals, wool bearing animals, such as alpacas and llamas, milk, eggs and furs;
- Christmas trees derived from a managed Christmas tree operation whether dug for transplanting or cut from the stump;
- Aquaculture products, including fish, fish products, water plants and shellfish;
- Forestry products such as short rotation woody crops used for bio-energy and maple syrup products.
- Collection, transportation, distribution, composting, cooling, drying and storage of animal and poultry waste;
- Storage, transportation and use of equipment for tillage, planting, harvesting and marketing;
- Transportation, storage and use of legally permitted fertilizers and limes, insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides;
- Construction of farm structures and facilities, including farm wineries and other on-farm food processing as permitted by local and State building code regulation;
- Construction and maintenance of fences and other enclosures;
- Use and/or maintenance of related pastures, idle or fallow land, woodland, wetland, farm ponds, farm roads and certain farm buildings and other structures related to agricultural practices.
are primarily concentrated in the Wallkill River Valley which runs southwest to northeast through the center of the County, including the towns of Crawford, Goshen, Hamptonburgh, Minisink, Montgomery, Warwick, and Wawayanda.

Agriculture is an important industry and land use in the County because it…

- Contributes to jobs and the economy (see Agricultural Economy section, below)
- Contributes to the visual character of the landscape, and sense of community and cultural identity
- Provides fresh, safe, and local foods and products
- Provides recreational opportunities
- Foundation for many tourism activities
- Keeps taxes down because it costs less to provide municipal services to agriculture than residential uses
- Provides open lands for wildlife
- Offers a quality of life that residents highly value
- Protects the environment – soil conservation, carbon sequestration, conservation of biodiversity

Agricultural Statistics

Appendix 1 offers detailed data about Orange County farms, farmland and agricultural economic characteristics. Appendix 2 offers detailed regional data. The following are highlights that summarize those current conditions and trends.

Farms and Farmland

- The number of farms in the County is increasing. The number of acres being farmed is also on the increase (9% more than in 2007). There are about 88,000 acres farmed - about 17% of the total land base in the County. The average size of a farm is 134 acres.
- The number of farms of all sizes has increased except for the smallest sized farms (1 to 9 acres). Those small farms decreased in number from 92 in 2007 to 72 in 2012. The largest increase in the number of farms were those sized 500 to 999 acres (increased from 19 to 22 farms).
- The market value of land and buildings on farms is increasing and is over $700,000 per farm or $5500 per acre of land.
Farm Products

- Orange County grows a diversity of crops.
- Forage crops were the most common crop.
- More farms had horses/ponies than any other kind of livestock.
- Farms with dairy animals fell 46%.
- The number of farms with other livestock is also decreasing.
- Dairy was the principal crop on 6% of farms in the county. The number of farms with dairy fell 18% since 2012. The largest increase was in the number of farms with beef cattle.
Farm Operators

- The average age of Orange County farmers is rising and in 2012 was 58.1 years. This compares to 57.1 years statewide and 58.3 years nationally.
- A recent positive trend is that the number of principal operators under the age of 35 doubled in number since 2007, but still only reflects 28 farms, or 4% of the total).

Farm Sales and Income

- According to US Census of Agriculture data, Orange County farms generated $100.7 million in cash receipts. Of that, crops accounted for $72 million and livestock production $29 million.
- Five commodities accounted for 84% sales: nursery/greenhouse; vegetables; dairy; horses; and fruit/berry.
- Direct to consumer sales increased 40% since 2007 from $5.4 million in sales in 2007 to $7.6 million in 2012. Orange County had the highest direct to consumer sales in the mid-Hudson region in 2012.
- Of all the commodities, only dairy had decreased value of sales in 2012 compared to 2007 (down 21%).
- A significant contribution to the overall agricultural economy is agricultural food manufacturing. This includes frozen food, canning, poultry processing and other food processing businesses.
Cattle/calves, and sheep/goats/wool showed large increases in the value of those sales. Using figures adjusted for inflation, total farm sales decreased 32% between 1987 and 2012. 40% of farms had sales less than $10,000. 36% have sales between $10,000 and $99,000. The average sales per farm was $153,035. 40 farms had sales over $500,000 and this accounts for 65% of the County’s output.

Farm Production Expenses

Orange County farms had $100.6 million in production expenses in 2012 with hired labor being the largest single expense ($23 million, total). Other significant expenses were for seeds/bulbs/plants/and trees ($11.2 million) and feed for animals ($10 million). Property taxes were about 6% of all farm expenses and this amount rose 19.9% between 2007 and 2012.

Farm Income and Value

Net income on farms dramatically rose from $4.7 million in 2007 to $13 million in 2012. More farms were making a profit (42%) in 2012 than in 2007.
Orange County farms owned about $487.5 million worth of land and buildings and an additional $76.9 million in machinery. The average value per acre of farmland increased from $5,150 in 2007 to $5,537 in 2012. This value was a great deal higher than the statewide average of $2,600.

**Farm Employment**

- Farms employed about 2,208 workers. 58 farms had more than 10 workers.
- The number of farms having hired labor increased by 25% since 2007, with a 43% increase in the total number of farm workers. This boosted the annual payroll for farm workers from $15.9 million in 2007 to $23 million in 2012.
- There are many other industries and businesses in Orange County that are dependent upon or related to agriculture. Ag-related industries employed a minimum of 2,131 workers and brought another $76 million in annual payroll that was dependent on agriculture.

**Agricultural Districts**¹

The New York State Agricultural District Program exists to protect current and future farmland from nonagricultural development. It helps reduce competition for limited land resources and also helps prevent local laws which would inhibit farming and impede the ability of farmers to operate their farms using acceptable agricultural practices.

There are two NYS Agricultural Districts located in Orange County (See Map 1). Both districts were created in 1972 and are required to be reviewed every eight years. Updates are made to the district boundaries after a review and public input process. The latest review took place in 2012 and new district boundaries were accepted at that time. Note that not all land included in the agricultural districts are farmed parcels.

Table 1 below details information about these districts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ag District #1</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Ag District #2</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Acres</td>
<td>67,793</td>
<td></td>
<td>94,619</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres in Farms</td>
<td>10,817</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10,789</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm acres Owned by Farmers</td>
<td>5,707</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>7,873</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm acres rented by Farmers</td>
<td>5,110</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>2,916</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Adapted from the 2012 Report on the Eight Year Review of Orange County Agricultural Districts #1 and #2
Active Farmland

Agricultural land is widely dispersed throughout the County. However, eight towns in central Orange County, forming a north-south corridor, account for 80% of the County’s agricultural land - about 69,300 acres (See Map2). This corridor includes the Wallkill River valley, along with parts of the towns of Goshen and Chester where most of the County’s prime “Black Dirt” region is found. With the exception of the Black Dirt area, this part of the County is developing quickly and there has been a notable decline in farmed acres there since the late 1980’s.

In Orange County, there is a very close correlation between farms that are active and those that also receive agricultural assessments through the New York program. Thus, use of the map showing agricultural assessments also approximates where the active farmland is in the County (Map 2).

Farmers and farmland owners benefit from reduced tax assessments through the New York Agricultural Assessment Program. Generally, farmland that receives a reduced assessment is in active agriculture and shows commitment on the part of the farmer and/or landowner to continue farming. There are
2,528 parcels and 89,678 acres of land in Orange County that receive agricultural assessments. Map 2 shows parcels of land that are included in the agricultural assessment program. It illustrates the most active concentrations of farms in the County. The map below shows those parcels that are considered to be farmed as determined by local assessors but are not receiving agricultural assessments. While some of this may be attributed to differences in assessment categorization, or even map data errors, it appears as if there are some eligible farmlands that are not taking advantage of the lower tax rates offered through the State program.

**Soils**

Successful agriculture depends on quality soils. High quality soils require less fertilizer and nutrients for growing crops. Farms with more productive soils can have lower costs and higher production rates. Orange County has a wide range of soil qualities and conditions anchored by the highly productive muck lands or “Black Dirt” in the Towns of Wawayanda, Warwick, Minisink, Goshen, and Chester (Map 3).
Prime farmland soils and soils of statewide importance are defined by the USDA and New York State. These are considered the most productive soils for farming. About 43% of soils in Orange County are considered prime and productive soils. Soils in Orange County are particularly suited for flowers, vegetables, or fruit and tree fruit production.

Prime and productive soils can also be found to some degree in almost every town with large blocks in Warwick, Goshen, Wawayanda, Minisink, Montgomery, and Newburgh. These soils are also highly desirable for residential and commercial because they are more conducive to construction and are not limited by steep slopes, shallow soils or other constraints. As such, these same towns are also under high development pressure.

Within the prime and important soils, approximately 10,000 acres are the muck soils or “Black Dirt” (Map 3). These Black Dirt soils are highly productive and very suitable for production of a wide variety of vegetable and field crops. Within the “Black Dirt” regions, these soils are found in large contiguous blocks, and since these soils support little development potential because of wetness, they will likely remain highly suitable for farming into the foreseeable future. Approximately 4,000 additional muck acres could be improved through drainage to achieve similar productivity capacity.
Other productive soils are scattered throughout the upland portions of Orange County, but are concentrated in upland valleys and throughout the Wallkill River Valley. These upland areas have been dominated by Orange County dairy farms and are highly vulnerable to conversion to non-farm uses.

**Farmland Conversion Pressure**

An increasing population growth rate has a direct impact on the County's land use patterns and significantly impacts agriculture. Increasing numbers of single family homes and commercial developments outside urban areas has required conversion of farmland and open space into other uses. Though development rates have slowed since 2007 with the most recent recession, the County has still continued to grow, some areas more rapidly than others (Table 2). Since 2000, the County as a whole grew nine percent in population.

This high rate of growth is expected to continue as Orange County is very attractive for both commercial and residential development due to its proximity to New York City. Orange County represents the outer ring of affordable single-family residences. Outward growth from New York City is directed towards Orange County because its southern neighbors such as Rockland, Putnam, and Westchester Counties are approaching build-out status.

The population growth rate in Orange is projected to increase through 2020, with the greatest absolute and relative growth occurring outside of Orange’s incorporated cities.

However, the growth rate of some of Orange County’s towns is expected to be nearly double the growth rate of the County as a whole. Nine towns are expected to have growth rates equal to or less than the overall growth rate of the County. The towns with the highest growth rate are also those with the most farmland. As development pressure builds, these prime agricultural areas become more threatened as land values rise and incompatible residential uses fragment farmland.
A closer look at building patterns in the County contributes to the picture of conversion pressure of farmlands. Table 2 shows the number of building permits issued at the town level. A frequent growth pattern seen in many New York communities is growth without population increases. In other words, more houses are built at a higher rate than the population increase. This pattern is an indicator of sprawl.
Some locations, such as in the Town of Wallkill, show a high level of new single family homes being built between 2000 and 2012, but not the highest population increase. Examination of both population growth and building gives a more complete picture of development pressure farms may be facing.

Table 2 shows both population growth and the number of new single-family home building permits issued. Areas where growth has been, and continues to be more rapid are those which are located in close proximity to Routes I-87, I-84 and NY 17. Crawford, Greenville, Hamptonburgh, Minisink, Monroe, Wallkill and Waywayanda all experienced a high level of population growth between 2000 and 2010.

Table 2 also shows that high population growth does not always equate with the highest number of building permits issued. In fact, some towns with the highest number of building permits issued did not have the highest population growth. It also illustrates the pressure that both new building and increased population growth has on the very communities that have the most agriculture.

The consequences of conversion of farmland means not only a loss of production, open space, and loss of jobs, it also negatively affects County and town fiscal conditions. In general, most residential housing does not generate as much net revenue for a jurisdiction as it costs more to provide public services to it. Commercial development and farmland usually subsidize residential development to varying degrees.

“Cost of Community Services” studies commissioned by the American Farmland Trust, Sullivan County and others from within the Hudson Valley have found this to be the case. A cost of community service study was conducted in 1998 for the Town of Warwick. That study showed that farmland costs a community far less than commercial or residential land uses. For every dollar collected in taxes, agricultural lands needed $0.25 to $0.43 in services, depending on school district.

These numbers mean that for every $1 collected in taxes by a municipality, it costs that amount to provide public services for a land use. For example, in Amenia, for every $1 collected in taxes it costs the Town 1.23 to provide municipal services to residential uses, but only 17 cents for farmland.
Protected Lands

There are 101 parcels of land that are currently permanently protected in Orange County (Figure 4). This covers 7,469 acres, or 1.4% of the County’s total land area. Many entities have helped to preserve farmland in Orange County, including land trusts, municipalities, Orange County Legislature, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. The Towns of Warwick, Montgomery, and Goshen have all contributed funds to farmland preservation.

The Town of Warwick is the only municipality that currently has an active farmland preservation program. Initially funded through bonding, the Town’s Community Preservation Fund has been financed since 2007 using a 0.75% real estate transfer tax that goes directly to purchase development rights of active farms. Since completing its first PDR project in 1999, the Town has expended over $11 million to protect 26 farms totaling nearly 3,200 acres; these municipal funds leveraged roughly $25 million in total project costs.
In 2004, after the adoption of its Open Space Plan, the Orange County Legislature and Executive Edward Diana created an Open Space Fund that provided up to 50% of the cost of land protection projects. This Fund was used to help finance the purchase of development rights of 17 farms totaling 2,307 acres.

**Priorities for Farmland Preservation**

New York State Priority Farmland Criteria

New York State requires that a county farmland protection plan identify land areas that should be protected. A landowner who wishes to sell their development rights through the State PDR program must show in their application that their land is in an area identified by the County as important farmland. As such, this Plan evaluated the criteria used by the State to identify important farmlands and has created its own set of criteria unique to the County.

The State PDR program is designed to:

- preserve “viable agricultural land” as defined in section three hundred one of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law;
- protect farmland in areas facing significant development pressure; and
- protect lands that serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics.

The specific State-level criteria for farmland preservation revolve around how well the proposed project:

- preserves “viable agricultural land”;
- is located in areas facing significant development pressure;
- serves as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics;
- protects prime farmland soils;
- protects farmland of statewide importance soils; and
- protects land used in agricultural production.

**Orange County’s Priority Farmland Criteria**

Below is a discussion of the criteria that define Orange County’s priorities for farmland preservation. These criteria are useful for evaluating, or even ranking, farms that are applying to a purchase of development right (PDR) or transfer of development rights (TDR) program or are otherwise seeking protection. Identification of priority farmland implements one of the 2010 County Comprehensive Plan.

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2 Further, New York’s Department of Agriculture and Markets Circular 1500 includes a requirement that county-level agriculture and farmland protection plan must include an identification of any land or areas proposed to be protected. The State has elevated the importance of county-level priority farmland identification because they give funding to farmland protection projects that are consistent with local agriculture and farmland protection plans.
recommendations; he Comprehensive Plan recommended that priority farmlands be protected by county, municipal and nonprofit entities. Map 5 identifies farmlands in the County.

MAP 5: FARMLAND.

Priority farmlands in Orange County are identified by the following six (6) criteria:

1. **Existing farmland in proximity to protected farms**: farms near protected farmland or the Black Dirt Region are priorities for protection so as to encourage farm clusters (Map 5). Note that while black dirt farms are not eligible for any PDR funding – they are considered “undevelopable” and thus have little to no development rights to purchase – but that this Region is one of the County’s most critical and intensively farmed areas. Farms located in close proximity to this Region are thus high priorities.

2. **Farm size**: the larger the farm, the higher the priority

3. **Soil type**: prime soils and soils of statewide importance are priorities, with slightly more weight being given to farms having prime soils (Map 3)
4. **Priority for development:** Areas outside of the County’s adopted Growth Areas (Map 6) are slightly higher priorities for preservation than those within its boundaries. This Map is a component of the County’s Comprehensive Plan (2010, or its successor), with the Growth Areas being described in the Plan as follows:

...the Growth Areas include the historic cities and villages of the County where growth has historically occurred, with some outlying areas for logical projected growth. They are particularly significant in a region with a largely rural history and character because they provide a sense of place and a focus of services amid larger areas of open space, agriculture, forest lands and rural residential neighborhoods. Most include a prominent central business district, the presence of regional civic and employment sites, a mix of land use types and intensities, pedestrian oriented neighborhoods, access to major transportation systems, and a diversity of housing, community and commercial activities. It is within the boundaries of the Growth Areas that the County encourages additional urban / village growth, such as higher density residential, commercial and certain industrial uses, and other community services. The use of infill construction as a method of revitalization is especially appropriate in these areas.

Priority should be given to the Growth Areas, and specifically the Villages and Cities within them, for County support, incentives, and investment in water and sewer infrastructure improvements/extensions, sidewalk construction, transportation infrastructure, opportunities for transit-oriented development, housing, and commercial development.

**MAP 6: MAP OF ORANGE COUNTY’S PRIORITY GROWTH AREAS, ADOPTED BY THE COUNTY**
5. **Project readiness**: commitment of matching funds or agreements for donations to meet the required match for executing a PDR project. One way this can be evidenced is by a written commitment signed by all involved landowners.

6. **Level of agricultural activity and farm infrastructure**: farms with existing barns, wells, sheds, and other farm facilities are priorities.

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**Local Land Use Policies and Agriculture**

The foundation for local land use regulation is the comprehensive plan. That document establishes the policies, vision, and strategies desired by the community. Land use regulations including zoning flow from the plan to meet those community objectives. Both can affect agriculture in many ways. A review of local comprehensive plans and zoning laws was done to gauge the level of support given to agriculture, and to identify areas where these could be strengthened to promote farming.

At the most basic level, zoning can specify where and what types of farms can operate and at what intensity farmland could be developed for other uses. Some zoning laws go beyond this to regulate setbacks, height, and size of farm buildings. Others establish minimum acres required in order to be considered a farm, while still others regulate the number of animals a farmer could have. Zoning laws thus can promote or deter farming operations.

Choices made by local communities in their zoning can drive up land values, make farm expansion or start-ups difficult, cause fragmentation of viable farmland, and hasten conversion to other uses. When local laws restrict agriculture, a sense of impermanence for farming can develop which in turn, can foster disinvestment in farm operations, and ultimately lead to sale of the land for development. This effect coupled with the growth pressures being experienced in Orange County and other farm-related issues such as aging farmers, a transitioning agricultural economy, and the challenge of intergenerational transfer can make selling the land for development irresistible.

Because planning and zoning can have positive or negative impacts on farming, an audit of comprehensive plans and zoning laws was done to evaluate their ‘farm-friendliness’. This review included eighteen towns and five villages, including towns that have land both in and out of New York State Agricultural Districts.

Appendix 6 details the results of this audit. The results are summarized below to give an overall picture of ‘farm-friendliness’ of municipalities in the county. Individual towns that may be interested in their specific audit can contact Orange County Planning Department for that information. Appendix 6 includes the specific criteria used in this evaluation.

**‘Farm-friendliness’ of Comprehensive Plans**

The Town’s comprehensive plans usually address agriculture in some way, and most recognize at least some of the important roles farms play in their community. About half of the municipal plans in Orange County have a specific chapter devoted to planning for agriculture as well as maps of important...
farmland resources. The majority, especially those towns with significant farming activities, also address agriculture in vision and goal statements that demonstrate the value of agriculture to the community.

The level of support expressed in the plan is correlated to how much farm activity is going on. For example, 100% of towns having significant farm activities in their municipality have plans that clearly establish farming as an important part of their community. Only 40% of other towns established that same policy and in those, agriculture was recognized as a land use activity but not emphasized.

While many plans favorably address agriculture in their long-term vision and goals, there are only a few that offer direct policies that address farmland and farming. For example, only 21% of the towns audited detailed tools to promote farms or protect farmland. This is true even in some communities having a lot of agricultural activity. About 35% of towns discussed tools such as conservation subdivisions or clustering as a method to address open space and farms. Still fewer discussed NYS Agricultural Districts or the role they can play. Towns with a lot of farming were much more likely to discuss tools such as PDR, LDR, or TDR, or to consider farms when identifying growth areas. Overall, many plans include agriculture in some way in their vision, but offer little specific planning to assist in ensuring that actually happens.

For those towns that have some agriculture, but are not dominated by those land uses, there are opportunities for niche or small scale agriculture. Without strong planning and community interest in promoting those land uses, it is feasible that those farms are the most constrained by local plans and zoning. Towns with significant amounts of active farmland could also be more proactive about planning for those assets.

Comprehensive plans can be strengthened by further analyzing issues facing farms and farmland, clearer articulation of the benefits provided by farms, and identification of specific strategies that support and allow for farms. As the pressure to convert farmland to non-farm uses increases, these tools and plans become even more important.

‘Farm-friendliness’ of Zoning Laws

An important conclusion of this part of the audit is that many town zoning laws do not address agriculture in a way that matches established goals in their plans. Many towns have supportive plans but less supportive zoning requirements. Others have very restrictive zoning that could significantly affect the ability to farm. There need to be consistent messages and approaches to regulating and addressing farms.

Some of the zoning practices commonly in use in the County that are not farm-friendly include:

- Requiring special use permits for farm uses.
- Allowing higher density of development in prime farm areas.
- Limiting the ability of a farm to have a farm-related businesses on the farm.
- Lacking use of developer-required buffer areas between farmland and new residential uses.
- Prohibiting processing facilities either on-farm or at a commercial location.
- Limiting farm stands to sale of produce raised only on that one farm.
• Lacking a process to ensure that the Planning Board evaluates impacts of a proposed project on surrounding farms.
• Lacking application submission requirements that ask for maps or other information that can be used to assess impact of a project on adjacent farm operations.
• Limited or inflexible definitions of agriculture, farms, etc.
• Lacking use of an agricultural data statement as per AML 25-aa.
• Placing barriers to providing for farm worker housing.
• Not exempting farm structures from height requirements.
• Establishing setbacks that force farm structures to be located in specific areas on a parcel.
• Prohibiting certain kinds of farm animals.
• Limiting the number of farm animals allowed per farm or per acre.
• Establishing a certain minimum acreage that farms need to have or need to have per animal.

Orange County communities have an opportunity to strengthening planning efforts and local laws to be more supportive of agricultural uses. Municipalities in the County can improve their community’s farm-friendliness by updating their zoning law. See Priority Project 5 for recommendations.
Regional Snapshot

In 2010, the Glynwood Center did a thorough report that detailed the state of agriculture in the Hudson Valley using 2007 US Census of Agriculture. That report highlighted the large, positive economic impact agriculture has in the region. It also recognized losses, transitions and declines the farm economy has faced. That is evidenced with reduced numbers of farms, farmed acres, and farmers’ net incomes. Although the data and conclusions from that report covered a broader region, they remain mostly valid today for Orange County as well although some sectors of the farm economy have rebounded since 2007.

A comparison of Orange County to some of its neighbors (Dutchess, Sullivan and Ulster) offer further insight into conditions. Orange County in particular has the most robust farm economy of the four mid-Hudson counties compared (Dutchess, Sullivan, Orange, and Ulster) and the most farms. The following outlines the state of agriculture in these four counties to provide a regional perspective. This is especially important in consideration of some needs and priority projects are best suited for multi-county implementation.

Appendix 2 details all the US Agricultural Census data for the past few decades for Orange, Sullivan, Ulster and Dutchess counties. Some highlights of the agricultural economy in the four counties are:

- In 2012 there were 2,143 farms in the four county region. About 326,000 acres were farmed, and although that is down from the 1974 level of 431,000 acres, it is an almost 17,000 acre increase since 2007.

- The number of farms regionally have increased since 2007.
Farm sales in the four-county area totaled nearly $233 million in 2012. When indirect and induced effects are considered, using the 1.61 multiplier for New York State, those sales increased to about $374.6 million including a variety of industries.

There has been a large and steady increase in the dollar value of agricultural products sold directly to consumers.

There has been a large and steady increase in crop sales, dominated by greenhouse and nursery crops.

The number of dairy farms, and amount of dairy and livestock sales continues to decrease across the region.

The increase in direct sales, vegetable and nursery crops coupled with the loss of livestock and dairy farming is consistent with what the American Farmland Trust calls “farming on the edge”\textsuperscript{3}.\ As urban and suburban growth extends out into traditional farmland areas, agriculture in those locations changes from large and animal-oriented dairy and livestock farms, to smaller farms concentrating on crops conducive to sale directly to urban markets. This pattern is seen throughout the mid-Hudson valley.

\textsuperscript{3} Farming on the Edge, by American Farmland Trust, 1997
Orange County ranks #2 with the other counties in terms of the number of farms and land farmed surpassed only by Dutchess County. However, Orange County has twice as much in total sales, the highest average sales/farm, and the highest dollars in direct sales, crop sales, livestock, and average gross farm income across the region. About 10% of Orange County farms market products directly to retail outlets. Eight percent have value-added commodities. Even though experiencing large losses of dairy farms, cows and production, Orange County still is highest in the number of dairy farms in comparison.

The issues facing farms and farmers identified in Orange County are very similar to those found elsewhere in both the mid-Hudson Valley and throughout New York State. Numerous studies have discussed these regional needs and are referenced in this Plan.

Each county in the region faces difficulties related to:

- Lack of institutional organization to coordinate and collaborate on needed projects;
- Lack of coordinated business retention and attraction programs, including developing new and taking advantage of emerging markets;
- Lack of food processing facilities and infrastructure;
- Similar technical training and business planning needs;
- Repetition and duplication of efforts to address agricultural needs;
- Lack of funding for programs as well as insufficient mechanisms to help farmers understand existing funding opportunities;
- Lack of planning for farm transition and succession to the next generation;
- Lack of understanding of agriculture among the general public and elected officials; and
- Labor issues

Regional discussions have recently been initiated to explore common issues and mutual opportunities. There is recognition that some problems are better solved regionally. To address this, some recommended projects in this plan are identified as one with an opportunity for regional implementation. In addition to Orange County, Sullivan and Dutchess are working on updating their agriculture and farmland protection plans.

**Regional-Level Plans**

Orange County is part of a region where much work has been done to study and promote agriculture. The past decade has brought a keen interest in farming, farmland protection, buy local, and local economies projects throughout the Hudson Valley. There are many agencies and organizations working to that end and some have produced extensive, up-to-date and data-driven reports or studies. Many of these organizations have long-standing programs and plans in place with a mission to improve and promote agriculture in the Valley. Important data, analysis and conclusions can be found within these other documents and this information should not be overlooked as the County works to implement its agricultural programs. To that end, this Plan references and incorporates many of the conclusions and recommendations of the following efforts:


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- 2007 American Farmland Trust - Picking Up the Pace: A Road Map for Accelerating Farmland Protection in New York
- 2010 FoodWorks: A Vision to Improve NYC’s Food System (NYC City Council)
- 2010 The State of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley - Glynwood Center
- 2011 American Farmland Trust - Planning for Agriculture in NY: A Toolkit for Towns & Counties
- 2011 Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp (HVADC) - Understanding Food Systems: Identifying Business Opportunities for Hudson Valley Farmers and Food Entrepreneurs
- 2011 NYS Department of Ag & Markets - From Farm to Factory: Linking New York State Producers and New York City Food Processors
- 2012 American Farmland Trust - Scaling Up: Strategies for Expanding Sales of Local Food to Public and Private Institutions in NY
- 2012 Cornell University - Agriculture-Based Economic Development in NYS: Trends and Prospects
- 2013 Hudson Valley Regional Council - CEDS for the Hudson Valley Economic Development District
- 2013 Local Economies Project - Hudson Valley Food Hubs Initiative
- 2013 Mid-Hudson Regional Sustainability Plan
- 2013 Scenic Hudson - A Foodshed Conservation Plan for the Region
- 2014 (updated from 2011) Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council Strategic Plan
The SWOT is an important tool to help identify the issues that place barriers and challenges on farms and farmers. The issues are complex and interwoven. As such, solving one issue is likely to address others. It is the goal of this Plan to outline the steps needed to address all the issues long-term.

Unfortunately, many of the pressing issues are longstanding and have been identified before in past plans and studies. The first Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan of 1996 discussed many of these same issues, as did the 2004 Agriculture Economic Development Strategy. Many of these are the same ones that currently impact and weaken the agricultural industry today. Other plans including the 2004 Open Space Plan, 2010 Comprehensive Plan, and the 2013 Economic Development Strategy all reiterate many of the same trends and concerns. While much progress has been made and some of the economic trends are more positive now. But, there is still much that can be accomplished to improve agriculture in the County.

Long-standing issues that need to be addressed include:

- Loss of dairy farms
- Loss of important agricultural infrastructure such as processing facilities
- Labor, immigration issues, and farm worker housing
- Loss of farmland, and impacts of growth pressure and land conversion
- High cost of farmland and high operating costs
- Lack of a next generation of farmers
- Reliance on rental lands for farm operations
- Lack of farm operation awareness and understanding on the part of the general public and municipal leaders and lack of understanding of the economic role agriculture plays
- Poor collaboration, inter/intra agency and industry communication, and lack of institutional or administrative capacity to fully implement necessary programs
- Regulatory barriers at the local, State and federal levels
- Lack of regional coordination
- Lack of funding to implement necessary programs
### Strengths
- Established Distribution Infrastructure
- Farmers
- Diversity in Types of Farms
- Farmers Markets
- Local Food Highly Valued
- Soils and Water Support Agriculture
- Excellent Market Access
- Public Support for Agriculture
- Strong Ties Between Ag and Tourism
- Support Structure for Farms Exists

### Weaknesses
- Declining Dairy Industry
- Resistance to Change
- Inefficient Use of Market Opportunities
- High Development Pressure
- Disconnect Between Ag and Economic Development
- Lack of Processing Facilities
- Aging of Farmers
- Lack of Succession and Transition Plans
- Labor Quality and Quantity
- Flooding
- Local Regulations and Policies Not Farm Friendly

### Opportunities
- Food Hub Initiative
- More Cooperation
- Locally Grown Products
- Additional Funding for Land Preservation
- Preservation of Additional Farmlands
- Changing Demographics
- Food Oriented Companies Attracted to Orange County
- Increase Food Processing Facilities
- Farm Link and Farm Match Programs
- Succession Planning and Education
- Attraction of new farmers
- Local Government Programs
- Value-Added and New Markets
- Farm to Business/Institution Programs
- Agri-tourism/Promotion
- Expansion direct sales/Farmer’s Markets
- Public Education
- Farm-friendly Local Laws
- Incentives, Grants, Access to Capital

### Threats
- Loss of Farmland
- Low Profitability
- High Costs of Land
- Lack of Capital to Invest in Farm
- High Costs of Farming
- Increased Competition for Land
- Conflicts and Nuisance Complaints
- State and Federal Policies and Regulations Not Farm Friendly
- Volatility of Milk Prices
- Increasing Regional Competition
- Unresolved Labor Policies
- Natural Disasters such as Flooding

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Vision and Goals

The purpose and primary goal of the Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan is to improve the overall viability of farms and farming in Orange County.

This is the same vision established since 1996 through a variety of other county-wide planning efforts. It remains the fundamental goal today. In order to achieve this long-term vision, the plan identifies five priority areas to be addressed (see figure below).

Long-term farm viability requires a toolbox of solutions: no one method alone will work. The toolbox for Orange County must include ag-related economic development initiatives to bring agriculture up to par with other industries in the County; education to build support among the public and decision-makers; training and provision of support for farmers; protection of land resources for farming; and development of the next generation of farmers.

Goals

To accomplish this broad direction, five priority goals are established in this Plan:

THE FIVE MAJOR AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION GOALS, STEMMING FROM LEADERSHIP PROVIDED BY THE COUNTY AND SPEARHEADED BY THE AGRICULTURE AND FARMLAND PROTECTION BOARD.
1. Fully integrate agriculture into all aspects of Orange County’s economic development strategy.

With a growing market for local agricultural products, changing demographics, and Orange County’s proximity to the New York City metropolitan area, opportunities exist to better align agriculture with other economic sectors, from manufacturing and distribution to tourism. There is increased interest in Orange County as a location for food production, agritourism, and direct sale opportunities. The time has come to recognize and – more importantly - enhance the role of agriculture in the County economy. Objectives for this goal include diversifying and broadening the agricultural economic base, increasing value-added production activity, taking advantage of underutilized agricultural capacity, and strengthening connections between agriculture and other sectors of the economy.

2. Widen public support for agriculture through community education and engagement.

This goal is aimed at improving public understanding about and involvement with agriculture as both an educational and economic development tool. It emphasizes advancement of direct sales and agritourism farm businesses, reducing conflicts with non-farmers, and increasing public support and appreciation for agriculture. Objectives include improving public recognition and understanding of the value of agriculture in Orange County as a critical component of the local economy; increasing understanding among the general public about farm operations; promoting use of locally-grown products by consumers, local businesses, and institutions; increasing agricultural tourism; and enhancing agricultural education for youth to both widen support for agriculture and promote a new/next generation of farmers.

3. Continue to provide farm operators with state of the art training, technical assistance and comprehensive support.

Agricultural operations in the County must have the tools and support they need to continue farming successfully. Objectives include maintaining support for organizations and agencies in the County that support local farms; coordinating training and assistance efforts to maximize effectiveness and reduce risks of duplication; promoting adoption of local right-to-farm laws; reducing regulatory impacts on farmers; and controlling taxes and the cost of farming in Orange County.

4. Maintain a critical mass of farmland and ensure there is an adequate supply of affordable land, accessible to farmers.

Land must continue to be available for farming in light of the growing suburbanization of Orange County. Preserving land for farming and ensuring continued, affordable access to farmland is a critical long-term need. Objectives include protecting high quality agricultural lands that are at risk for
conversion to non-farm uses; expanding the supply of affordable and accessible land; promoting appropriate farmland protection strategies and land development patterns; reducing regulatory barriers that prevent farmers from operating successfully; and supporting comprehensive drainage and flood control in the Black Dirt region.

5. Support new and next generation farmers.

Growing the next generation of farmers in Orange County will be necessary over the next decade as our current generation of farmers look towards retirement. Objectives include supporting farmers in the transfer of farms from one generation to the next; attracting new entrepreneurs and younger households to have a career in farming; expanding the availability of capital to finance new farm start-ups; and increasing the availability of labor.
Recommended Projects

This section outlines programs and projects that can be implemented to enhance farm viability in the County. Both short and long-term solutions to the issues agriculture faces are offered. These solutions were arrived at through a planning process that identified, refined, and prioritized ideas generated from farmers and other stakeholders in the County.

Some strategies are short-term and low cost, while others are more complex and need more funding. It is understood that the County will not be able to implement all aspects of these recommendations all at once, or by itself. All will require partnerships and close collaboration between the various agencies and organizations that can lend expertise.

Orange County, the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Bureau, area land trusts, and of course the farm community all have important roles to play in the future implementation of these strategies. Ultimately, implementation will require leadership, collaboration and communication between many people and agencies.

Long-term, it may be necessary and advantageous to create an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator to spearhead implementation of the actions recommended below. The County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board however, will have a key role short and long-term. Because that Board is organized with members from both the farming community and staff from County and other critical farm support agencies in the County, and because the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board has some funding available to support implementation, the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board is the appropriate entity to provide the leadership to move this Plan forward.

The preferred option for implementing this plan is:

1. Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board takes leadership as the responsible entity to set annual project priorities for implementation that year. With assistance from County Planning, the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board should have a monthly agenda item covering progress about the Plan and discussion of issues and needs to move it forward. Partners that are working to implement specific projects should also have monthly reports to the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board.

2. The Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board will be supported by creation of an Implementation Committee made up of an Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board member, and staff from County Planning, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation. This committee will assist in keeping track of implementation and organizing specific project partners.

3. Under the direction of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, the Implementation Committee will focus on priority initiatives to help with the nuts and bolts of implementation and will work with project partners for each action listed below. It is also recommended that one or more Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board members volunteer to participate as liaison with the Implementation Committee to help on moving specific projects forward in which they have interest and expertise.

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4. The Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and its partners should advocate for the eventual creation of the Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator to work with the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and to coordinate implementation activities. A shared/regional coordinator or circuit rider may be a feasible option, at least to start with, and this should be evaluated as an option. This is discussed in more detail in Priority Action 3.

5. The Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board could use its available budget to assist in funding initiatives or to serve as matching money for grants that may be required for projects.

**Priority Projects**

Many specific projects have been identified as actions within the above five major goals (agricultural economic development, education and engagement of the public, training and support for farmers, farmland protection, and recruiting the next generation of farmers) of this Plan. Eight projects have been identified as being the most critical to implement first. The other projects included are still important initiatives, but the eight priorities are those that have been determined to be foundational for other successful outcomes.
Priority Project 1. Develop an initiative to improve understanding of agriculture as a key economic engine in Orange County.

Background
Farmers and farm-related agencies and organizations have identified a lack of understanding of the role agriculture plays in the life and economy of Orange County. Lack of understanding often leads to farms and other agricultural businesses being undervalued in terms of their economic contribution. As a result, agriculture is often not one of the industries targeted by economic development organizations at either the county or regional levels. This strategy is aimed at integrating agriculture as a significant industry in County economic development efforts.

Action Steps
1. Develop a marketing campaign educating elected officials, economic development organizations, and the general public about the economic contribution of Orange County agriculture. The impact of farmland loss should be considered when new development is proposed.
2. Take information already developed in the 2004 County Agricultural Economic Development Plan and this Plan to use in website and short reports that market the positive economic contribution of farms in the County. Distribute these materials with elected and appointed officials, and economic development professionals in the County.
3. Establish an ongoing “State of Orange County Agriculture” education effort that keeps the role of agriculture in the forefront of elected and appointed officials. To aid in this, appoint representatives of the agricultural sector on the various committees and task forces related to economic development.
4. Work with NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to collect more complete information on all aspects of agriculture including food production, support and manufacturing sectors. This will be important to provide up-to-date and complete data to use.
5. Produce periodic editorials and press releases for local news and business publications and social media on the economic impact of agriculture.
6. Incorporate elements as needed of the USDA’s Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Program in this effort.

Project Partners
Orange County Planning
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Orange County Citizens Foundation
Orange County Partnership
other county associations

Cost: Low

Time Frame: Start Year 1 - 3; Ongoing thereafter

Other Related Actions: This project has components that tie into project #4 (buy-local).
Priority Project 2. Develop additional food processing and local food system infrastructure to support farms.

Background
There is a need to enhance food processing, production, and distribution infrastructure in the County and region. Lack of these services hampers agricultural growth. On-farm infrastructure and value-added processing infrastructure are important gaps in the food system. Investment in food distribution, food marketing, and extending the year-round supply of food products are all needed components. According to “Financing a Better Food System: A Study of Infrastructure Needs and Available Financing in the Hudson Valley”, a white paper produced by the Local Economies Project of the New World Foundation, there are “systemic gaps in processing infrastructure” for fresh cut produce, meat, dairy, and grains. More details related to this need can be found in the Local Economies report. Farms should be situated to take advantage of identified opportunities for expansion including specialty dairy, meat, produce and grain.

Action Steps
1. Support full implementation of food hub projects to facilitate local food distribution and marketing of products. Concentrate on aggregation and distribution of local products.
2. Identify potential interest by agricultural producers in developing facilities that process, package, aggregate, distribute, and/or market agricultural products. Example: a milk processing facility.
3. Conduct feasibility studies for each of the facilities or ventures under consideration. Ideally, these studies should evaluate both market potential and financial feasibility; present options for design, construction, and operations; provide preliminary cost estimates; and identify potential sources of funds.
4. To aid dairy farmers, concentrate on investments in specialty dairy infrastructure and products.
5. Develop a project to improve on-farm infrastructure and funding support for them. Work to identify new funding investment opportunities for farmers and link them with funding sources to help farms be more ‘wholesale ready’, as discussed in the Food Hubs Initiative.
6. Work regionally to explore expanded processing for value-added produce and grain milling and processing as these have been identified as potential new market opportunities.
7. Work regionally to take advantage of increased beef demand and provide for additional slaughter and meat processing capacity.

Project Partners
Orange County
other Mid-Hudson Counties
Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp
Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board
Orange County IDA, Farm Credit East, Northeast Livestock Processing Service Company

Cost: High

Time Frame: Year 1 to 3 for Actions 1 – 4, Year 3 to 5 for Actions 5-7

Other Related Actions: This project has components that tie into project #3, #4, and #7.
Priority Project 3. Develop a specific agricultural economics program to increase the profitability of farms.

**Background**
All stakeholders have identified lack of agricultural economic development as a key weakness that challenges farms. While there is no lack of specific economic programs that have been developed to address this, lack of staff, institutional capacity and collaboration prevents positive movement. More emphasis on economic development and more coordination of that work is crucial. While other economic sectors have entities such as the IDA to coordinate and fund projects that benefit those industries, agriculture does not enjoy the same capability. Cornell Cooperative Extension serves critical functions in providing education, training, and services, but there is still a great need for strong economic development advocacy and coordination in the County. This strategy focuses on agriculture economic development and building capacity to concentrate on economic initiatives. It also seeks to promote collaboration and coordination of agricultural programming and related resources in the County.

**Action Steps**
1. Page 44 and 45 of this Plan details the need to coordinate agricultural economic development activities. That approach centers on the Orange County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board together with an implementation committee taking key responsibility to implement this Plan and move priority projects forward.

2. Due to the critical needs faced by county dairy farmers, at least 30% of the implementation efforts should be dedicated to dairy economic development.

3. Coordinate the efforts of various agencies and organizations that work with farmers to continue to populate and maintain an agricultural website that would serve as a portal and ‘one-stop-shop’ for agricultural resources. Include links to technical assistance, business planning, training, grants, and other information. This could also be used to market agricultural property for sale to new and existing farmers. Of special importance is the need to identify, coordinate and disseminate information about funding that can be used for on-farm infrastructure development, value-added processing, diversification and expansion.

4. This action step is targeted to the longer term outlook of engaging an Ag Economic Development Planner/Coordinator to assist in coordination of efforts as well as to create strong networks with legislators, county officials and elected officials, and farm businesses. Long-term, creation of an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator may be beneficial and feasible to spearhead economic development actions. Appendix 10 and the following offer guidance on the scope and role the Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator could have:
   - Ag economic development, marketing and ag business planning.
   - Initiate an Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion program.
   - 30% of their time to be spent on promoting dairy projects.
   - Serve as staff to aid in implementation of the priority strategies with the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board.
   - Provide business and production planning services to farmers. This should be coordinated with other existing agencies and organizations that have needed expertise. For example,
Cornell Cooperative Extension and Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District could provide technical production expertise, food safety training and other practical assistance. Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp could provide business planning services.

- Network and coordinate among all agencies, ag businesses, and farmers to build relationships needed to move implementation of projects forward.
- Write grants and identify funding for projects.
- Report regularly on all progress to the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board and provide accountability to County.
- Attend IDA, OCP, and farm-related agency meetings, especially to understand and coordinate programs from Cornell Cooperative Extension, Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District, Farm Bureau, Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp, and other organizations.
- Establish volunteer commodity advisory committees (vegetable/crops, livestock, dairy) made up of farmers and agency staff to provide bi-annual input on projects, implementation, and progress.
- Develop public outreach on agricultural and food issues, such as distribution of fliers and fact sheets, etc. Options for administration of this staff could be:
  - Through County Planning, under the funding and leadership of the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board
  - Through Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp as a shared regional position having dedicated time to Orange County
  - Through Cornell Cooperative Extension

5. Continue to fund Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp so that they can play a critical role in implementing economic development tasks.

6. To address the specific need to support dairy farms in the County, consider working with dairy farmers to evaluate the feasibility of forming a bargaining cooperative to negotiate higher premiums from its members’ milk handlers. Other steps to support dairy farms include:
   - Determining the feasibility of developing an Orange County version of Hudson Valley Fresh, or a premium, high-quality brand of milk that provides a higher rate of return to participating dairy farmers.
   - Evaluating the feasibility of and process for starting one or more small or specialty milk processing plants in the County or regionally.
   - Developing a revolving loan fund that can be used to support dairy expansion or dairy value-added projects.

7. Expand efforts to help farms diversify and add value-added products. Multiple opportunities exist and the County and its partners should promote and support organic, grass-fed, and kosher growing. Cheese production could assist dairy farmers. State-level initiatives support diversification into breweries, wineries, distilleries, and growing malt, barley and hops. Use of high tunnels can help extend the growing season and provide vegetable farmers with year-round growing opportunities that can take advantage of direct sales as well as the farm to school initiatives in Orange County. Farmers can also take advantage of their land base by leasing lands for hunting. Expansion into these crops, methods, and products will require
technical assistance from organizations such as Cornell Cooperative Extension. Regional education and training in these areas is recommended.

**Project Partners**
- Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board
- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- County Planning
- Farmers
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Farm Bureau
- Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Downstate Milk Producers Co-op
- Orange County Vegetable Growers
- Dairy Advisory Committee

**Cost:** High

**Time Frame:** Start Year 1 for Actions 1, 2 and 4; Years 3 to 5 for Actions 3 and 5

**Other Related Actions:** This project has components that tie into project #1, 2, 4 and 7
Priority Project 4. Develop a buy-local initiative to increase market opportunities for Orange County agricultural products.

Background

Sales of locally produced foods comprise a growing part of Orange County agricultural sales. There is a large demand for locally-grown food in the county, region, and NYC metropolitan markets. According to the public survey done for this Plan, locally grown food is most desirable, followed by organically grown food. Many perceive locally sourced foods as fresher, more environmentally sustainable, and higher in quality compared to some other readily available foods. Many also know that purchasing local food helps support local farm economies.

There are many buy-local and direct sales opportunities that farmers in the County can take advantage of. These include direct-to-consumer marketing, farmers’ markets, farm-to-school programs, community-supported agriculture (CSA’s), community gardens, school gardens, food hubs and market aggregators, and kitchen incubators and mobile slaughter units. Other types of operations include on-farm sales/stores, internet marketing, food cooperatives and buying clubs, pick-your-own or “U-Pick” operations, roadside farm stands, urban farms (and rooftop farms and gardens), community kitchens, small scale food processing and decentralized root cellars, and some agritourism or other types of on farm recreational activities.

An effective locally-based food system has several components including marketing and promotion; business assistance; nutrition and education; technical training and support; and farmland conservation. While many of these components are already addressed and being implemented in Orange County, there are areas that could be strengthened including food hub/food aggregation, agritourism, and farm-to-institution programs (to schools, and institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, etc). Additionally, farm to business efforts that establish market opportunities for restaurants and retailers to buy and sell locally produced food can be an important pathway that could benefit farmers in the future. Much of a buy-local program revolves around marketing. While there are several existing branding programs, such as Pride of New York, that can be taken advantage of by Orange County farmers, there is an opportunity for an buy local or Orange ‘fresh’ initiative.

Action Steps

1. Expand farmer participation in the Pride of New York and existing Hudson Valley brands.

2. Create a buy local initiative in Orange County and consider forming an agricultural business alliance or steering committee to coordinate a buy-local campaign. Some of the components of a buy-local program could include:
   - Ask institutions, restaurants and other food retailers for a list of local food items they use or would like use or to carry. Explore with them the kinds of marketing they currently use to promote local food products they use, if any, or what could most benefit their business. Ask if they would participate in a buy local food campaign.
   - Create the Orange County buy-local brand, message, and tag line for promotion. This should be something that lets consumers find and choose local products and at the same time promote the growers so that there is a recognition and personalization. The brand itself could also build on existing, regionally accepted brands.
Promote restaurant and other retail use of this tag line or logo as a means of advertising that local produce is used or sold. Establish a formal registration process for agricultural businesses interested in using the logo. Include minimum standards that must be met to insure that products are grown, raised, or otherwise produced in Orange County.

- Inventory farms to identify products that are available for sales to restaurants and other businesses, and institutions. Develop a farm product directory identifying farms, the agricultural products they produce, and where they are sold in Orange County.
- Develop a marketing/media plan to advertise these farms and farm products to the general public. Develop a campaign kit that farmers receive when they participate. These could include posters, stickers, or table tents.
- Develop educational materials that explain the benefits of buying locally grown and raised farm products, and the positive effects on the local economy.
- Hold a kick-off event and involve the media such as newspapers, business alliances and networks, radio, or local food directories.
- Identify farmer needs such as advertising, transportation of produce, web site needs, etc. and work to address them collectively.
- With the assistance of Cornell Cooperative Extension, chambers of commerce, and/or other organizations, develop and distribute a farm product and services directory listing the businesses that sell local produce.

3. Promote other buy-local events that expand awareness of farms, farmers, and their products. Ideas that have been successful elsewhere include cooking competitions, farmer/chef connection events, bike or self-tour of farms (Tour-de Farms), or an ‘eat local week’. See also www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer for assistance on connecting consumers to local producers.

4. Work with farmers that participate in farmers markets to ensure they participate in the SNAP (food stamp) program. Create marketing materials targeted to the County’s food stamp program.

5. Expand partnerships with area school districts to expand Farm to School programming. Numerous resources are available to accomplish this (see www.farmtoschool.org). This could include use of marketing materials, meal calendars that identify the buy local logo and tagline, producers profiles so that parents know where their children’s’ food comes from, and sponsoring of local food and agricultural education.

6. Make a concerted effort to reach out to restaurant owners. Organize a restaurant/buyer base that farmers can work with. Provide marketing materials to help restaurants highlight the local foods they serve.

7. Provide technical education and support to farmers to expand into providing year-round products so the buy-local effort is more than summer/fall.

8. Explore if a Farm to Emergency Food Provider project could help to increase sales of local agricultural products to government agencies and institutions that provide those services.
Project Partners
Cornell Cooperative Extension
chambers of commerce
Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
Orange County Citizens Foundation
Healthy Orange
Orange County Partnership

Cost: Moderate

Time Frame: Start Year 1 to 3

Other Related Actions: This project has components that tie into project #1, 2, and 7.
Priority Project 5. Provide training, tools, and support to Towns to implement farm-friendly changes to local codes and plans, and assist them with removing local barriers to farming.

Background
Local codes including subdivision and zoning can influence farm operations in a variety of ways. Zoning should help put into effect the community’s plans for future development. It can help prevent development from moving into prime farmland areas, allow for a variety of agricultural operations, and establish development guidelines that address how natural features are protected while minimizing conflicting land uses. Zoning is also set up to ensure the health, safety and welfare of residents. Sometimes though, there are conflicts between the different purposes zoning is trying to accomplish. Zoning can place unnecessary barriers to farming by unreasonably regulating farm operations with strict standards such as large setbacks, minimum acreage requirements, lengthy permit procedures, and limitations on the number and type of farm animals. The zoning audit done for this Plan showed that in some communities, the comprehensive plan establishes farm-friendly goals, but the zoning places regulatory barriers that are not farm-friendly.

Other issues can arise when farm operations are located in a New York State’s Agriculture District. The Agricultural Districts Law limits local regulations related to farm operations located in those designated district. Local governments may not enact ordinances or local laws that would restrict or regulate farm structures or farm practices beyond the requirements of health and safety. Most communities in Orange County that have agricultural districts in their municipality do allow agricultural uses—some permitted as of right. However, even those farm-friendly zoning laws have components such as requirements for special use permits that could be considered a barrier to farming.

Beyond the actual law, the proper administration of zoning is also important. Effectiveness of any local law depends on the people who administer it. Many communities in Orange County no longer have any farm representation on planning boards, zoning board of appeals, or even town boards. At the least, having farmers involved in local planning decisions will help inform and ensure that agricultural needs are addressed.

It is also highly recommended that municipalities, especially those with significant farm activities have citizen and farmer involvement to advocate for local programs that support and promote farms. Appointment of a local agriculture advisory committee, as recommended below, can go a long way to providing an ongoing, local voice for agriculture (See Appendix 9 for model resolution to set up local committees).

Action Steps

1. Provide agriculture-related training sessions to fulfill the 4-hour per year requirements for planning board and ZBA members. This effort should be offered throughout the mid-Hudson region to collaborate on training efforts.
2. Work with local municipalities to remove regulatory barriers. Advocate and provide assistance to local municipalities to help develop local plans and land use regulations that are supportive of farms and farming activities. State-level grants are available through the Department of Agriculture and Markets to support local implementation of this
The County should assist in alerting municipalities about the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant and the Municipal Agriculture and Farmland Protection Planning Grant opportunities as assistance for code updates and incorporation of Transfer of Development Rights methods into local zoning. The County should provide model language that incorporates the following:

- Recognize and reference this County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan in Comprehensive Plans.
- Establish a purpose statement and policies that recognize agriculture as a valuable land use in their plans. Include a clear focus on agriculture in the plan, backed up with an inventory of agricultural lands and businesses and account for the economic role and community character roles farms play.
- Identify and incorporate the NY Ag Districts program in their community more in their planning and use these areas to help concentrate local efforts at farmland protection.
- Include promotion of agriculture and protection of farmlands as one of the zoning’s purposes.
- Review the list of allowable uses in the zoning law and consider not requiring special use permits or site plan review for agricultural uses. If a local review is deemed important, towns should consider adopting the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets recommended modified site plan review process for agriculture (See Appendix 7).
- Allow for farm store (a permanent, year-round structure) and farm stand (seasonal or temporary), direct sale, u-pick, and CSA type farms. Allow both to sell products grown/raised on other farms in Orange County.
- Allow for agriculturally-related uses to be on the farm premise as an additional use provided it is related to the farm operation.
- Require new non-farm uses to create buffer areas between itself and farms.
- Review and change existing prohibitions or limitations of the number and/or type of farm animals allowed.
- Review and change existing requirements that a certain amount of acreage is required to be considered a farm in order to encourage establishment of small farms.
- Include a right-to-farm statement or section within the zoning.
- Consider use of conservation subdivisions to allow development while preserving open space for farms.
- Consider use of transfer of development rights programs.
Consider use of special zoning districts such as an agricultural or ag overlay zone where specific uses, densities, or other development standards can be developed targeted to promoting farm uses. This technique is especially important in towns where significant areas of farmland remain.

3. The County should work with Towns to promote appointment of farmers or people knowledgeable about farming to local town planning boards, zoning board of appeals, and planning committees.

4. Promote and encourage establishment of town-level volunteer Ag Advisory Committees to provide knowledge and assistance related to agriculture at the municipal level. This Committee can help their community determine impacts to agriculture from proposed development activity. Use model resolution (Appendix 9) to help towns set up these committees.

**Project Partners**

Orange County Planning Department  
Municipalities  
Orange County Municipal Planning Federation  
County municipal associations  
Orange County Partnership  
Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation

**Cost:** Low

**Time Frame:** Start Years 1 and 2 for initial implementation, Ongoing thereafter

**Other Related Actions:** This project has components that tie into or influence all the other priority projects
Priority Project 6. Protect farmland within core production areas (see Map 5: “Farmland: Priority for Preservation,” page 26).

Background

Orange County continues to be under development pressure. Our most vulnerable farms are in the upland areas of the County, where growth rates will continue to work to convert farmland. Although the black dirt soils themselves are protected from development, development adjacent to these areas can make farming more challenging. Removal of some black dirt soils from farming and placement into conservation also removes some of these areas from active farming.

Although the best way to preserve farmland is to have economically successful farmers, the complexity of issues facing farmers today makes it imperative that farmlands remain available and cost effective to farmers, especially young and new farmers. This priority project is to enhance the farmland protection program so that additional farmlands can be preserved and made accessible. It involves re-funding the County PDR program, to use that funding to leverage other opportunities coordinated through land trusts, and to expand the methods of farmland preservation to include lease and transfer of development rights.

Action Steps

1. Examine alternative funding sources and financing structures for county and local PDR programs including the adoption of a real estate transfer tax, fees, municipal funds, state and federal funds, general appropriations, bond fees, PILOTs, fundraising, and assistance from social investors (e.g., Iroquois Group, Hudson Valley Ventures) and agri-businesses (e.g., Amy’s Kitchen, Mana Foods).
2. Update the County Open Space Fund Program application to expand the agricultural criteria to match this plan and to add this Ag and Farmland Protection Plan to the list of county-level plans that the funding program should address in addition to the Comprehensive Plan and Open Space Plan.
3. Identify any large clusters of existing farmland for linkage as agricultural land corridors during future development reviews. Map rented farmlands as an important resource for ongoing farming. Use “Farmland: Priority for Preservation” Map to target the program (page 24).
4. Consider expanding the use of funds to cover purchase of development rights as well as lease of development rights, transfer of development rights, and lease to own programs.
5. Create a set-aside to provide capital or loan guarantees to qualified new and beginning farmers to purchase land, or lease land with option to buy.
6. Continue communication and coordination on this program with Orange County Land Trust.
7. Support development of a transfer of development rights program (TDR). County Planning can provide information and models to assist town-initiated TDR programs. A TDR program does not require the same type of investment of money to lease or purchase development rights, and the protection is permanent. However, the process of setting up such a program is more complicated, and usually works best when multiple municipalities are involved. It is recommended, therefore, that Orange County assist local municipalities interested in participating in a TDR program with the tools and research needed to start a municipal or regional TDR program. The priority farmlands map should be used as a guide to identify sending and receiving areas suitable for a TDR program. The TDR program works best when there is
enough development pressure to provide a market demand and thus Orange County is in a good position for such a program to be successful.

8. In addition to continuing the PDR activities in the County, the program should be expanded to include a Leasing of Development Rights (LDR) program. While LDR does not provide the permanent protection PDR does, it can provide some measure of temporary protection, allowing the land to remain as farmland until funds can be raised for purchase or transfer of the development rights. It can also help lower the entry costs for new farmers looking for land for a new agricultural enterprise.

9. Build on existing initiatives to enhance farmer to landowner matches.
   - Create a more complete local Orange County database of farmland owners willing to participate in such a program and keep this maintained.
   - This database should include parcels that are being actively farmed now, as well as parcels that can be brought back into productive agricultural use without much effort.
   - Develop an advertising campaign designed to market this farmland to potential new farmers. The web-site should have a page dedicated as ‘come farm with us’ marketing with a mechanism for landowners and land seeking farmers to connect. See Land for Good model.

Project Partners
Orange County
Orange County Land Trust
other conservation NGOs and land trusts
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Municipalities
Orange County Partnership

Cost: High

Time Frame: Start Year 1 to 3 for Actions 1 through 3; Start Years 3 to 5 for others; ongoing thereafter

Other Related Actions: This project has components that tie into project #3, 4, 5 and 7.

Background

New farmers face four major barriers including:
- Access to training, education, and technical assistance
- Access to land
- Access to capital and credit
- Access to markets

In addition, they often experience inadequate support from family, community, farmer and service networks, which impacts these barriers. New farmers need programs and services that enable them to acquire the information and resources they need to succeed. They need a responsive "service infrastructure" -- from production and legal consultants, equipment, feed and seed dealers, and lenders, to trade organizations and publications.

The Glynwood Center and others have intern/apprentice programs that could be strengthened in Orange County with additional participation by county farms. Cornell Cooperative Extension has a “New Farmer Manual” that is an excellent resource. These programs should be the basis for an expanded effort to recruit new farmers to Orange County. This is especially important given the aging of the current farm operators. An associated issue for the County to address is the needs for more transition and succession planning with existing farmers.

Action Steps

1. Provide training, incentives, and advertise existing funding opportunities for farm start-up operations.
2. Make a concentrated effort as part of business expansion and retention programs to provide training or services to help farmers transition or put in succession plans in place for the next generation.
3. Offer farm business planning that covers land acquisition, leasing arrangements and securing credit.
4. Create an Orange County farm mentor program, possibly in connection with the Glynwood program.
5. Create a list organic farms in Orange County that want to participate with NE WOOF (Northeast Workers on Organic Farms). Note that such internship programs must meet all labor and worker compensation requirements.
6. Address costs of land by advocating to NYS to offer state income tax credit incentives to those that lease land to new and beginning farmers as well as to those that sell land to new or beginning farmers. Another option is to advocate for being able to offer a reduction in state capital gains tax applied on sales to new farmers.
7. Explore a Transfer of Farming Rights program.
8. Establish model language for a lease to own agreement that landowners can use.
9. Work with local realtors to develop a list of available agricultural property that would appeal to new and existing farmers looking to start or expand a farm operation in Orange County.
10. Establish an internship program for high school or college students to create and maintain a
searchable database to add to website as part of this clearinghouse of information.

11. Work with public schools and Farm Bureau (Ag in the Classroom) to advocate for the integration of agricultural issues into primary and secondary school curricula. Current efforts include a Future Farmers of America chapter in Warwick, 4H clubs, and an Agriculture Literacy Week program for first, second and third graders throughout the county. This effort can be tied to a program with Orange County Community College to establish a student intern program to promote Ag in the Classroom programs in local elementary schools.

12. Promote farm internship programs and agriculture-related skill development at the high school and community college level.

13. Use the Cornell Cooperative Extension Center and 4-H Park in Mount Hope agricultural education programs. Participate in a Hudson Valley regional agricultural leadership training program, modeled on the LEAD NY program.

14. Study and evaluate methods to increase affordability and accessibility. Hold a summit or conference oriented to land affordability for new and young farmers. Invite organizations such as Equity Trust or Dirt Capital to participate and use that opportunity to identify viable options to address the issue. Explore innovative options such as shared ownership to ensure affordability of land for new farmers.

**Project Partners**
Orange County Land Trust
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Farm Bureau
County farmers
Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp /Hudson Valley Bounty
Glynwood Center
Hudson Valley Greenway
Local realtors
Local school districts
Orange County Community College
Equity Trust
New Visions for Agriculture
FFA
BOCES and other educational institutions
Cornell FarmLink/FarmNet
NY American Farmland Trust

Seek information from existing programs/resources including, but not limited to:

- www.beginningfarmers.org
- www.farmaid.org
- www.fsa.gov
- www.crees.usda.gov
- www.start2farm.gov/usda/programs
- www.sustainableagriculture.net

**Cost:** Low to Moderate

**Time Frame:** Start Years 1 to 3 for Actions 1 through 3; Years 3 to 5 for others, ongoing thereafter
Priority Project 8. Implement Wallkill River Drainage Programs.

Background

Orange County is located within the boundaries of the watershed for the Rondout Creek and its major tributary, the Wallkill River, until the confluence with the Hudson River. The Wallkill River originates at Lake Mohawk in New Jersey, passes through the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge and then the Black Dirt region before flowing north through the Towns of Montgomery, Walden and New Paltz before joining Rondout Creek just downstream of Rosendale. The Black Dirt region is one of the most significant agricultural areas in Orange County and has been severely affected by flooding. The County and area farmers consider implementation of Wallkill River drainage programs a critical need.

To address the Wallkill River flooding issues, numerous steps have already been taken. These include:

February, 2013 – Contract signed between Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District and NYS Housing Trust Fund to provide for the transfer of $2 million from the Greater Catskill Flood Remediation Program for Wallkill River flood mitigation.

February, 2013 – Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District forms a committee of Black Dirt Region farmers and local experts/stakeholders to advise the Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District Board on the best use of the $2 million and develop a long-term flood mitigation and drainage improvement plan for the Black Dirt Region.

March, 2013 – Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District selects Barton and Loguidice Engineering and Integrated River Solutions to provide engineering and related professional consulting services.

February, 2014 – After extensive discussion and engineering/hydraulic modeling, a 10 page report is released detailing three priority flood mitigation projects and the anticipated steps to move these three projects through environmental/regulatory review including the preparation of detailed engineering/construction plans.

July, 2014 – The first on-the-ground construction work undertaken with the Flood project funding is completed. It involved the cutting and removal of over 400 tree stumps on the ‘Pellets’ Island reach of the Wallkill. This reach is crucial to the whole farming region since it is at the downstream/outlet end of the Black Dirt valley. Cutting of the stumps will facilitate future maintenance of this River reach to maintain its capacity to convey flood flows.

Information about this flood mitigation work is distributed informally (by word of mouth) via the members of the Project Advisory Committee. They receive periodic updates from Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District staff with summary of activities and ability to provide input/feedback. Additional information is available on the Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District website. A 4-page general Project Update was distributed to an extensive list of farm support agencies, public officials and others in April, 2014.

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More regular, extensive and aggressively marketed updates could benefit the project by accomplishing better public education about the project and its expected benefits. This could be in the form of a regularly updated web page, printed or electronic newsletter and additionally by presentations at appropriate public venues.

As noted, additional funding will be required to complete comprehensive, Region-wide flood mitigation. Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District has submitted two grant applications in effort to supplement the current $2 million fund – one to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-Hurricane Sandy Relief fund in January of 2014, and one to the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants Program in November of 2013. The NFWF grant was not funded, and no word was ever received on the HMGP proposal. The Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District is continuing to seek opportunities to secure additional funding for this work.

Action Steps

1. Complete SEQR process and address easement issues to allow for expansion of the existing Flood Control Project Maintenance Agreement from its current downstream limit at Maple Avenue bridge to 17M bridge.
2. Complete SEQR process for the three priority projects (Celery Avenue ledge modification, Transport Lane ledge modification, Floodplain Bench construction from Cheechunk Canal to County Route 1 bridge).
3. Complete construction plans for priority projects and submit plans along with environmental studies to relevant regulatory agencies. Goal is to receive necessary permits/approvals and begin construction winter 2014/2015.
4. Prepare construction plan for removal of fill associated with the Transport Lane Bridge that washed out during Hurricane Irene. Obtain necessary permits and/or permissions, and undertake this fill removal project. Goal is to complete construction before winter/2014.
5. Continue Floodplain Bench planning, design and construction along the Wallkill from County Route 1 bridge to Oil City Road. This action will require additional funding beyond that which is currently available. Estimated time frame to complete is one to three years if funding can be secured.
6. Continue to study additional Flood mitigation measures beyond three priority projects, stump removal project, Maintenance Agreement extension and Transport Lane bridge approach fill removal.

Project Partners

Wallkill Valley Drainage Improvement Association
County of Orange
Orange County Land Trust
State of New York
Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District
Wallkill River Black Dirt Region Flood Mitigation Project Advisory Committee (an ad hoc committee of farmers and local experts providing advice to the Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Directors and Staff)
County legislators
Orange County vegetable partners

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Farm Bureau
Orange Environment
municipalities in the Black Dirt region

Cost: The currently available $2 million NYS funding award is expected to be sufficient to cover up-front engineering and related investigations, Pellets Island stump removal project, Transport Lane fill removal project and ledge modifications. The cost of the flood plain bench project has yet to be accurately estimated, but it is expected that these costs combined with the projects will exceed the $2 million. Continuation of the flood plain bench concept upstream from County Route 1 to Oil City Road will undoubtedly require additional funding beyond the $2 million. Estimates for additional funding needs beyond the $2 million to complete the flood plain bench improvements to Oil City Road have been estimated to be in a range of $5 to $20 million.

Time Frame

Time- to- completion goals for much of the work described herein have been included. In summary, an optimistic time frame would be to have all the work except the flood plain bench improvement beyond County Route 1 completed by 2016. Assuming necessary additional funding can be secured, extension of the flood plain bench improvements to Oil City Road might feasibly be completed by 2018 to 2020.
Other Recommended Strategies and Projects

Other projects have been identified to address the five goals established in this Plan. The following list outlines information for those projects. These are important projects, but not foundational or priority and tend to be longer term projects. Note however, that some of these are low cost and less complex to implement.

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<tr>
<td>cooperative advertising and marketing campaigns such as Hudson Valley Bounty.</td>
<td>Current (Orange County has 80 farms and 57 restaurants participating in Hudson Valley Bounty.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Encourage the establishment of additional agri-tourist attractions and</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>activities.</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Encourage the expansion of existing agri-tourism attractions and activities</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>by developing and promoting new events, activities, tours, and packages</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>featuring farms and local foods to enhance Orange County agri-tourism and</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>encourage repeat visitation.</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop a unified county signage program that can be used to direct</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tourists and consumers to various farms, markets, and events. Develop model</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>signage laws that can be adopted by local governments, or incorporated into</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>their zoning laws. This would include development of:</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>o a scope of work.</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Prepare and distribute Request for Proposals.</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Identify locations and prepare designs.</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Obtain permits and landowner permissions to place signs.</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<td>o Place signs.</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Prepare model sign designs and sign laws to be incorporated into</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>municipal zoning laws.</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop a centralized online map of farms and farm products to promote</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium-term</td>
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<tr>
<td>agri-tourism and keep farmers informed of new developments in</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>agriculture around the county. This would include doing:</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Inventory of farms and locations.</td>
<td>Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County Tourism</td>
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### Action Steps

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Project Partners</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Creation scope of work for development of online map and mobile app.</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Hire consultant and develop online map and mobile app.</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Creating a map of these locations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Marketing these to the public.</td>
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2. Develop a targeted marketing program focusing on Orange County’s strategic advantages for companies that process, package, distribute, and/or sell food and beverage products.

- Develop a plan to promote Orange County as a business location for food companies.
- Determine the content, format, and timing of the message and types of media to be targeted to effectively communicate the message. Include information about grants, loans, and other incentives available to agriculture-related industrial businesses that create or retain jobs.
- Identify key influencers that need to be reached, including site selectors, real estate brokers, business park developers, trade associations, agricultural organizations, etc.
- Prepare marketing materials and disseminate information through direct mail, e-mail, and social media as well as through proactive media relations and on-site familiarization tours.
- Integrate the marketing program with related economic development efforts at the local, regional, and state levels.

3. Advocate for State and Federal policies that benefit agriculture.

- Work with other mid-Hudson Valley Counties to advocate and support at the state and federal levels a change to the milk marketing order and classification of yogurt as a Class 1 product.
- Advocate at the state level on behalf of farmers to avoid overregulation, improve labor laws, and address CAFO requirements.
- Advocate with state transportation officials the need to reduce tolls for farm vehicles and trucks on the NYS Thruway.
- Support comprehensive immigration reform as a way to address farm labor issues.
- Develop policy statements on each of these topics and forward as letters to relevant state and federal agencies.
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<th>Cost</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Adopt resolutions for these policies at the legislative level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Explore methods to reduce costs for farmers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Encourage Orange County farmers to create a buying co-operative to</td>
<td>Orange County Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York State Energy Research and</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Short</td>
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<tr>
<td>collectively purchase farm supplies and fuel and reduce production costs.</td>
<td>Development Authority (NYSERDA), USDA Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Work with Cooperative Extension, NYSERDA, USDA Rural Development and other</td>
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<tr>
<td>organizations to provide information to farms on financial assistance</td>
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<td>available for energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Expand the use of renewable energy production on farms using</td>
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<td>agricultural waste products, solar, wind, and other similar technologies.</td>
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<td>• Develop a transportation and food distribution program to help facilitate</td>
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<td>and organize efficient transport of produce to urban markets.</td>
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<td>5. Improve agricultural assessment practices throughout the County.</td>
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<td>• As a starting point, work with real property staff to develop a checklist</td>
<td>Orange County Municipalities</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium-term</td>
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<tr>
<td>or guidance document on ag valuation and assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create a training program for local assessors in valuing farm property,</td>
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<td>buildings, and AML 25-aa rules.</td>
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<td>• Provide training for town assessors on agricultural assessment topics on</td>
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<td>an annual basis.</td>
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<td>• Promote the use of County assessment services to towns regarding the Ag</td>
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<td>Assessment program and ag valuation in order to provide more consistency in</td>
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<td>assessments from location to location in the County.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have a County Assessor conduct agriculture assessment duties for</td>
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<td>municipalities.</td>
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<td>• Change the way that farm buildings are assessed as highest use.</td>
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<td>• Work with local assessors (and if County, make it a policy) to ensure</td>
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<td>that penalties required by AML 25-aa for converted lands that have</td>
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<td>previously benefited from an agricultural assessment are imposed when land</td>
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<td>is converted from ag to non-farm use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Work with local officials and farmers to ensure that farmers take</td>
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<td>advantage of existing tax abatement programs. Conduct a review of other tax</td>
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<td>abatement programs.</td>
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### Action Steps

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>programs used elsewhere that help maintain farms noting that local municipalities cannot offer other tax abatement programs unless authorized by NYS.</td>
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</table>

**6. Support Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and other organizations to ensure provision of technical and administrative support to farmers related to meeting State and Federal environmental requirements.**

- Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NRCS staff trained in all relevant state and federal environmental laws (CAFO, wetlands, Food Safety Act, etc.).
- Provide training to farmers about these laws on a regular basis.
- Assist in permit applications.
- When conflicts arise, use Ag Ombudsman position to help advocate for farmers and seek solutions.
- Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension, others
- Low
- Ongoing

**7. Enhance efforts to reduce conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors.**

- Create an Ag Ombudsman function within an existing County Planning or Cornell Cooperative Extension position, coordinated with Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, as the mechanism to assist farmers with planning issues and conflicts.
- Orange County Municipal Planning Federation
- Low
- Medium
Implementation Plan

The County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB) intends to form an Implementation Committee to monitor the progress on implementation of the above actions, to identify opportunities for funding and partnerships, and to assess programming needs.

To be effective in implementing the Plan, however, the AFPB needs continued support from Orange County. In addition to staffing assistance from the Planning Department, allocations should continue to be made to the AFPB so that it can use the funds to either 1) provide a required match for a grant that would be used to implement one or a series of strategies in the Plan, or 2) hire a contractor, such as an Agricultural Economic Development Planner/Coordinator, to assist with Plan implementation. Without funding, the AFPB will need to rely solely on existing staff from the various departments and agencies that serve on the AFPB.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, which partially funded this Plan, is encouraging counties with adopted Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans to present the findings of their Plans to the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) and other funding advisors. This will strengthen opportunities to gain support for recommendations that could be funded by New York State, notably through its consolidated funding application (CFA). Grant funds awarded through the CFA process can provide substantial funding for implementation of certain strategies outlined in this Plan. The AFPB will work cooperatively with Orange County and the Mid-Hudson REDC – notably its “Green Circles” Committee - to develop applications for CFA funds based on the projects ideas within this Plan.

Additionally, this Plan recommends that the following steps be taken to begin successful implementation:

- **Improve communication, collaboration, and cooperation** among all those involved with agriculture, including farmers, farm support agencies, county leaders, and other local and regional stakeholders. This is a critical component of accomplishing all of these strategies and projects. As a first step, formally create the implementation committee as described in this plan and work with Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board to create an annual work plan for priority projects. Establish the implementation framework to effectively move forward. Annually, the Board should evaluate progress and report to the County Legislature.

- **Appoint representatives of the agricultural sector** to help with implementation efforts, and work to involve them in on other county boards of directors, committees, and task forces related to economic development. The farm community needs to be well represented on boards of directors, committees, and task forces related to agriculture.

- **Schedule quarterly multi-county meetings** between staff and Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp to facilitate more coordination between the counties in region.

- **Establish a working relationship between the various farm support agencies and chambers of commerce** in Orange County to distribute brochures and promotional materials related to agriculture and farming.
- Provide opportunities for the non-agricultural business community to better understand the state of agriculture in Orange County and build relationships with farmers and other agricultural enterprises.

- Concentrate on programs that expand the understanding of agriculture in the County and promote its role in the economy.

- Keep this plan current and consider updating it along with the 8-year Ag District reviews. This can be facilitated by annual progress reports from the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board.

- The County and its partner agencies and organizations, should also on an annual basis identify progress that has been made on implementation as well as identification of emerging issues and trends. In this way, the plan update can use this existing information, more rapidly fill gaps in programs, and readily report progress and needs to the County Legislature.