

The 2007 Survey of Farms Colchester, Connecticut

Prepared through an Agricultural Viability Grant Awarded by
The Connecticut Department of Agriculture

December 2008

Llyn Kaimowitz, Consultant
27 Stoneham Drive
West Hartford, CT 06117
860.231.9005
kaimo@comcast.net

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank the following people for the abundant help and good will that they contributed to this project:

Linda Hodge, First Selectman of Colchester

Jenny Contois, former First Selectman of Colchester

Stan Soby, former First Selectman of Colchester

Members of the Colchester Department of Planning and Zoning, including:

Adam Turner, Town Planner and Farm Survey Project Manager

Alicia Watson, former Wetlands Enforcement Officer

Jay Gigliotti, Wetlands Enforcement Officer

Craig Grimord, Zoning Enforcement Officer/Assistant Planning Director

Salvatore A. Tassone, Town Engineer

Timothy E. York, Building Official

John J. Chaponis, Assessor of Colchester

Wendy S. Mis, Director of Health

The Colchester Land Trust for supplying copies of the book on Conservation Options: A Landowner's Guide for distribution, and especially President Lisa Hageman and members Chuck Toal and Elizabeth MacAlister for their contributions to developing and planning this project

Elisabeth Moore of the Connecticut Farmland Trust for her essential planning input

Jiff Martin of the Working Lands Alliance of the American Farmland Trust for providing copies the book on Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland for distribution

Art Liverant, President of the Colchester Historical Society, for background information on Colchester's farming history

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the various organizations that supplied brochures for the packets of farm preservation information distributed to farmers

And most importantly,

The Farm Owners of Colchester who so graciously took time out from farming to be interviewed for the survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING FARMLAND

There are many reasons for Colchester to work toward preserving its farmland. Farms operate as self-funded open space. Farmers undertake the cost of maintaining this space, keeping it attractive and productive, contributing to town character. In addition, farmers pay taxes on their property and the products that they sell. In fact, farmers pay significantly more in taxes that they receive back in town expenditures, so they help to support the town budget, even when they receive special farm tax rates.

Farms are also important in the preservation of the environment in ways that are important for public health. Farms often include wetlands which are vital parts of the town's hydrologic system, absorbing excess rain or stream water and releasing it slowly so that flooding is reduced. Wetland soils filter and purify water, removing excess fertilizers and other chemicals before releasing it to the ground water that feeds wells. When these natural hydrologic systems are dismantled through development, the public has to pay for sewers and sewage plants to take their place.

Another important environmental role of farms is the preservation of natural habitats and movement corridors for wildlife. These habitats allow the natural predators of insects and vermin to thrive, helping to naturally rid the town of disease vectors.

Local farms are a very important source of food security. High transportation costs, widespread crop losses from natural disasters, and looming water shortages in agricultural areas supplied with water from mountain snow packs all threaten food supplies and raise food costs in Connecticut. Some local farms produce food already, and those that don't, hay lots or Christmas tree farms, for example, keep the soil ready for food production in the future. Once a farm is stripped of its top soil, the land paved over, the wetlands destroyed, and water-conducting landforms are planed down, that farm and its environmental services can never be reclaimed; any attempt to do so would be economically unfeasible. Our working farms are land banks, saving the complex system of soils, water courses, drainage, and wildlife habitats necessary to grow food and cleanse our environment for future generations. Investment in preserving local farms not only benefits us today, it also keeps the land whole and productive for future generations.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This report is a study of farming in Colchester, Connecticut, and recommendations for keeping that farming viable, with the ultimate purpose of preserving farmland. The project was funded by a Connecticut Department of Agriculture "Agricultural Viability Grant," awarded in January 2007 to the Town of Colchester.

The consultant interviewed eighteen Colchester farmers concerning their farm activities, the problems they encounter in farming, and their plans for the future of their farms. The

consultant then met with officials from the Town of Colchester, members of the Open Space Advisory Committee, and with members of the public. This report presents the information gathered by the consultant and recommendations for further actions by the town to promote farm viability and preservation.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY DATA

Nearly all of the farmers in the survey come from farming backgrounds. They are very hard-working, about half of them holding full-time jobs off the farm, then returning home to farm. The rest are full-time farmers. Their work extends year round. Two thirds of the farmers are 50 years of age or older. One third are 60 years of age or older. Only a few farmers receive help from their adult children, and most farmers have difficulty finding farm labor, so many farms are kept to a size that the family can manage alone.

The inventory focused on farms of 12 acres in size or larger, and other than Caring Community, a job training and vocational rehabilitation program on 7 acres, the farms in the survey ranged from 18 acres to 200 acres. Nine were farms of less than 50 acres, 5 fell between 50 and 99 acres, and the rest fell between 100 and 200 acres. Farms are composed of varying terrains including tillable fields, pasture, wetland, woodland, hills, ledges, and sand and gravel deposits. All of these terrains have uses on farms. For example, wetlands, woodland, and steep hills can be used for animal pasture. Several farms rely on their sand and gravel businesses to stay afloat. In general, farms can make good use of land that is unsuitable for development, but only as an adjunct to the level fields of good soil that are of prime importance for farming.

The list of farm products grown and manufactured in Colchester is very impressive, including numerous types of fruits and vegetables, eggs, beef, fire wood, Christmas trees, hay, and many types of animals, including horses for equestrian activities. There are also foods made from the produce of town farms, such as cheese, wine, and jams. The high quality of the items produced here, combined with the growing trend toward purchasing local foods from sources that can be visited and trusted, gives Colchester the potential to become a destination for people who subscribe to the wholesome food, “green” living, and “slow food” movements.

Several farmers also use their land for other businesses such as sand and gravel excavation and sales, lumber, recycling, and a store for Christmas items. In view of the frequently expressed opinion that it is hard to make a profit at farming because of the skyrocketing costs of fuel, land, and taxes, these additional businesses are important for keeping farmland operational. Nearly half of the respondents have alternative ideas for their farms that they would like to develop, including soil manufacturing, hayrides, decorative plants, recycling, and equestrian activities.

The question of what the town or state could do to help farms brought a variety of answers. Many answered that taxes could be lowered and their 490 tax status made more secure. Farmers also want the town to adopt the state’s legislation and regulations that pertain to farming. For example, farmers would like to see the state’s right-to-farm law formally adopted

by the town. Farmers would also like to see the town educate other residents about farming. Readers should see the entire list of comments in Appendix B.

When asked about the biggest problems encountered in farming, the top answer was “taxes.” Other answers included: weather; finding labor; complaints from the public about farm practices; crop and animal diseases; shortage of land; fuel costs; the cost of fertilizer, seeds, or supplies; expenses in general; town administration issues; machinery costs; health/age; risk; and trespassing. The subject of taxes, however, engendered a great deal of anger and frustration. Farmers feel that they are already helping to carry a disproportionate share of the expenses of the town and are being squeezed to carry even more of the load as town expenses go up. There is widespread concern over the possibility of losing their special farm 490A tax status without warning. They feel that there are no tax incentives to keep farming in town, and that the town actually taxes things that could be exempt or taxed at a lower rate.

Other particular concerns of local farmers are finding labor, the general inability to match sales income with the cost of production, and frustrations in dealing with town administration. The latter centered on the difficulty of obtaining decisions from town offices about changes farmers want to make to their properties. They are particularly frustrated with land use regulations and restrictions that farmers feel don’t always make sense for farms. In general, there was a common wish for the town – both the government and the residents – to be more supportive of farming, such as town adoption of the state’s right-to-farm law and education of town residents about local farms (both their available products and their farming methods, such as manure application) to improve sales and minimize complaints.

Despite the risks and costs of farming, two thirds of the respondents actively want to expand the size of their farms, and a few others would expand if it were possible. The most common reason keeping farmers from expanding is the inability to buy land. In some cases, it is the lack of any contiguous land that prevents expansion, in others it is the high cost of land, sold at development prices, that prevents it.

Asked if they were satisfied with farming and wanted to continue indefinitely, every farming household said yes, and many farmers said, “farming is our way of life.” Older farmers said that they would like to farm as long as they were able. Whether those farms will continue indefinitely or not is a big question, however. Two-thirds of the group had no expectation that children would take over the farm. This is clearly a concern for the town if it wants to preserve farmland as open space.

Another concern is how farmers will fund their retirement years. Among full-time farmers, land is generally like a retirement account. Farmers turn much of their income into farm equity. Among part-time farmers who have full-time jobs off the farm, there is often an anticipation of retirement income from their jobs, but those who are already retired say that they have a difficult time trying to meet the expenses of farming, such as taxes and fuel, on a fixed income. A related issue is farm succession. Half of the farmers had made no formal plans for the transfer of their farm to heirs, and two-thirds had no formal estate plan. These facts suggest that the preservation of these farms as farms may be vulnerable, especially if farmers die

prematurely. Providing local farmers with access to knowledge about farm succession planning is vital to helping them set achievable goals for preserving their farms.

Given the passion of these farmers for their farms, there was an expectation that farmers would be eager to consider conservation easements in order to receive cash for farm improvements or retirement while assuring the continued use of the land as a farm. Contrary to our expectations, however, about three-fourths of the participants have not considered preservation options such as easements for reasons that often center on a fear of losing control over their property.

Most farmers want to preserve their farms intact, but a number of farmers who said that if they became frustrated enough with taxes or the town administration, they would sell to a developer.

Finally, the farmers of Colchester defy some old stereotypes. They are smart, articulate, and keenly aware of national business news and trends. While they hope that their hard work is producing enough income to pay for expenses, taxes, mortgages, and their family needs, they don't expect to rake in enormous profits. Another characteristic of the farmers that is evident is their resourcefulness. One farmer mentioned that every day brought an unexpected surprise on the farm. Many farmers have prepared themselves with a wide array of skills in construction, machinery repair, and general problem solving for natural calamities.

RESPONSES TO FARMER CONCERNS BY TOWN OFFICIALS

Town officials expressed support for the preservation of Colchester's farms. Linda Hodge, First Selectman, feels that farms, both commercial and the "hobby farms" for personal use, are a key to the character and environment of Colchester. They can have an important role in tourism and marketing to make the town a destination. They play an important role in environmental preservation and in the control of sprawl. She is an enthusiastic supporter.

Officials in the Public Health and Planning Departments echoed her sentiments and showed sensitivity to farm issues, but they also emphasized that their responsibilities center on the safety and health of all residents in town, so they work to find a balance between farm needs and general public protection.

Because taxes are one of the most important issues in farm survival, and the assessment of local taxes has generated tremendous anger among farmers, an understanding of the work of the Tax Assessor is particularly important. State statutes give town assessors extensive discretion in classifying land into use categories and in setting farmland assessments. For most farmers, an important element of farm viability is receiving Public Act 490 tax status, the status that allows a farm to pay taxes based upon the actual use of the land, rather than on the fair market value. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture publishes a chart of suggested land values to use when assessing Public Act 490 lands, but use of those values is not mandated, and assessors are given flexibility to design their own schedule of values for 490 land. Farms that do

not qualify for 490 tax status or that choose not to apply for it are assessed a flat “excess acreage” tax rate set by the Assessor.

The Tax Assessor feels that his tax policies and rates are supportive of farming, and the report includes a lengthy explanation of how rates are applied and assessments are calculated. Many farmers dispute the fairness of the Assessor’s application of rates and are also worried about losing or being denied 490 tax status. The farmers and the Assessor are clearly at odds over this issue. Because taxes are clearly an important key to retaining farms in Colchester, this is a serious problem that must be addressed.

GENERAL FINDINGS

In general, the farmers in the survey indicated that the best ways to preserve farming in Colchester would be to:

- help farmers to develop and promote sales of their farm products, for those farmers who sell to the public, because the best way to preserve farmland is to make farms thrive;
- make it easier for farmers to obtain and maintain their agricultural tax status, known as 490 A (for agricultural lands) and 490 F (for woodland), investigate tax rates to assure that they are applied consistently, and apply exemptions and 490 O (for open space) taxation to bring taxes down to their lowest legal levels;
- make it easier for farmers to navigate town zoning regulations when making changes to their farms, adopt the state’s right-to-farm law as town policy, and generally promote Colchester as a farming town to decrease friction with other residents and increase public support;
- listen to the farmers and their needs, make an effort to understand the difficulties of farming, and show that farming is important by supporting them. This support can include town adoption of the state’s right-to-farm laws, showing a little flexibility in the strict application of regulations, and being more helpful when farmers want to make changes to their farms.

The consultant also discovered that, while the farmers are very knowledgeable about the business of farming, some might benefit from programs on farm financial and succession planning and conservation options.

SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS TO SUPPORT THE VIABILITY OF LOCAL AGRICULTURE

Evaluate the Town Government’s Ordinances and Policies for Farm-Friendliness

Begin with a general review of town policies that involve the issues already discussed in this report, especially for taxation, zoning, and environmental or health issues. Adopt the state’s definitions for farming and right-to-farm law as town policy. For zoning or taxation purposes, broaden right-to-farm policy to allow farms by right to engage in business activities that are not

traditional farming but are related to or consistent with farming, and allow farm retailers to use off-site produce when necessary to maintain their businesses. Incorporate a statement promoting the preservation of agriculture into town planning documents (such as the next update of the Plan of Conservation and Development), and examine opportunities to incorporate agricultural priorities into the programs of other departments, as well.

Make an examination of the town's farm taxation policies a priority. Invite farmland and open space owners to submit their concerns to a neutral representative and have that representative work with the Tax Assessor to determine the source of each problem.

Reconsider the farm taxation schedule and discuss opportunities for creating a more supportive tax program. The town can authorize 490 O taxation, extending a more favorable rate to excess acreage too small to qualify for 490 F. Parcel tax classification should support the trend toward smaller farms, even as small as one acre.

Authorize additional tax exemptions that state law allows for farm machinery (beyond the original \$100,000 exemption), farm buildings, and extra property tax abatements on certain types of farms (in addition to the taxation rates authorized under PA 490).

Create an Agricultural Advisory Board with several farmers as members. Create a subcommittee that will become knowledgeable about public and private funding sources for the purchase of land or easements. Use the Board to review town policies and upcoming legislation or regulation with an eye to protecting and promoting farming interests.

Clarify what the town character is and what town residents think it should be. Identify the town characteristics and other desirable values that farms contribute to, and use this list to form a clear idea of what the town is working toward.

Insert statements supporting farmland preservation in documents such as the POCD and zoning regulations so that there is clear policy guidance whenever development plans may have an impact on farming areas. Review planning and zoning procedures to build in specific practices that will protect agriculture. For example, permit farms by right to engage in business activities that are not traditional farming but are related to or consistent with farming. Create an agricultural overlay zone biased in favor of farm preservation, using input such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil maps and concentrations of contiguous farmland parcels to define the zone. In this zone, require buffers between any new residential development and farmland or wetland through techniques such as residence clustering. Focus development more heavily in the already developed portions of town and discourage development in portions of town that are agriculture-rich by controlling the extension of utilities and road paving. Combine this with a Transfer of Development Rights program so that development pays for farmland preservation. Avoid zoning protection, however, that places extra burdens on farmers or "ties their hands" in matters regarding the use of their land.

Add layers to the town's GIS that will help the town in understanding its farmland resources and aid private groups to engage in prioritization activities. Use information from these layers to create a database of farms that can be ranked for preservation discussion purposes.

Establish town funding for the outright purchase of farmland or purchase of conservation easements, perhaps through real estate transfer fees or bonding. Lease back the fee-simple purchases to farmers for farming or consider the horse park suggested in the “Engage in Further Self-Study” section of this report. Use town funds for easement purchases to qualify for matching state funding.

Look at the successful programs in other towns that promote agriculture in their communities. Lebanon would be a particularly good community program to examine because of its knowledgeable manager, active farm preservation program, and shared border. Suffield, which has made a commitment to an annual farmland preservation goal, is another excellent model.

Apply Economic Development Resources to the Farming Community

Many of the farms in Colchester are businesses selling products to the local public. Like other businesses in town, they can benefit from the town’s economic development services. Helping farms to thrive as businesses will support their continued operation without costly or extraordinary interventions. The Economic Development Commission should discuss possible methods for supporting farm businesses in town. Here are some ideas:

The Town government and organizations in town can remind people that Colchester is a farming community through signs, pictures on the town website, a brochure featuring a map of local farms, and other methods of reaching out to the public.

Research ideas for helping local farms find affordable farm workers. Help local farmers to advertise their labor needs and ramp up their recruitment activities. Examine ways to help farmers offer employee housing, such as offering a tax exemption on buildings for farm labor housing. Encourage farmers to purchase or rent labor-saving equipment for harvesting, such as produce conveyors, by providing a tax exemption. Look for incentives for young people to choose farm work as their summer employment, perhaps through grants that will supplement pay. Advertise nationally to hire apprentices among young people looking to enter farming.

Examine whether an annual Colchester Farm Day, featuring a driving tour of farms, would be economically useful to local farm owners by focusing attention from state news and entertainment media.

Hold public discussions on alternative uses for farmland, uses that are tied closely to farming but may fall just outside of the common definition. Discuss ways in which the town can support creative new types of farm activities without creating impediments.

Maintain an Active Awareness of Farming in Town

Government officials, officers in local organizations, and citizens can all think and talk about farming as a positive attribute of Colchester. Whenever town decisions are made that may affect farming in some way, actively discuss the impact of those decisions on farming, invite critical comment from farmers, and weigh those decisions against the values and benefits that farming confers on the town.

Use the Agricultural Advisory Board, mentioned earlier, to make local farmers aware of support and information sources that are available. Have the Board distribute the guides to farmland preservation mentioned in the “Suggested Reading” section at the end of this report, and charge it with holding seminars to answer questions related to these guides. Use the Agricultural Advisory Board as a platform to increase two-way communication between town government and farmers.

Involve the Colchester school system in farm awareness programs as a means of stemming future problems. Educate local students about the role of Colchester’s farms in food production and their community, so that they grow up to support their local farms. Follow the lead of towns that now have students growing produce for use in their cafeterias through the state’s Farm-to-Schools program, and encourage schools to seek local farm products for cafeterias.

Invite the public library to come up with ideas for supporting Colchester’s identity as a farming community, such as a reading list of books or a public discussion addressing modern food supply/food security issues. Perhaps the library can create a permanent display on the town’s farming history.

Engage in Further Self-Study

Consider performing a Cost of Community Services study or look at the results for studies in other communities. These studies are a snapshot of the relationship of tax income to town expense, by sector, at a given point in time. In Connecticut, other parts of New England, and across the U.S. in general, these studies indicate that agricultural activities pay far more in taxes than they require back in town expenses for services.

Examine and define the “town character.” Hold a photo contest for residents of Colchester and ask them to take photos that depict the town character. Hold discussions on what these photos signify, whether the town character needs to be preserved or changed, and how this should be done. Talk specifically about the role of farms in creating town character. Another question to ask is, what are the “social values” or the “social priorities” that town residents want to promote? How can farms support those values and priorities?

Many communities across the U.S. are developing innovative ways to incorporate equestrian activities into town life and town design. Some towns are encouraging equestrian-based residential developments that preserve open space in the form of riding trails and pasture.

Others sponsor public equestrian centers or horse parks, something like small fair-grounds, that provide space for competitive equestrian activities while also maintaining open space that brings in income and can be used for public cultural events. Invite local horse farmers to join the Agricultural Advisory Board (to be established) in working on developing a business plan for a town horse park. Research and discuss other innovative equestrian developments, public and private, around the U.S. and whether developments such as these should be encouraged in Colchester.

Identify local prime and important soils in town and the parcels in which they occur.

Farmers Can Strengthen Their Own Resources

Farmers in Colchester can help themselves by forming some sort of organization for information and resource sharing or by joining with an existing organization willing to pursue a farm agenda. Through it, sponsor periodic educational seminars on topics such as farmland succession and retirement planning, conservation easements, marketing techniques, creating value-added products, risk management, sources of insurance, and family business management.

The Colchester Land Trust has indicated a willingness to become an advocate and spokesman for the local farming community, but to make this happen, farmers must join the Trust and become active in its meetings and activities. Active support from farmers will strengthen the Trust, allow it to become more familiar with farm priorities, and aid the Trust in moving forward in a comprehensive plan for open space in town.

The nuisances of farming, such as farm smells and slow-moving or noisy farm vehicles, are occasionally a source of community conflict. Farmers can improve relations with neighbors by learning farm management “best practices,” especially for manure use and storage management, and publicly attesting that they know and follow these practices. Work with the town’s Director of Health to establish a program that will assure other residents that farmers are carrying their share of the burden in this matter.

Create a town-wide list of farmers’ e-mail addresses for easy sharing of information, such as changes in town ordinances, upcoming workshops from the Farm Bureau, sales on feed, used equipment for sale, etc.

Examine the feasibility of cooperative purchasing of feed, fuel, seed, or services that can be bundled together for savings, such as paving or construction.

Farmers who want to see their farm continue but may not have heirs interested in farming should familiarize themselves with the state Department of Agriculture’s “FarmLink” program.

Get on the Working Lands Alliance/American Farmland Trust e-mail list to learn about state legislation that might affect farming. Encourage all local farmers to contact state legislators about such legislation.

Realtors traditionally give gifts to clients who have purchased a home. Farmers can work with local realtors to produce an affordable gift basket for Colchester newcomers containing local products or coupons for local products, along with maps of local farms and their product calendars.

Private Farmland Preservation Activities

Farmland preservation is complex because of the many different reasons why the land should be preserved, the various needs and interests of the land-owning farmers, and the competing interests of the public, both as individuals and as a town. Therefore, planning for preservation should include the participation of a broad representative group of constituents who have a stake in the outcome. The Colchester Land Trust has already emerged as a leader in this effort and should be joined by representatives of constituents with interests in the environment, town character and history, town development, and farming.

Join with farmers to organize and sponsor the seminars recommended earlier (in the list of activities that farmers can take) related to farm viability and farmland preservation.

Begin a campaign to educate the public about the importance of farmland to Colchester and the changes and resources needed to enable farmland preservation. Join with the town government for this campaign.

Make sure that all farmers receive conservation information, especially the booklet from the American Farmland Trust titled Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities.

Farmland preservation efforts should be prioritized, and prioritization efforts should include the full spectrum of constituencies. Obviously, a request from a farmer for help with preservation, such as an interest in selling a conservation easement, would create an immediate candidate for consideration. But, if there are no clear candidates and private groups are looking for input to guide the use of their resources, one possibility is to establish a LESA (Land Evaluation and Site Assessment) system, a rating tool created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that allows the rating of the relative importance of parcels of farmland. Choosing parcels to target for preservation efforts can be difficult because of the differing priorities among stakeholders. Should the priority be clean water, wildlife refuges, open space for town character, development buffers, recreation, prime soils, sprawl containment, or promotion of farming? LESA systems, when crafted carefully, provide consistency among land evaluations and give weight to all of the various factors that the local community deems important.

INTRODUCTION

Colchester has a long history as a farming community, but farmland has given way to housing subdivisions during the past fifty years. The modern demand for new homes on large rural lots and the town's location on major transportation routes combine to make Colchester a highly desirable location for residential developers seeking new business opportunities. In the face of high demand for land on which to develop new homes, some residents and the elected leaders of the town are concerned about preserving the town's farms and the benefits that they impart. This, then, is a good point at which to assess the state of agriculture in Colchester – its products, advantages, needs, and problems – to see what role agriculture currently plays in the town and what can be done to make it more viable in the future.

With the right balance, guided by the town government, development and agriculture can live together. New residential areas can provide markets for farm products, while farms can provide the open space, ambience, and tax support that maintain strong property values. This report provides insight into the needs of farms that the Colchester town government can use to work on achieving that beneficial balance.

WHY WORKING TO IMPROVE FARM VIABILITY IS IMPORTANT TO COLCHESTER

The preservation of farmland isn't simply an attempt to maintain a quaint, quiet neighborhood. Farmland preservation conveys highly significant fiscal and environmental benefits to the local community and should be considered an important part of the town's development planning.

For Colchester, an important reason to preserve farms is because they operate as self-funded open space. The farms in this survey consist of large parcels of land with naturally attractive features such as pastures, woods, and wetlands. The farmers who own them have a strong connection to their land and they care for it well, restoring the nutrients in the soil and maintaining it as a workable asset. The open spaces maintained by farms contribute to the character of the town, making it more desirable to residents and contributing to the full package of characteristics that make the town so appealing to homebuyers.

Furthermore, farms preserve this attractive open land while paying taxes, unlike open land that is owned by governmental or non-profit agencies and removed from the tax list. In fact, farms pay much more in taxes than they cost the town in expenses – even when they receive special farm tax rates – in contrast to residential developments which cost more in services than the residents pay in taxes.¹ Farm taxes, therefore, help to support and balance the town's budget.

¹ Based on the results of numerous Cost of Community Services analyses performed by the American Farmland Trust and others, it has been demonstrated that working lands generate more in tax revenue than they receive back in services. See the following webpage for statistics: http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27757/COCS_8-06.pdf.

Wetlands are vital parts of the town's hydrologic system. They absorb excess water from heavy rains or stream overflow and release it slowly back into the water system. Excess nitrogen and phosphorous are filtered by wetland soils, naturally and cheaply purifying water before sending it on to the ground water drawn from wells. Housing or commercial developments often disrupt wetland functions through construction of roads, paving with impervious materials, unauthorized dumping of fill, or changes to surrounding landforms and slopes. Such disruptions can necessitate expensive upgrades and higher maintenance levels for sewage systems and roads. Farms, however, preserve wetlands and enable them to perform their natural functions of controlling flooding, purifying water, and recharging groundwater reserves without additional expense to the town.

Farms provide essential natural habitats and travel corridors for wild animals, and this benefits humans. Habitat disruption, which occurs with land development, removes the natural predators in the food chain that need open land and land corridors in order to find sufficient food. Those predators keep mosquitoes and vermin in check, so removing their habitat increases the danger to humans from insect and animal-borne diseases.

Local farms can be an important source of food security. American has become increasingly dependent on food imported from other countries, such as produce from Chile. As oil demand increases, especially from rapidly developing nations such as India and China, oil prices will rise and oil supplies will be less secure. This will inevitably affect the prices of produce and other foods in Colchester. Additionally, major food-producing regions of the U.S. have seen an upswing in the severity and unpredictability of disastrous weather such as droughts, flooding, hurricanes, and frosts. Some of these regions also face severe water shortages during the coming generation due to diminishing ice packs that feed their rivers. Consumers of produce grown in areas such as California or Florida will see a rise in prices and the uncertainty of availability. Therefore, local farms that produce food should not only be preserved, they should be encouraged to expand in order to provide food security and price stability in the future.

ABOUT THE TOWN OF COLCHESTER

Colchester is a town of approximately 15,000, situated in the southeast quadrant of Connecticut, midway between Hartford and New London. The town is conveniently located on one of the state's main commuter highways, Route 2. Driving thirty minutes north on Route 2 brings one to Hartford, and twenty minutes in the opposite direction brings one to Norwich. New London is about thirty minutes south, using a combination of state routes, and Middletown is about thirty minutes west.

Location is part of why Colchester is "the fastest-growing town in Connecticut over the last two decades."² The schools and the rural ambience combined with convenient shopping opportunities also contribute to its growth. Today the town is a mix of historic homes and farms with modern subdivisions and amenities. Within minutes of exiting Route 2, one can wind through woods on dirt roads. A minute's drive from the charming town green surrounded by

² From the home page of the official town website, <http://www.colchesterct.net>.

beautiful nineteenth century homes, one finds grocery stores, restaurants, and other modern services. There is a careful balance of new and old.

The town was founded in 1698, and for the first two centuries its economy centered on farming and local industry such as iron works, tanneries, and textiles. In the early 20th century, the Hirsch Foundation settled Jewish immigrants from Europe in the town as farmers. As the century progressed, however, farming in general declined and farmers began to take in summer boarders from nearby cities. Soon, these farms were converted into rural resorts. After World War II, the resorts closed, but the construction of Route 2 in the 1960s led to Colchester's new role as a bedroom community for local urban areas, which it remains today.³

GRANT PURPOSE AND HISTORY

This project is supported by an Agriculture Viability Grant funded by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, with matching support from the Town of Colchester.⁴ The State of Connecticut provides grants to municipalities for capital or planning projects to promote agricultural sustainability and/or increase the economic viability of farm businesses. Funding for these grants was established in 2005 through Public Act 228-05, An Act Concerning Farm Land Preservation, Land Protection, Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation. The particular type of grant awarded to Colchester is known as a Farm Viability Program Grant.

The purpose of the Farm Viability Program is:

- to provide a cash match for capital projects that are defined as fixed assets and have a life of ten years or more; including projects in conjunction with farmers markets, processing facilities and storage facilities;
- to develop and implement local or regional agriculture-friendly land use regulations;
- to develop and implement local or regional farmland protection strategies;
- to develop and implement plans that sustain and promote local or regional agriculture;
- to fund the production of outreach materials and provide educational workshops to inform municipalities of agriculture-friendly strategies, resources, and programs;
- to fund advertising for local or regional agriculture;
- to provide a 50% cash match to approved applicants.⁵

In applying for this grant, the Town defined its mission as “to identify and rank all agricultural land in Colchester with the goal of preserving valuable farmland.” The specific plan for fulfilling this grant mission was to “identify our agricultural land, inventory parcels and rank them – all in an effort to preserve our agricultural resources.” The project overview specified that this would be a two phase plan: first, a consultant would conduct the inventory of properties, then the Town would establish a five member Agricultural Advisory Committee who would

³ From the town history page of the official town website, <http://www.colchesterct.net/ourhistory.html>, and from Art Liverant, President of the Colchester Historical Society.

⁴ Colchester's financial contribution to the project comes primarily from staff time used in conjunction with the project activities.

⁵ Information on the State of Connecticut's Agriculture Viability Grants can be found at the Department of Agriculture website under “Programs and Services.” <http://www.ct.gov/doag/site/default.asp>

work with the Town to rank and prioritize the parcels of farm land that are critical to preserve. Following this process, appraisals and surveys might be performed to determine property values.⁶

Following a public Invitation to Bid for performing the consultation duties related to this grant, the Board of Selectmen awarded the consulting contract to the author of this report in April 2007. This consultant met with members of the Town Planning Department and with members of the Colchester Land Trust to develop a strategy for identifying farm owners to include in the inventory and to discuss the types of data needed from the interviews. The inventory interviews were conducted in Fall of 2007, and interviews with town officials occurred in January 2008.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

In the early stages of this project, the consultant met with Adam Turner, Town Planner, and Alicia Watson, Town Wetlands Enforcement Officer, to discuss the categories of data required to complete the report and methods for prioritizing farm owners to interview for the inventory. As a framework for prioritizing the interviews and creating the interview questionnaire, we created a list of Agricultural Land Categories [Appendix A]. Alicia Watson then developed a tour of properties in Colchester that exemplified the categories in the land category list in order to give the consultant a context for the project.

The consultant developed a list of questions to use in the survey interviews, and the questions were reviewed by Adam Turner and Alicia Watson, Elisabeth Moore of the Connecticut Farmland Trust, and an ad hoc committee of the Colchester Land Trust. The Colchester Land Trust committee, composed of Lisa Hageman, Chuck Toal, and Elizabeth MacAlister, also helped to shape the interview list and suggest ideas for gathering information vital to understanding the role of farms in Colchester.

The basis for the list of farm owners that we chose for interviews was the Town Assessor's list of land owners whose property is taxed under the provisions of Connecticut Public Act 490⁷ which allows farm, forest, or open land to be assessed for taxation at its "use" value, rather than at fair market value. There are 66 town property owners taxed under the law's section A, agricultural use, and these formed our initial list of farm owners. With input from the Colchester Land Trust and town staff, we refined the list to include additional land owners with large agricultural parcels that were not on the "490A" list. Priority was given to interviewing owners of parcels greater than 12 acres as this seemed to be a natural division in the list for separating the parcels large enough to provide significant open space and wildlife habitat.

Farmers chosen for interviews received a letter introducing them to the survey project, and the consultant then phoned each farmer to schedule an interview. The consultant met face-

⁶ "Agriculture Viability Grant, Town of Colchester, Inventorying and Ranking Agricultural Land." Jenny Contois, 15 November 2006. This is the grant application submitted to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

⁷ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap203.htm>, sections 12-107a to 12-107f.

to-face with each participating farm owner. Farm owners were often, but not always, the male head of the family. In some cases, both spouses considered themselves equal contributors to running the farm and both were consulted. Spouses who were not primary farmers were also invited to sit in and contribute to the interviews, but most responses to the questions were given by the family member considered to be “the farmer.” Interviews generally lasted from a half hour and an hour and a half. Each participant received a packet containing publications from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, the Connecticut Farmland Trust, the American Farmland Trust, the Land Trust Alliance, and other sources. These materials were chosen to support farm viability through information on agricultural laws, product marketing, farm succession planning, development easements, and other viability techniques. [See Appendix C for a list of materials.]

Interviewing a full roster of 50 farm owners proved to be impossible. Some farmers chose not to participate in the project. Many others could not find time in their schedules because they worked full time at a job and farmed part time. Some farmers spoke to the consultant on the phone about specific concerns, but were not interested in responding to all questions. And some farmers simply could not be reached regardless of the time of day that calls were placed and chose not to respond to messages about the project. Ultimately, 18 farmers received the full interview and responded to all questions. Only those responses are tallied in the data report in Appendix B.

At the completion of the entire set of interviews, the consultant organized the data and shared it with the Town Planner to discuss methods for examining the data for useful information. The consultant then met with various officials of the Town of Colchester who work in positions related to the issues that concern the town’s farmers. These officials responded to concerns raised in the survey, and their views are presented later in this report.

Following the publication of a draft of this report, public meetings were held to share the results of the project with the residents of Colchester.

Originally, this survey was spoken of as an inventory of farms with a goal of eventually ranking farms for preservation activity. However, it became clear that we would never obtain interviews with fifty farmers for the reasons noted above, and this was not going to be an actual inventory of all farm activity in town. It also became clear that most farmers had relatively little interest, at the time of their interview, in some programs designed especially for the preservation of farmland, such as conservation easements. The project data does, instead, offer something very valuable – the words of the farmers themselves regarding their needs in order to continue farming. Helping farmers to continue their farming is ultimately the best route to preserving farms. The recommendations in this report will focus on using our expanded knowledge of farmers’ priorities to help them make their farms thrive financially and to help them and the residents of Colchester to prepare for future decision-making related to the fate of local farming.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The questionnaire used in the interviews of farmers, along with the data and opinions that were gathered, is presented in Appendix B of this report. The responses to each question are first

tallied as statistical data whenever appropriate. For example, the tally might sum the number of farmers who responded “yes” to a question, the number that responded “no,” and the number that responded “don’t know.” Then, additional comments related to the question are presented below the data for that question. All of the responses have been randomized in order throughout the various tallies in order to preserve as much of the anonymity of each respondent as possible.

At the end of each interview, the consultant also gave each farmer the opportunity to express opinions or give additional information related to being a farmer, farming within the Town of Colchester, problems of farming, or any other topic of concern. These comments are included at the end of the presentation of data in Appendix B. In many cases, comments have been summarized and shortened down to their basic gist in order to make the document easier to work with and in order to preserve the privacy of the farmers, when possible. It’s important for the reader to know this because the comments often appear to be brief mild remarks, spoken without passion. In reality, the farmers who participated in this project were usually very passionate about their work and their concerns. They spoke quite forcefully about the problems they encounter and the difficulties that may cause them to quit farming.

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

About the farmers and their families:

Nearly all of the Colchester farmers in this study come from a farming background, some of them tracing their family farm connections back for several generations. Nearly all of the farmers themselves have been farming for decades. Some of the farmers regard the beginnings of their own farmer status as their birth because they had farm chores as children and were aware of the family as a farming family from their earliest days. The average number of years in farming was 34.

Colchester’s farmers are a hard-working group. About half of them work full-time at another job, then come home to work on the farm in their spare time. Several others also did so before retirement. The other half of the group are full-time farmers. (There is some overlap in the numbers because some people who work full-time outside of the farm also say they work the equivalent of a full-time job on the farm as well.) While the work is somewhat cyclical for many farmers, it nevertheless continues throughout the year. Farmers generally rise very early to begin their work, and those who work at a job elsewhere, work well into the evening. Even crops that may seem to be self-sustaining (Christmas trees, for example) require year-round labor, such as pruning and clearing out storm damage, to keep them going.

Unlike earlier times when many children were needed on the farm, today’s farm families are much smaller. In this study, the average number of people per residence on the farms was 2.56, but some families had older children who had their own homes elsewhere; the general range for the total number of children in families was from 1 to 4. Though the children usually helped on the farm while growing up, only a few farmers receive help from their adult children now. As a result of this and the difficulty in finding affordable labor, Colchester farmers try to

keep their farms and the products of their farms on a scale that they and their spouses can manage alone, with some occasional outside help.

About the farms:

The farms that participated in the study vary widely in size, products, and land utilization. The study focused on farms that were larger than 12 acres in order to gather data on pieces of land that were most likely to be missed as open space if developed, and 12 acres was a convenient dividing line in the 490A list. The exception was Caring Community, a job training and vocational rehabilitation day program that farms on 7 acres. Other than Caring Community, the size of farms in the study ranges from 18 acres to 200 acres. Nine farms fall in the range between 18 and 49 acres; five farms fall in the range of 50 to 99 acres, two farms fall in the range of 100 to 149 acres, and one tops the list at 200 acres. The median size is 40 acres. Most farmers did not lease land from others or to others.

A common characteristic of Colchester farmland is that it consists of a number of different types of terrains which lend themselves to various uses which contribute to the diversity of products. Among the studied farms, most have some combination of tillable land for crops, pasture, wetland, woodland, hills or ledges, and sand and gravel deposits. All of these terrains have important uses on farms. In addition to the obvious utility of tillable land and pastures, Colchester's farmers use woodland, steep land, and some of their wetland areas for animal pasture. Woodlands also produce fire wood. Several farmers have developed their sand and gravel deposits into businesses. Land that would probably be unsuitable for residential development because of the grade or floodplain is therefore useful as farmland, though it should be noted that not all farmers can use all of these types of land for their particular types of farming. The percentage of their property that farmers were able to utilize for farm activities ranged from 20% to 100%, the median being 65% and the average being 62%. It is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions about the efficiency of land use from the data in the survey, but using the size ranges in the paragraph above, along with specific use data for each farm, the following can be noted. Farms in the range of 18 to 49 acres averaged 60% use of their acreage for farming, farms in the range of 50 to 99 acres averaged 62% use of their acreage for farming, and farms of 100 acres or more averaged 28% use of their acreage for farming.

The number of data points is far too small to be statistically significant in the 100 acre-plus range, and the consultant didn't discuss the details of why each farmer utilized his or her land in the manner that he or she did. Several possibilities for these numbers can be hypothesized, however. First, farmers with large parcels have the luxury of using the best land for their farming and can ignore the worst, while farmers on smaller parcels have to make do with less-than-ideal land, such as using soggy wetland for pasture. Second, it is possible that, over the generations, large farms were carved up until small core units of the most usable land remained as farmland and the less farm-worthy types of land were sold off for other uses. Third, with the shortage of farm labor, farmers are able to farm only the amount of property for which they can find or afford workers, so larger parcels may go partially unused. Finally, the type of farming that each farmer chooses dictates what kinds of land can be used; some farmers may be producing crops or animals that can't use all parts of their farm.

The list of products from Colchester farms (in Appendix B) shows the breadth of items for which there is a local market, including numerous vegetables and fruits, eggs, beef, fire wood, Christmas trees, hay, and many types of animals, including horses for equestrian activities. There are also foods made from the produce of town farms, such as cheese, wine, and jams. The high quality of the items produced here, combined with the growing trend toward purchasing local foods from sources that can be visited and trusted, gives Colchester the potential to become a destination for people who subscribe to the wholesome food, “green” living, and “slow food” movements. The year-round nature of the products could lead to a sort of marketing synergy, such as inviting Christmas tree buyers to come back to town for berries in early summer or corn in late summer.

In addition to traditional farm products, several farmers have used their land for other businesses. These include sand and gravel excavation and sales, lumber, recycling, and a store for Christmas items. In view of the frequently expressed opinion that it is hard to make a profit at farming because of the skyrocketing costs of fuel, land, and taxes, these additional businesses are important for keeping farmland operational. Nearly half of the respondents have alternative ideas for their farms that they would like to develop, including soil manufacturing, hayrides, decorative plants, recycling, and equestrian activities. Encouragement of alternative activities such as these by the town government will help to preserve open space in Colchester at no cost to the town.

Half of the respondents like to buy farm supplies locally and keep their money in the community, but nearly half do not, often because they cannot afford the feed prices. The incomes of local farms from farming activities are generally not high. On the farms of those willing to discuss income, sales ranged from less than \$10,000 to more than \$100,000, but were skewed toward the lower part of the range. The one farmer who brought in more than \$100,000 per year mentioned that nearly all of that was paid out in expenses.

There is already a farmers’ market on Friday afternoons at the Priam Vineyard. When asked if a bigger or longer market would be helpful, most farmers said no. Some products, such as hay, aren’t suitable for markets, and markets take time out from other farm work.

The question of what the town or state could do to help farms brought a variety of answers. Many answered that taxes could be lowered and their 490 tax status made more secure. Farmers also want the town to adopt the state’s legislation and regulations that pertain to farming. For example, farmers would like to see the state’s right-to-farm law formally adopted by the town. Farmers would also like to see the town educate other residents about farming. Readers should see the entire list of comments in Appendix B.

The problems of farming:

Farmers were asked the open-ended question, “What are the biggest problems that you encounter in farming?” By far, the top answer was “taxes.” One third of the group gave that answer, though nearly all other farmers echoed “taxes” as a major concern in other portions of

the interview. Other answers, in order of number of responses, were: weather; finding labor; complaints from the public about farm practices; crop and animal diseases; shortage of land; fuel costs; the cost of fertilizer, seeds, or supplies; expenses in general; town administration issues; machinery costs; health/age; risk; and trespassing.

At some point in the interview, every farmer worried about taxation. This issue has raised a lot of ire in the farming community, and some of the farmers expressed themselves with considerable anger and frustration during this part of the discussion. In fact, several of the people who refused to participate in the survey did so only after first venting great anger over farm taxes. Most of the farmers feel that farms typically pay much more in taxes than they receive in town services. They feel that they are already helping to carry the expenses of the town and are being squeezed to carry even more of the load as town expenses go up.

The other responses to the question about farming problems were similarly “under reported.” That is, while farmers may not have mentioned certain problems in answer to this open-ended question, those problems often came up elsewhere during the discussion. For example, only three people mention finding labor as a problem during this question, but seven people said “yes” in response to the later question “Do you have problems finding and keeping farm labor?” Also, the general inability to match sales income with the cost of production and frustrations in dealing with town administration were common complaints that were often voiced in other parts of the interview, rather than in response to the question about biggest problems.

When asked what would make it easier for the respondent to continue farming in the future, two-thirds of the responses were complaints about either taxes or governmental regulations or activities. Readers are urged to see Appendix B to see the specific answers. A common thread among these answers is a desire for the town to be more supportive of farming. Specific ideas included town adoption of the state’s right-to-farm law,⁸ education of town residents about local farms (both their available products and their farming methods, such as manure application), and easier and quicker decisions from town offices about changes farmers want to make to their properties. There is a tone running through these comments and others in the interviews that the town is, at best, not trying to help its farmers and, at worst, is working against them.

Finally, farmers were given the opportunity at the end of each interview to discuss other issues or add additional comments. Most farmers elected to reiterate or elaborate on points they had made in earlier responses, and the feeling on these topics was sometimes quite passionate. Generally, these additional comments fell into the following areas.

First, farmers feel strongly that they need more support from the town administration, especially in regard to right-to-farm laws and support of farming techniques, such as manure spreading, when other residents complain.

Farmers also asked for support from other residents in Colchester. They feel that if more people are educated about farms and food production, this will be very helpful to farmers in many ways, including fewer complaints and more product sales.

⁸ See: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap368m.htm>, section 19a-341.

Farmers had a great deal to say about their interaction with the town administration. They are particularly frustrated with land use regulations and restrictions that farmers feel don't always make sense for farms. They are also upset about the difficulties they perceive in connection with getting approvals for land use changes, including the length of time needed for approvals.

Taxation also elicited great frustration. There is widespread concern over the possibility of losing their 490A tax status without warning. Some feel that farmers are carrying a disproportionate share of taxes. They feel that there are no tax incentives to keep farming in town, and that the town actually taxes things that could be exempt or taxed at a lower rate.

Regarding the general outlook for farming in Colchester, many farmers were quite gloomy, saying it is too late to save. Farming has many problems; in particular, the expenses of producing are too high in relation to sales income. Beyond taxes, feed, or fuel, it's also expenses such as repairing buildings or equipment, insurance, vandalism, and buying livestock that have them worried.

Readers are urged to read the entire list in Appendix B to better understand these concerns.

About the future of Colchester farms:

Despite the risks and costs of farming, two thirds of the respondents actively want to expand the size of their farms, and a few others would expand if it were possible. The most common reason keeping farmers from expanding is the inability to buy land. In some cases, it is the lack of any contiguous land that prevents expansion, in others it is the high cost of land, sold at development prices, that prevents it.

Asked if they were satisfied with farming and wanted to continue indefinitely, every farming household said yes, with the exception of one spouse in a farming couple who felt worn down by the constant difficulties of farming, including hard work without respite.

The wish to continue farming and to expand the farm isn't surprising in view of the passion for farming that many farmers expressed in their interviews. "Farming is our way of life" was the statement heard over and over. No one ever mentioned any longing for an easier life away from the soil. Older farmers said that they would like to farm as long as they were able. Though several spoke of retirement from their non-farm jobs, no one spoke of retiring from farming. Farming clearly holds a different status for these people than a job. It defines them and their place in the world, a place of honor. Many farmers expressed the feeling that they were doing something valuable by producing food and by making the land fertile. No arrogance or feeling of superiority about this, it was simply an expression of the job that they had to do in life.

Whether those farms will continue indefinitely or not is a big question, however. Two-thirds of the group had no expectation that children would take over the farm. Some farmers had no children, but most said that their children were not interested in farming or didn't live in the area. This is clearly a concern for the town if it wants to preserve farmland as open space. Although a few farmers spoke hopefully of selling their farm as a farm, this is clearly not an option that carries certainty because several farmers said that their soils were not prime soils. (Farmers were given a pamphlet on the state's "FarmLink" project⁹ that links farm buyers with farm sellers.)

The issue of what will eventually happen to these farms is only half the question. The other half is "what will happen to these farmers?" The issue of retirement funds is particularly important to the group interviewed for this survey as most of them are over the age of 50. One third of the group fell in the age range of 50 to 59, and another third fell into the group of 60 to 80+ years of age. Among full-time farmers, land is generally like a retirement account. Farmers turn much of their income into farm equity. Among part-time farmers who have full-time jobs off the farm, there is often an anticipation of retirement income from their jobs, but those who are already retired say that they have a difficult time trying to meet the expenses of farming, such as taxes and fuel, on a fixed income.

When asked if they had talked to a retirement planner or financial advisor, nearly two-thirds responded that they had not, and half have not made formal arrangements to transfer their farms to heirs. This suggests that the preservation of these farms as farms may be vulnerable, especially if farmers die prematurely. Providing local farmers with access to knowledge about farm succession planning from one of the non-profit organizations in New England that offer these services will allow them to learn techniques to set achievable goals for preserving their farms. There are also firms and non-profit organizations that specialize in farm or family business planning, and these can be helpful, as well.

Given the passion of these farmers for their farms, there was an expectation before the inventory was begun that farmers would be eager to consider conservation easements in order to receive cash for farm improvements or retirement while assuring the continued use of the land as a farm. Conservation easements result from the sale of the farm's development rights. The farmer is left with ownership of the farm as a farm. Future sale of the land must be made with the intention of maintaining the land as a farm, undeveloped. The development rights are often purchased by or donated to a governmental body or non-profit agency.

Contrary to our expectations, however, about three-fourths of the participants have not considered preservation options such as easements for various reasons. Several were worried about losing the flexibility to sell their land as they pleased. A couple of farmers felt that they couldn't get enough money to make it worth while. A couple of farmers also mentioned land formerly owned by Ruby and Elizabeth Cohen and feared that turning over any of their rights to the town could be risky. In 1999, the town acquired the Cohen land, with the aid of state grants, as open space. Although Ruby Cohen's intention for the land was for it to be kept natural as a wildlife preserve, the town later proposed to build three baseball fields on it. The concern of

⁹ <http://www.farmlink.uconn.edu/>

those farmers is that the town might somehow see a farmland conservation easement as an opportunity to exert some influence over the use of their farmland.

When asked, then, if these farmers had seriously investigated the outright sale of their land to a developer, a few responded that they had spoken to developers but, by far, most have not. Developers are actively contacting some farm owners on a regular basis, but most farmers want to preserve their farms intact. Only one, to date, has sold any portion of his farm to someone outside the family for building lots. Most reported that they haven't discussed the idea of selling to developers with their farming friends, but a few said that they have discussed it, and the general feeling is to sell. This was reinforced later in the general comments made by a number of farmers who said that if they became frustrated enough with taxes or the town administration, they would sell to a developer.

An overall view of Colchester farmers and farming:

During the interviews, several important threads emerged that are not captured fully in the responses of Appendix B. First, it is clear that the old-fashioned stereotype of the farmer as a "hayseed" is totally inappropriate. The farmers that participated in the interviews are smart and articulate. They keep up with national news and are keenly aware of how that news will affect them as farmers. Some of them keep up to date on commodity prices via the Internet, while some others read the Wall Street Journal. Though not everyone spoke of their farming as a business, those who did were versed in state regulatory law, the forecast for fuel costs and produce prices, and real estate trends.

One should not judge the farmers' prowess as business people by their income, however. Unlike traditional retailers or manufacturers, the farmers in the survey see part of their payoff from farming in the satisfaction that it brings them in producing something of value and protecting open land and a rural ambience within the town. While they hope that their hard work is producing enough income to pay for expenses, taxes, mortgages, and their family needs, they don't expect to rake in enormous profits. Retaining their land when they could reap a real estate windfall and farming the land despite significant economic and weather risks is an act of commitment and faith.

Another characteristic of the farmers that became evident is their resourcefulness. One farmer mentioned that every day brought an unexpected surprise on the farm. It might be the need to repair a feed trough kicked by a frisky bull, removal of a fallen tree from a tractor path, or an essential piece of equipment biting the dust, but farmers need to be ready to deal with unanticipated barriers and emergencies on a regular basis. To do this, many of them have prepared themselves with a wide array of skills in construction, machinery repair, and general problem solving for natural calamities. People like these are valuable resources for any town.

Perhaps some of the conflicts between farmers and the town arise because the farmers have a different relationship with their land than the average landowner. Farmers nurture their soil, coax it to grow things, and assess its value and productivity, not just from border to border as square footage, but from the top of the leaves of the plants growing on it all the way down

deep into the earth. For farmers, their land is a living asset with which they have a daily conversation. Because of this greater intimacy with their land, it's probably hard for farmers to bow to the restrictions that an outside agency might want to put on their land in pursuance of an abstract and broadly generalized law.

Also, many of these farmers have been working their land for years, some of them following generations of family members in doing so. For them, working the land has permanence, in contrast to changing housing trends and population fluctuations. It's possible that some of them feel that the stability and durability of their activity should merit some priority, some consideration from the town in order to keep the town from flying too rapidly into the spiral of increasing development followed by increasing taxes.

RESPONSES TO FARMER CONCERNS BY TOWN OFFICIALS

The consultant met with Colchester town officials in the Planning and Zoning Department, Health Department, and the Assessor's Office. We discussed the definition of farming and the role of farms in Colchester. These officials were asked about the types of farming issues that they deal with and how they approach those issues, in general and on a case-by-case basis.

Linda Hodge, First Selectman, feels that farms, both commercial and the "hobby farms" for personal use, are a key to the character and environment of Colchester. They can have an important role in tourism and marketing to make the town a destination. They play an important role in environmental preservation and in the control of sprawl. She is an enthusiastic supporter of farms and wants to help and encourage them. She is looking for ideas on ways to make farming more sustainable. One area she sees as important is energy efficiency; another is finding ways to help their sales.

Wendy Mis, the Director of Health, says that common issues brought to her department by town residents are fly and odor complaints, usually related to manure applications on farm fields or manure and fertilizer storage areas. She recommends the manure handling techniques promoted in publications from the University of Connecticut. She also works to be proactive as well as reactive to problems, preferring to head off potential problems early in the planning stage of any land use changes. She advocates sufficient space between structures on adjoining properties and good advance land use planning to mitigate odor problems.

Ms. Mis agrees that public education about farms and their benefits would be very helpful to the town. New residents should be aware of the nature of farming communities, including the poultry noises and odors, before they settle in, and she advocates signage announcing that this is a farming community. She also wants people to understand farming because of food-borne illness issues. If citizens understood how food is produced and shipped, they would prefer local food from area farms. She would like people to know more about the farms in town.

Ms. Mis also discussed farm markets and retailing, enumerating the types of concerns she would have with such ventures, such as proper refrigeration and the handling of sliced fruits, but if a farmer is working with the state Department of Agriculture, she is willing to step aside and let their regulations govern the situation. In general, she shows a strong appreciation for farming and significant knowledge about farming issues.

Members of the town's Planning and Zoning Department are involved daily with farms as they administer land use programs. Craig Grimord, though new to the town, has many years of experience with farming communities, and he agrees that manure smells, flies, and poultry noises are common problems. But rules allowing people to own livestock with only a few acres of land, and requiring them to leave at least 100 feet between animals and the nearest neighbor can create problems as well, in the form of animals being crowded on a small plot. As development grows in town, complaints about farms will grow. Clearly, cooperation and creative problem solving are needed in order to protect everyone's interests.

Mr. Grimord sees a role for the state in supporting farming. Farmers can apply for state agriculture viability grants to improve farm manure management. The state can also help with grants for conservation easements to encourage preservation.

Jay Gigliotti, the Wetlands Enforcement Officer, spoke of the important balance that he tries to bring to his job. He tries to give as much leeway to farmers in farm wetlands issues as he can when there are gray areas in the regulations, but certain rules simply must be enforced for public health and environmental preservation. In a discussion of some specific cases brought up by farmers who felt that the town was overly restrictive in applying rules and unhelpful in navigating the zoning enforcement system, Mr. Gigliotti felt that it would be helpful to make clearer policy distinctions regarding types of farming. Some farms are based more upon their commercial aspects in a way that shifts the emphasis from farming to agricultural-related business. Equestrian activities are a prime example, where riding lessons are more commercial than farming, he feels. The application of definitions is important because it plays a role in determining the particular rules that need to be applied.

Another issue that some farmers mentioned was the difficulty they have in correcting the changes in wetlands that were made by other owners or by the government in road maintenance activities. Farmers feel that if someone else dumped soil that formed a dam, creating a swampy area on their property, the farmer should be able to remove the soil and restore the use of the land for pasture. Mr. Gigliotti pointed out that once such dams and the area around them become stable, the surrounding soil changes to adapt to the new situation, and removing the dam creates a new environmental situation that has to be evaluated from the point of the recent stability.

Salvatore Tassone, the Town Engineer, has a strong appreciation of farms and the open space they preserve. His professional area leads him to be concerned about issues such as safe road access on farms, the protection of town roads, and storm water management issues. Case-by-case review of building and zoning applications is vital. Barns or the areas around them can create impervious surfaces that alter storm water flow. This altered flow can create health or safety problems, such as washing manure out of the property onto town roads. Mr. Tassone is particularly concerned with road and drainage issues when parcels are relatively small and farm

building are located near other properties. In one ongoing case, it is the parcel size and proximity to others that mandates a cautious review of drainage systems.

Timothy York, the Town Building Official, emphasizes that the health, safety, and welfare of others is a top priority when he reviews building plans. There has been relatively little building activity on active farms in town, but he has advised farmers and participated in occasional Health Department inspections. He mentioned that pre-application meetings are already a practice for any new development activity in town, and that is a good way for anyone planning a new building to learn what is required and how to navigate the review system.

Lack of advance planning can be a big problem for land owners wanting to add buildings to their properties. Mr. York advised that they need to completely think out their project and solidify their plans before entering an application. In one local farm case, for example, the owner hadn't completely decided what to do in the project prior to approaching the town and failed to mention all aspects of the project. As the project description changed, including a larger building and a different business plan, the new specifications affected every area of the approval process, and earlier approvals and permits became outmoded. He felt that better preparation prior to application would have streamlined the process.

A Town Assessor's job is not easy. The entire town benefits when the Assessor works hard at bringing in as much tax income as is legally possible. If the Assessor doesn't, people complain about the failure to realize all the assets and to spread the tax burden fairly. Yet no one is happy when the Assessor does his job.

In Connecticut, the state statutes give town assessors extensive discretion in classifying land into use categories and in setting farmland assessments. For most farmers, an important element of farm viability is receiving Public Act 490 tax status, the status that allows a farm to pay taxes based upon the actual use of the land, rather than on the fair market value.¹⁰ Assessors have the power to create rules for farmland classification, such as minimum tract size, that affect the eligibility of land for 490 taxation consideration. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture publishes a chart of suggested land values to use when assessing Public Act 490 lands,¹¹ but use of those values is not mandated because local conditions, such as variations in rental values or production capability, vary from town to town. Assessors are given flexibility to design their own schedule of values for 490 land as long as those values are applied to land use categories in a manner consistent with the hierarchy of use categories established by the state.

Public Act 490 contains a provision designed to preserve agricultural lands by penalizing their sale for land speculation. It's a sliding scale mandating that the seller must pay anywhere from one percent to ten percent of the purchase price of the land as a conveyance tax if the land is sold within ten years of receiving 490 tax status. The penalty provision was designed to

¹⁰ The State of Connecticut instituted differential taxation for farm, forest, and open space land in 1963 through Public Act 490. The designations 490A, 490F, and 490O in this report refer to taxation rates applied to farmland, forest, and open space under this act. See: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap203.htm>, sections 12-107a to 12-107f. Although the state suggests appropriate tax rates for various uses of the land and various soil types, town assessors are under no obligation to use those rates and are given extensive discretion over the actual rates they levy; the state asks only that towns use the same sort of hierarchy of land uses relative to one another.

¹¹ <http://www.ct.gov/doag/cwp/view.asp?a=1366&q=259038>

prevent tax abuses by landowners who made a pretense of farming while waiting for an opportune moment to sell the land. Most farmers have little interest in land speculation and depend upon 490 taxation for the survival of their farms. Occasionally, however, farmers choose not to apply for 490 taxation in order to give them the flexibility to sell their property without the penalty. When farms are not part of the 490 tax program, their open land is not taxed under any of the classifications for farmland.

Farm property other than land or the farmer's residence – farm buildings, horses, and farm equipment other than motor vehicles – qualifies for tax exemptions.¹² State law specifies exemptions that are available for horses and equipment, and it allows municipalities to extend the exemption on equipment and to provide exemptions for farm buildings other than the farmer's residence.

John Chaponis, Town Assessor, sees his job for the Town of Colchester as discovering property changes and the value of those changes that should be added to the town's tax list. He indicated that most farm taxation in town is governed by state or local laws which he enforces uniformly, other than the exceptions that are grandfathered in. In a developing town like Colchester, the determination of what is or isn't farmland, and who does or doesn't receive 490 taxation, is important, and the Assessor says that he is happy to take time to explain to the criteria to anyone with questions.

He noted that while 490 taxation is a state process, every town has its own regulations. The state allows each town to consider many factors in classifying land as farmland and in setting values for assessments but doesn't require that all of these factors figure into the consideration. In selecting the factors that he uses, Mr. Chaponis feels that he is liberal in favor of the farming community. For example, he requires no minimum acreage for land to be classified as farmland, unlike many towns that have established a five acre minimum in order to qualify for special taxation. He also says that he is a proponent of 490 taxation for farm and forest land, including equestrian farms. He is always willing to inspect forest or wetland to determine whether they are a legitimate part of operational farmland and happy to extend 490 tax status if they are.

Mr. Chaponis has chosen to apply the state's suggested Public Act 490 land values to farmland that has qualified for 490 classification. For 490A lands (agricultural), this would range from \$165 per acre for unmanaged pasture up to \$1,100 per acre for orchard land. He uses the recommended value of \$190 for 490F (forest) land. These lands would then be assessed at seventy per cent of those values.

He says that property owners do sometimes get confused over procedures or the requirements for obtaining or retaining their farm classification. For example, state law directs the assessor to consider the gross income produced by farming in determining whether land is farmland.¹³ Without gross income, there is no business and, therefore, no classification of the land as farmland under the provisions of Public Act 490. Applicants for 490 status also must have farm equipment; a lack of equipment signals that there is no farm. Often, at the time of

¹² <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap203.htm#Sec12-91.htm>

¹³ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap203.htm#Sec12-107c.htm>

being sold, 490 farms don't meet the statutory requirement for ten years of operation as a farm (in order to be taxed as farmland), and when farmers sell such property, the Assessor is mandated by law to charge a special penalty conveyance tax.¹⁴ This tax could actually be greater than the aggregate savings that the farmer received under 490. The farmers are usually unprepared for this action. Also, every year some people sign a declaration saying that they are no longer farming, then change their minds and call him to reverse their declaration. Such cases help to create the idea that 490 status is highly vulnerable.

For farmers who fail to qualify for 490 status, or for those who choose not to apply for it, Mr. Chaponis has created an assessment classification for "excess acreage" which is applied to every parcel without the need for an application. In defining "excess acreage," Mr. Chaponis notes that in areas of town zoned for residential use, zoning regulations require that each approved building lot meet the minimum size requirement for that zone. Any land in the tract above and beyond that minimum building lot requirement is "excess acreage." So, for example, zoning regulations may require that tract X have a minimum of 60,000 square feet (or 1.38 acres) to be approved as a building lot. That building lot will have a market value appraisal that can be established by local sales data. Say, for example, that the market value is \$100,000. Then what if the entire tract is larger? A larger lot, for example, three times the size of the minimum required building lot acreage, will sell for more than \$100,000 but not three times more (or \$300,000). In recognition of this, the excess acreage is taxed at a rate lower than the value of the required building lot portion of the tract. Mr. Chaponis sets the market value of this excess acreage at \$1,400 per acre. So, using the hypothetical building lot value, a 5.38 acre lot would be appraised for taxes at \$105,600 (\$100,000 for the first 1.38 acres plus \$1,400 per acre for the remaining four acres). In Connecticut, land is assessed at seventy per cent of its appraised market value, so the excess acreage assessment value of the land would be \$980 per acre.

Mr. Chaponis then gave an example of how this excess acreage valuation would look if it were applied to a larger tract of land, such as a farm. Again using the hypothetical minimum building lot requirement of 1.38 acres with a market value of \$100,000, a tract 35.38 acres in size would be appraised at a market value of \$147,600 (\$100,000 plus 34 acres at \$1,400 per acre), with a resulting assessed value of \$103,320. He feels that applying an appraised value of \$1,400 per acre to excess acreage is a very conservative rate, in comparison to most other towns; some towns' rates are closer to \$4,000 to \$7,500 per acre. He set Colchester's excess acreage rate low to avoid taxing large tract owners to the point where they must sell their land.

Ultimately, says Mr. Chaponis, the tax on excess acreage is not much higher than the tax on 490 farmland. Ten acres of farmland, for example, would have an appraised value of \$9,800 under the excess acreage category (10 acres times \$980 per acre, which is 70% of \$1,400). If taxed under Public Act 490 as high-quality Tillable B farmland, those ten acres would have an appraised value of \$5,040 (ten acres times \$504 per acre, which is 70% of \$720, the state's recommended value for Tillable B land). The difference in appraised value is \$4,760. Using Colchester's 2007-2008 mill rate of 22.73, the tax on \$9,800 would be \$222.75, and the tax on \$5,040 would be \$114.56, a difference in tax on those ten acres of \$108.19 per year.

¹⁴ To ensure that land owners follow through with the land use for which they are receiving special taxation, the law includes a financial penalty on owners who sell their property within ten years of being classified as eligible for 490 tax status. See: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap223.htm#Sec12-504a.htm>.

Given the possibility that a farm owner might have to pay more than \$108 in farm property (equipment) taxes or might pay even more in a conveyance tax if the farm were sold before meeting ten years of 490 qualification, Mr. Chaponis feels that there are some small farm owners who probably don't apply for 490 status because the difference isn't worth the restrictions.

Farm equipment is an area that sometimes draws argument. Although the presence of farm equipment helps to qualify a property as a working farm, the equipment is, by state law, a tax liability. Mr. Chaponis audits the equipment in question because, in order to qualify for special farm equipment taxation status, it must be legitimately linked to farming activities, as opposed to being used for routine lawn maintenance or for non-farm business activities. Defining whether a business or a portion of a business is actual "farming" or not is a situation where there may be a gray area subject to individual interpretation.

For example, the gray area begins when agricultural products are converted into, and packaged as, processed food items. If some of the agricultural products are purchased from another farmer, the situation becomes muddy. A gray area may arise in the matter of equestrian farms. When do the business aspects of their activities move from agricultural to non-agricultural? For example, although the boarding of horses may be an agricultural use, is the equipment related to the training of riders necessarily agricultural? Computers are another type of equipment that would be questioned. While they may be important to keeping the farm business finances straight or for obtaining farming information on-line, they are not farming equipment. In establishing the tax rates for farm equipment, Mr. Chaponis seeks to determine that farm taxation is extended only to portions of a business clearly related to the production of a farm's agricultural output. Serious disputes by farmers have arisen over the Assessor's choices of where to draw the line in determining the purpose of equipment, but Mr. Chaponis feels that he has a clear and consistent standard for the decisions he makes. Ultimately, state law dictates how farm equipment is assessed, and there is an appeal process for farmers who dispute the Assessor's decisions.

Mr. Chaponis speculates that some of the farmers' unhappiness with the Assessor's office comes about as a result of unhappiness with the changes that the whole town must adjust to as a result of its rapid development and the rise in property values in general. He also understands that there is discontent with the audits of personal property that occur in connection with farm equipment, but that farmers must remember that this questioning is uniform for all businesses in town. He does feel that 490 classifications made in the past were not always made as accurately as they could have been, and he looks forward to addressing this in the next town-wide revaluation. Generally, however, he says that farm tax issues are a relatively small percentage of the tax issues in town.

All of the town staff who were asked to meet to discuss the farm inventory responded willingly and gave generously of their time. While they are always happy to meet with farmers to discuss problems, staff members were consistent in mentioning their obligation to all residents of the town with respect to promoting safety and health through observance of regulations. While farm owners dislike interference in their use of their land, town staff members are charged with overseeing a uniform application of the laws, regardless of the type of land use. All staff

members spoke of approaching problems on a case-by-case basis. While all were concerned with pursuing issues that they are mandated to pursue, they truly exuded enthusiasm for farms.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON FINDINGS IN THE STUDY

Many of Colchester's Farms Are Businesses that Need Local Support:

Farming is, for many of the respondents, a business, and it is a particularly risky and difficult business. Farmers have relatively little control over their costs. Fuel needed for heavy trucks and tractors has risen well beyond what anyone would have expected a decade ago. Farm labor is extremely difficult to find, and when available, farmers often have to pay higher than average salaries or provide amenities such as lodging. Land value, and, therefore, the taxation of farmland not eligible for "490" tax rates goes up as development spreads through the town. High land values keep farmers from expanding their farms to expand their business. The money invested in fertilizer or labor is easily lost when there is a lack of or an excess of rain. Crop or animal diseases can be unpredictable and expensive to fight.

The prices a farmer can ask for his or her products, on the other hand, are kept low. Large grocery store chains establish competitive prices for produce. Their produce may be of lower quality, having been picked early and stored for long periods before sale, but many consumers expect farmers to meet or beat the store prices. Sometimes estate owners with no interest in being farmers may lower the local price for hay by discounting the hay produced on their acreage. In general, many farmers noted that the prices they get for their products don't match or keep pace with the costs of production.

One of the most important ways to help farming continue in Colchester is to help farmers make their businesses thrive. Part of the plan to keep local farmers in town should include economic development support from the town and state. Farmers generally pay two or three times as much in taxes as they require back in governmental services, so support of farming is financially advantageous to the town. While not all farmers sell their products to the public, professional economic development support for those who do is a wise investment that will pay the town back not only in tax support, but also in helping to control town expenses and maintaining the natural benefits that open spaces provide.

Taxes Are An Important Factor in Farm Survival and Problems Must Be Addressed:

Another very clear message from the farmers is their concern about property taxes. By far, respondents feel that 490 A and F taxation, taxing the land based upon its use, not its fair market value, is absolutely essential to their continuation in farming. But many of them expressed concern that their 490 tax status might be removed or denied by administrators who apply definitions for farming that differ from those of the state Department of Agriculture. Farmers told of being denied 490 tax status without explanation or having their existing 490 status suddenly revoked. Other people have said that the town isn't applying the 490 tax rates that are posted at town hall (the 490 rates suggested by the Connecticut Department of

Agriculture). Also, it has been said that some of the classifications for farmland (on the state's 490 list) that might be appropriate for some farms are not applied, denying some farmers lower tax rates for which they might qualify. One farmer mentioned that he received 490 status for one parcel of his land but not for the other parcel which was also being farmed.

There is also some confusion in the records. A couple of farmers who appeared on the town's print-out of farmers enrolled for 490A status say that their tax bills show that they aren't actually enrolled. A further check of the "Appraisal Vision Assessors' On-line Database" used by the town to share parcel tax data with the public shows that neither farmer is listed as being enrolled in the 490 program. This discovery lends credence to the stories of farmers who are confused about their status or feel that they lost their status without warning. Assessor John Chaponis feels that some of the confusion stems from cases where farmers have voluntarily signed statements revoking their 490 enrollment but have forgotten that they have done so.

An additional concern in town, raised by the Colchester Land Trust, concerns the taxation of open space. In addition to use-based taxation on farm and forest lands, Public Act 490 also permits similar taxation on "open space" (as 490 "O"). The town already uses a special open space tax rate for "excess acreage," a rate that the Assessor feels is lower than open space taxation used in many other towns in Connecticut, and it automatically applies to all acreage in a parcel beyond the required "building lot" acreage. The primary benefits that 490 O status confers are the possibility of a lower tax rate and applicability to forested parcels smaller than 25 acres. Taxation under 490 F (forest) requires a minimum of 25 acres of forest as designated by the state forester, whereas 490 O does not. Some farmers and other residents feel that the town's "excess acreage" tax rate isn't low enough to help stem the sales of land for development, and the Colchester Land Trust wants the town to authorize 490 O status as a possible tool for land preservation.

Interviews during the farm inventory show a widespread distrust among farmers of the town's taxation policies. Of course no one likes taxes, but when the situation becomes as adversarial as the responses to this survey suggest, the town should make a priority of ironing out its farm taxation practices. Policies that benefit farmers in the area of taxation are essential for ensuring the continuance of farms. Retention of working farms helps the town budget, so there is a financial incentive for the town to investigate farm taxation in an effort to make its application uniform and to answer lingering questions about the process. The issue of 490 taxation (and taxation in general) is so vital to farming in Colchester that the town administration should examine its existing policies, hold a forum where farmers can express their concerns, and make sure that both the farmers and the town are "on the same page" in their understanding of the farm taxation process. Transparency in the application of tax classifications is critical in order to restore trust in the assessment process.

Support From The Town Will Help Farms Thrive:

Farmers in Colchester feel that the town could be much more supportive. "Town support" can take many forms. The town can start by promoting the idea that Colchester is still a farming community and proud of it. Adopt the state's right-to-farm laws and let newcomers

know that farming is a treasured tradition in town. Use various opportunities to communicate to the public the importance of local farms and how products are produced on farms. Help farmers to develop their businesses with economic development services.

Help With Laws and Regulations Is Important:

Ordinances and regulatory law governing the operation of farms is an area of concern among local farmers. Farmers want the town to use the state's definitions of what activities constitute farming,¹⁵ the state's right-to-farm law¹⁶ in conflicts between non-farmers and farmers over farm smells and farm vehicles, and the state's regulatory oversight for food products. Doing so will standardize expectations; both farmers and the public will have uniform guidelines that are easy to reference, and application of these laws will signal support from the town for farming activities.

Also, where farm activities bump up against the town's regulations, farmers wish that there could be more flexibility on their behalf. Many feel that the town defaults in favor of development and is more willing to make it easy for builders to get variances and exceptions than it is for farmers. Farmers feel that the town is stricter about the land use changes that farmers want to make and less willing to help farmers navigate the regulatory system in a timely fashion. Farmers ask the town to recognize that some regulations – fuel storage limits or classification of cattle food as a hazardous substance, for example – don't make sense for farms.

It seems that everyone today is busy and overextended with their commitments, but many farmers are already working full-time jobs in addition to spending all of their remaining hours farming. Others find that, even as full-time farmers, they need to make the most of their daylight hours on the farm. From early spring to late fall, they need to concentrate on farming, so when they have to interact with the town for changes in their land use, they hope to accomplish the process as expeditiously as possible. A way to show town support would be to look for ways that applications for land use changes on farms could be expedited or streamlined.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS TO SUPPORT THE VIABILITY OF LOCAL AGRICULTURE

Evaluate the Town Government's Ordinances and Policies for Farm-Friendliness

Begin with a general review of town policies that involve the issues already discussed in this report, especially for taxation, zoning, and environmental or health issues. Adopt the state's definitions for farming and right-to-farm law as town policy. For zoning or taxation purposes, broaden right-to-farm policy to allow farms by right to engage in business activities that are not traditional farming but are related to or consistent with farming, and allow farm retailers to use off-site produce when necessary to maintain their businesses. Incorporate a statement promoting the preservation of agriculture into town planning documents (such as the next update of the Plan

¹⁵ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap001.htm>, part q.

¹⁶ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap368m.htm#Sec19a-341.htm>

of Conservation and Development), and examine opportunities to incorporate agricultural priorities into the programs of other departments, as well.

Make an examination of the town's farm taxation policies a priority. Invite farmland and open space owners to submit their concerns to a neutral representative and have that representative work with the Tax Assessor to determine the source of each problem. Farmers' trust of the taxation process has been frayed, and some personality clashes seem to have arisen, so it is necessary to have some intermediary agent who can work on these problems and calmly investigate tax questions.

Additionally, the town should reconsider the farm taxation schedule and discuss opportunities for creating a more supportive tax program. The state's recommended 490 A tax rates include classifications that may not be in current use in town; these might help to extend favorable taxation to some parcels. The town can authorize 490 O taxation, extending a more favorable rate to excess acreage too small to qualify for 490 F. Farms of the future may get smaller as farmers sell off land to fund their retirement, or, alternately, very small farms for cut flowers or herbs may start up as "locavores" increase their demand for locally grown fresh products. Parcel tax classification should support the trend toward smaller farms, even as small as one acre.

Also, the town should authorize additional tax exemptions that state law allows for farm machinery (beyond the original \$100,000 exemption), farm buildings, and extra property tax abatements on certain types of farms (in addition to the taxation rates authorized under PA 490). Farms demand relatively little in town services and provide so many environmental and open space benefits in return, that extra tax support to ensure the future of farming in town is a good trade.

Create an Agricultural Advisory Board with several farmers as members. Alert members of the farming community and hold a meeting to discuss the town's intention to support and preserve farmland. Create a subcommittee that will become knowledgeable about public and private funding sources for the purchase of land or easements. Let the Board become a voice for farmers within the town government. Use the Board to review town policies and upcoming legislation or regulation with an eye to protecting and promoting farming interests.

Clarify what the town character is and what town residents think it should be. Identify the town characteristics and other desirable values that farms contribute to. (See "Engage in Further Self-Study.") Think about which farms or what types of farms contribute the most to the characteristics that the town wants to preserve, and use this list to form a clear idea of what the town is working toward. Studies conducted by the University of Connecticut show that in many rural towns, and in Connecticut in general, residents feel that local farms are important and are willing to commit money toward preserving farming and farmland.¹⁷ Find out what Colchester residents think using the suggestions listed for self-study.

¹⁷ <http://advance.uconn.edu/2000/000404/00040405.htm>, <http://www.aae.wisc.edu/foltz/FLP.pdf>, <http://www.workinglandalliance.org/OtherDocs/survrept.pdf>

Insert statements supporting farmland preservation in documents such as the POCD and zoning regulations so that there is clear policy guidance whenever development plans may have an impact on farming areas. The town should review planning and zoning procedures to build in specific practices that will protect agriculture. Planning and zoning commissions have broad powers in Connecticut and can use these in a wide variety of creative ways to save farming. For example, the town can permit farms by right to engage in business activities that are not traditional farming but are related to or consistent with farming. Colchester can create an agricultural overlay zone biased in favor of farm preservation, using input such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil maps and concentrations of contiguous farmland parcels to define the zone. In this zone, require buffers between any new residential development and farmland or wetland through techniques such as residence clustering. Focus development more heavily in the already developed portions of town and discourage development in portions of town that are agriculture-rich by controlling the extension of utilities and road paving. Combine this with a Transfer of Development Rights program so that development pays for farmland preservation. Avoid zoning protection, however, that places extra burdens on farmers or “ties their hands” in matters regarding the use of their land.

Add layers to the town’s GIS that will help the town in understanding its farmland resources and aid private groups to engage in prioritization activities. Create a GIS layer that identifies all prime or important soils and check for the presence of these soils at the earliest stage of any future development activity. Create a GIS layer that identifies all parcels with 490 tax status and all parcels lacking 490 tax status that are known to be used for agricultural purposes. When new subdivision or industrial/commercial development projects are proposed, make sure that any contiguous agricultural lands are identified early in the planning process. Create a map from GIS with various GIS layers identified with farm preservation issues. For example, include the layers of prime and important soils, 490 tax status or agricultural use, public parks and open space, and wetlands. Examine the border lands of the contiguous towns and note which farms in Colchester meet up with farmland or open space in other towns. (For example, Lebanon has protected farmland along its border with Colchester.) Data for these layers is available from the NRCS or from UConn’s CLEAR program. Combine the graphic information from this map with the list of desirable characteristics, the list of farms embodying those characteristics, and a list of the total sizes of town farms (some farms are made up of several smaller parcels) in order to create a database of farms that can be ranked for preservation discussion purposes.

Establish town funding for the outright purchase of farmland or purchase of conservation easements, perhaps through real estate transfer fees or bonding. Lease back the fee-simple purchases to farmers for farming or consider the horse park suggested in the “Engage in Further Self-Study” section of this report. Use town funds for easement purchases to qualify for matching state funding. See [Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities](#) and [Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities](#) for details.

Look at the successful programs in other towns that promote agriculture in their communities. The state Department of Agriculture can suggest towns that have implemented various program elements that could help Colchester with specific issues. Lebanon would be a

particularly good community program to examine because of its knowledgeable manager, active farm preservation program, and shared border. Suffield, which has made a commitment to an annual farmland preservation goal, is another excellent model. [Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities](#) has a list of other communities with various types of farmland protection activities.

Apply Economic Development Resources to the Farming Community

Many of the farms in Colchester are businesses selling products to the local public. Like other businesses in town, they can benefit from the town's economic development services. Helping farms to thrive as businesses will support their continued operation without costly or extraordinary interventions. The Economic Development Commission should discuss possible methods for supporting farm businesses in town. Here are some ideas:

The Town government and organizations in town can remind people that Colchester is a farming community. Place signs at town borders that remind visitors that this is a farming community. Feature farm pictures in the town website and in town literature and reports. Install permanent posters at the entrance to Town Hall. Link these materials with names, locations, and the products of town farms so that residents can begin to incorporate these farms into their list of local shopping resources. Publish a brochure with the names, products, and addresses of farms, along with a map of their locations. Create publicity and signage for the weekly farmers' market at Priam Vineyards. Pass an ordinance that allows farmers to post their own signs. Discuss whether it is possible to support the town's agricultural producers by listing their farms and products on the town website or as an insert in a town mailing. The goal is to educate the public about Colchester's farms so that they will buy local products and so that incoming home purchasers are aware of existing local farms and their potential impact on a neighborhood.

Research ideas for helping local farms find affordable farm workers. The farm labor shortage is a national crisis, and Colchester farms are finding it increasingly difficult to find affordable labor; this limits their size and range of products. There are no easy answers for this problem, but here are some suggestions based upon ideas of labor experts. Help local farmers to advertise their labor needs and ramp up their recruitment activities. Examine ways to help farmers offer employee housing, such as offering a tax exemption on buildings for farm labor housing. Encourage farmers to purchase or rent labor-saving equipment for harvesting, such as produce conveyors, by providing a tax exemption. Look for incentives for young people to choose farm work as their summer employment, perhaps through grants that will supplement pay. Advertise nationally to hire apprentices among young people looking to enter farming, especially for the farms that may be looking for a farm purchaser a few years down the road. See if local social service agencies, such as those that aid new immigrants, can provide free transportation for their clients down to Colchester and back in exchange for farming jobs. If a labor shortage prevents a local farmer from harvesting the last of his or her produce, seek volunteer labor, such as from Foodshare, to harvest it, allowing the farmer to claim the donated produce as a tax write-off. To successfully compete for farm labor, local farmers are going to need inspired assistance in reaching out into the labor market.

Examine whether an annual Colchester Farm Day, featuring a driving tour of farms, would be economically useful to local farm owners by focusing attention from state news and entertainment media.

Hold public discussions on alternative uses for farmland, uses that are tied closely to farming but may fall just outside of the common definition. Some farmers feel that they need such new activities in order to stay in business. Discuss ways in which the town can support creative new types of farm activities without creating impediments.

Maintain an Active Awareness of Farming in Town

Government officials, officers in local organizations, and citizens can all think and talk about farming as a positive attribute of Colchester. Think about how it adds to the town, both materially and in terms of town character. Whenever town decisions are made that may affect farming in some way, actively discuss the impact of those decisions on farming, invite critical comment from farmers, and weigh those decisions against the values and benefits that farming confers on the town.

Use the Agricultural Advisory Board, mentioned earlier, to create an e-mail address list for farmers and other citizens who want to be informed of its meetings and receive the meeting minutes. Let the board work to make local farmers aware of support and information sources that are available, through a web page with links to educational and organization websites, for example. Have the Board distribute the guides to farmland preservation mentioned in the “Suggested Reading” section at the end of this report, and charge it with holding seminars to answer questions related to these guides. (The organizations that produced the guides can help with this. Consider working with the Southeast Connecticut Council of Governments to produce seminars.) Consider setting up an on-line bulletin board for local farmers. Make everyone aware of the programs that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture provides, such as their Agriculture Directional Signage. Gauge interest in and need for an additional farmers’ market. Use the Agricultural Advisory Board as a platform to increase two-way communication between town government and farmers.

Involve the Colchester school system in farm awareness programs as a means of stemming future problems. Educate local students about the role of Colchester’s farms in food production and their community, so that they grow up to support their local farms. Encourage schools to find ways to add farm knowledge into their annual curriculum at every level. Make field trips to local farms. Invite farmers to speak on special topics in biology. Hold a discussion in a civics class on today’s farms and their role in food security. Ask students to write about the rich history of farming in Colchester and how much farming remains today. Work with the Colchester Historical Society on materials that can be worked into classes on town history and encourage field trips to the Zagray Farm. See if a plot is available in town for student vegetable gardens. Follow the lead of towns that now have students growing produce for use in their cafeterias through the state’s Farm-to-Schools program, and encourage schools to seek local farm products for cafeterias. When discussing the food pyramid, show how many foods in the

pyramid are produced in Colchester. Contact the Connecticut Agricultural Education Foundation for other classroom ideas.

Invite the public library to come up with ideas for supporting Colchester's identity as a farming community, such as a reading list of books or a public discussion addressing modern food supply/food security issues. Perhaps the library can create a permanent display on the town's farming history.

Engage in Further Self-Study

Consider performing a Cost of Community Services study or look at the results for studies in other communities. These studies are a snapshot of the relationship of tax income to town expense, by sector, at a given point in time. In Connecticut, other parts of New England, and across the U.S. in general, these studies indicate that agricultural activities pay far more in taxes than they require back in town expenses for services.

Examine and define the "town character." Hold a photo contest for residents of Colchester and ask them to take photos that depict the town character. Hold discussions on what these photos signify, whether the town character needs to be preserved or changed, and how this should be done. Talk specifically about the role of farms in creating town character. Another question to ask is, what are the "social values" or the "social priorities" that town residents want to promote? How can farms support those values and priorities?

Many communities across the U.S. are developing innovative ways to incorporate equestrian activities into town life and town design. Some towns are encouraging equestrian-based residential developments that preserve open space in the form of riding trails and pasture. Others sponsor public equestrian centers or horse parks, something like small fair-grounds, that provide space for competitive equestrian activities while also maintaining open space that brings in income and can be used for public cultural events. Invite local horse farmers to join the Agricultural Advisory Board (to be established) in working on developing a business plan for a town horse park. Research and discuss other innovative equestrian developments, public and private, around the U.S. and whether developments such as these should be encouraged in Colchester.

Identify local prime and important soils in town and the parcels in which they occur. This information is important for farmland preservation activities. Data is available from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Town of Lebanon has already done this and can provide guidance.

Farmers Can Strengthen Their Own Resources

Farmers in Colchester can help themselves by forming some sort of organization for information and resource sharing or by joining with an existing organization willing to pursue a farm agenda. Through it, local farmers can sponsor periodic educational seminars, perhaps in

conjunction with other towns or farm organizations, on topics such as farmland succession and retirement planning, conservation easements, marketing techniques, creating value-added products, risk management, sources of insurance, and family business management. The demographics cited in the questionnaire responses indicate that succession planning is one of the most important needs of all for assuring the continuance of existing farms in Colchester and should be high priority.

The Colchester Land Trust has indicated a willingness to become an advocate and spokesman for the local farming community, but to make this happen, farmers must join the Trust and become active in its meetings and activities. Active support from farmers will strengthen the Trust, allow it to become more familiar with farm priorities, and aid the Trust in moving forward in a comprehensive plan for open space in town.

The nuisances of farming, such as farm smells and slow-moving or noisy farm vehicles, are occasionally a source of community conflict. Farmers can improve relations with neighbors by learning farm management “best practices,” especially for manure use and storage management, and publicly attesting that they know and follow these practices. Perhaps farmers can work with the town’s Director of Health to establish a program that will assure other residents that farmers are carrying their share of the burden in this matter.

Create a town-wide list of farmers’ e-mail addresses for easy sharing of information, such as changes in town ordinances, upcoming workshops from the Farm Bureau, sales on feed, used equipment for sale, etc.

Examine the feasibility of cooperative purchasing of feed, fuel, seed, or services that can be bundled together for savings, such as paving or construction.

Farmers who want to see their farm continue but may not have heirs interested in farming should familiarize themselves with the state Department of Agriculture’s “FarmLink” program.

Get on the Working Lands Alliance/American Farmland Trust e-mail list to learn about state legislation that might affect farming. Encourage all local farmers to contact state legislators about such legislation.

Realtors traditionally give gifts to clients who have purchased a home. Farmers can work with local realtors to produce an affordable gift basket for Colchester newcomers containing local products or coupons for local products, along with maps of local farms and their product calendars.

Private Farmland Preservation Activities

An early objective of this grant project was to create a committee that would create a set of guidelines for establishing preservation priorities for Colchester farmland. One of the goals spoken of during the planning for this survey was to create some type of prioritization list that would help to guide future preservation activities. It is clear from the survey that any

prioritization of parcels or zones would be very difficult at this stage. Most of the farmers in the survey are not looking for formal preservation programs (such as conservation easements) to help them keep their farms running.

This is not to say that groups such as the Colchester Land Trust should not be actively seeking farms that can be permanently “secured” as farms through easements. Some farmers indicated a lack of sufficient knowledge about conservation options to make a fully informed choice. Efforts to bring more information to local farmers on the wide array of support available to them will allow farmers to choose the types of support that best match their interests and needs.

Farmland preservation, as noted before, can also rely on a strategy of creating an environment where farms flourish. The review of taxation and other town policies, taking steps to minimize friction between agricultural activities and non-farming residents, and promoting activities that help to increase access to customers will make Colchester a “farm friendly” community and will insure continued interest in farming. Moreover, gaining a wider reputation for these qualities will attract other farmers to the area, helping to assure aging farmers of the ability to sell or rent their farms as farmland. Participation by organizations such as the Colchester Land Trust on town committees that oversee these activities will help to move this agenda along.

Farmland preservation is complex because of the many different reasons why the land should be preserved, the various needs and interests of the land-owning farmers, and the competing interests of the public, both as individuals and as a town. Therefore, planning for preservation should include the participation of a broad representative group of constituents who have a stake in the outcome. The Colchester Land Trust has already emerged as a leader in this effort and should be joined by representatives of constituents with interests in the environment, town character and history, town development, and farming.

Here are some suggestions that private organizations such as the Colchester Land Trust can use to promote the preservation of farming in Colchester.

Join with farmers to organize and sponsor the seminars recommended earlier (in the list of activities that farmers can take) related to farm viability and farmland preservation.

Begin a campaign to educate the public about the importance of farmland to Colchester and the changes and resources needed to enable farmland preservation. Join with the town government for this campaign and put as much energy into it as you can muster because education is vital to future farmland preservation fundraising efforts.

The farmers who participated in the survey received packets of information about the preservation options available to them. Follow up with these farmers to see if they have questions about the information or whether they want to take the next step. Contact others who chose not to participate in the survey or were unable to participate and make sure that they receive conservation information, especially the booklet from the American Farmland Trust

titled Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities.

The residents of Colchester are key to determining how farmland preservation efforts should be prioritized, and prioritization efforts should include the full spectrum of constituencies. Obviously, a request from a farmer for help with preservation, such as an interest in selling a conservation easement, would create an immediate candidate for consideration. But, at a time when there are no clear candidates and private groups are looking for input to guide the use of their resources, one possibility is to establish a LESA (Land Evaluation and Site Assessment) system. A LESA system is an excellent objective numeric rating tool created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that allows the rating of the relative importance of parcels of farmland. Evaluation includes scoring a parcel's soil quality and productivity, size, and environmental attributes to create an overall score that can be used for comparative purposes.

Choosing parcels to target for preservation efforts can be difficult because of the differing priorities among stakeholders. Should the priority be clean water, wildlife refuges, open space for town character, development buffers, recreation, prime soils, sprawl containment, or promotion of farming? The outcome of any decision to preserve a given parcel of land can appear to be either good or bad, depending upon the outlook and social values of the stakeholder. LESA systems, when crafted carefully, provide consistency among land evaluations and give weight to all of the various factors that the local community deems important. This consistency can be an aid to obtaining governmental grants and will make the prioritization process more transparent. On the other hand, the development of a LESA system is labor intensive and will take much volunteer time to create and hone. NRCS officers can help guide the process.¹⁸

If Colchester residents are concerned about the loss of farmland and open space, NOW is the time to take control of the town landscape, before more open land disappears. While some of the news about farms is bad – more than half of Connecticut's farms are less than 50 acres in size because of continuing farm fragmentation, and the state is losing 7,000 to 9,000 acres of farmland every year to development¹⁹ – some very positive developments give hope. This year, demand for locally grown food skyrocketed, and many farms sold out quickly. Recent reports indicate that more students are enrolling in agricultural programs. Developments such as these show that farming in Colchester isn't a lost cause. Building a more secure farm environment now will serve the entire town with environmental, budgetary, and ambient rewards for generations to come.

¹⁸ The NRCS website has more information, including their LESA handbook, at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/lesa/lesa_sysdes_uses.html.

¹⁹ According to the Working Lands Alliance website.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

Organizations Mentioned in This Report:

American Farmland Trust, <http://www.farmland.org/>

Center for Family Business at the University of New Haven has occasional programs of interest for farming families, <http://www.newhaven.edu/academics/16337/>

Colchester Land Trust, <http://www.colchesterlandtrust.org/>

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), <http://www.buylocalfood.com/>

Connecticut Agricultural Education Foundation, <http://www.ctaef.org/>

Connecticut Department of Agriculture, <http://www.ct.gov/doag/site/default.asp>

Connecticut Farm Bureau, <http://www.cfba.org/>

Connecticut Farmland Trust, <http://www.ctfarmland.org/>

Connecticut Farm Risk Management & Crop Insurance, UCONN, <http://www.cag.uconn.edu/ces/frm/pages/about.php>

Farm Transfer Network of New England, <http://www.farmtransfernewengland.net/>

Harvest New England, <http://www.harvestnewengland.org/>

Land for Good, <http://www.landforgood.org/>

Land Trust Alliance, <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>

Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, <http://www.seccog.org/>

The Working Lands Alliance, the Connecticut chapter of the American Farmland Trust, <http://www.workinglandsalliance.org/>

Information on Connecticut's soils is available at the following USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website: <http://www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/soils.html>

Suggested Reading:

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life by Barbara Kingsolver, with Steven L. Hopp and Camille Kingsolver (HarperCollins, 2007) chronicles the life of the author's family as they convert to eating only food from local sources. Kingsolver explains in detail the social and

economic importance of preserving local farms, and sidebars by Hopp compellingly explain scientific and policy factors.

Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities (2006). This guide lists and explains the many agencies and programs that provide funding and support for farmland preservation at both the private and public levels. It can be downloaded for free at:

http://www.workinglandsalliance.org/OtherDocs/AFT_ConservationOptionsforConnecticutFarmland06.pdf.

Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities, a publication by the American Farmland Trust and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (2008). This new guide is a complete information kit for towns who want to preserve farms. It can be downloaded for free at: <http://www.ctplanningforagriculture.com/>.

APPENDIX A: AGRICULTURAL LAND CATEGORIES

The following categories are the agricultural activities used to define the term “farming” for the purpose of studying farm needs and interests under the Colchester Agricultural Viability Grant.

Horse Farms

Two types of horse farms will be recognized: those that have a substantive business, such as breeding, training, boarding, etc., and those that exist primarily as a hobby interest of the owner. The distinction is a fine one, and a ‘hobby’ could grow into the stabling of horses other than those of the owner and/or could be sold to someone with substantive business interests. Using the 490A assessment guidelines, we will limit members of this category to farms with a 5 acre minimum.

Livestock

This category includes beef or dairy cattle, llamas, goats, sheep, or similar animals. Piggeries (i.e. 3 or more pigs over 6 months of age) and the raising of fur bearing animals are prohibited in Colchester. Horses will be considered in the Horse Farm category.

Produce/truck garden

Colchester includes both home gardeners who sell excess garden products on a table by the road and farmers whose purpose is raising produce for sale. A minimum parcel size of 5 acres, used as a distinction in the 490A assessment guidelines, will be used to distinguish properties considered “farmland.” This category also includes orchards.

Vineyard

This category includes the commercial growing of grapes for making wine.

Horticulture/Nursery

This category includes greenhouses, nurseries, and flower growers where the stock for sale is, at least in part, grown on the premises. This category includes the production of faster growing products such as shrubs but does not include the separate category of trees.

Tree Farms

This category includes the purposeful planting of trees that are removed from the earth and sold, such as Christmas trees or trees for landscaping, but excludes properties with standing forests which are harvested and managed for income. “Forestry” is an agricultural activity but is not the focus of this Grant.

Haylots

Haylots constitute a significant portion of the agricultural land in Colchester and are vital for supporting other types of agriculture, so they are considered “farmland” in this Grant.

Poultry/Eggs

This has been an historic agricultural activity in Colchester. As with other foods that may be grown by home producers, inclusion of poultry raising in the Grant will be determined by the scale of the operation and size of the parcel.

APPENDIX B: TABLE OF DATA

These are the questions posed to farmers in the inventory. The statements following each tally are comments offered by farmers in response to the question. To protect anonymity, answers have been scrambled in their order.

18 respondents participated in the complete survey. One respondent was a day program for adults, and some questions were not applicable to the program. Some respondents also chose not to answer some questions.

What residents are living on the farm? How many residences are on farm?:

NONE: 1,1

Home is elsewhere in town.

Non-residential day program

ONE RESIDENCE: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 15

TWO RESIDENCES: 1

NUMBER OF PEOPLE: 2, 2, 4, 2, 2, 2+2, 1, 3, 5, 4, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2 = 41

Average = 2.56 people per residence on a farm

Size of farm; how much is arable, non-arable, pasture, forest, wetland?:

TOTAL NUMBER OF ACRES, COUNTING ONLY LAND IN COLCHESTER:

40: all arable and crop planted

20: 7 hay, 3 Christmas trees, .5 pond, 9 woodland

89: 15 ag use for cows, produce, hay, 74 is woodland

73: 30 tillable cropland, 15 pasture, 8 wetland, 20 woodland

40: 10 tillable, 20 pasture, 10 wetland and woodland

[also rents 280 acres in nearby town and cuts hay on other farms]

22: 11 hay, 6 wetland, rest residential

76: 33 pasture, 41 woodland (part of which is used by farm animals)

18: all for horse breeding, riding, training except ½ acre residential area

200: 40 pasture, 160 woodland/wetland/uncleared fields/gravel (13 ac)

112: 24 tillable, 18 pasture, 30 sand & gravel, 40 forest

65: about 40 acres of pasture, about 40 acres of woods, about 5 acres of wetland

27: 18 arable, 4 wetland, 5 residential and outbuildings

23: 13 acres in Christmas trees, 5 acres not arable, 3 acres forest, 2 acres wetlands

35: not sure how it breaks down

75: 40 pasture, 35 forest/wetland/ledges (some of which is used by farm animals)

145: 40 hay, rest is woodland, wetland, hilly, or sand and gravel

28: 14 pasture, 14 woods, wetland, house, horse arena

7: 2 agricultural, 1 wetland, 4 administrative or unspecified use

Number of years your family has been farming:

Parents had this farm

Born into farming family – farm down the road

Since 1936

Over 100 years

Family bought farm in early 1900s

Grandfather bought farm in 1905

Father farmed this land.

Both had grandparents who farmed, one had parents with family farm but not for primary income.

Many generations

No prior farming in family, but this farmer farmed before coming to Colchester

Since 1912 on this farm

Husband's family farmed

Husband grew up in farming family

Family history in farming goes way back

From farm family, and was a professional farmer before moving to Colchester

No previous farming background until 1976

Since 1818

Number of years that you have been farming this farm:

24 years

27 years

44 years

22 years

25 years

54 years

35 years

30 years

9 years

22 years – bought farm from parents

37 years – got as bequest from friend

69 years – since he was born

50 years

55 years

29 years

54 years

3 years

23 years

Average = 34 years

Type of farming: full-time or part-time, seasonal:

FT: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 9

for both spouses

as a teacher

for wife; husband works at another profession but helps PT

Worked FT as teacher, PT as farmer before retirement, now FT farmer

For wife; husband works elsewhere

PT: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

Works ft at P&W

Used to farm FT, then sold herd and worked for town PT, now retired and farms PT

Also worked as a mason

Also runs gravel company from his property

Vo-ag teacher

But the work is year-round

NEITHER: 1

All haying done by a contractor

Who farms here: family members, employees?:

Just the farmer being questioned: 1,1,1,1,1

0 FT, 3 PT, + some seasonal

Self, brother, 2 stepdaughters help with hay in summer

Wife helps, sons help part-time

Hay contractor only

Mostly just the two of them, and they try to get part-time help occasionally

Just him; some outside help from time to time.

12 FT and PT, mostly PT

Mostly just him, occasional help from grandson. Used to hire neighbor's son.

Kids who clean stalls for in-kind payment

His children help

Uses seasonal help for hay

Just him except for help from family and friends with hay

15-20 day workers in program, 8 staff that work with agricultural program, 10 other staff

How much of the land is actively farmed? (rounded off):

100%

Almost 100%

Almost 100%

Nearly 100%

80%

75%
70%
70%
About 65%
60%
60%
50%
50%
40%
30%
25%
20%
20%

Average = 62%

[As noted in other responses, the parts of farms not actively used for agricultural purposes are often wetlands, forests, or features such as ledges or hills.]

Type of farming: crops, products and the acreage for each:

22 acres grapes, 17 acres hay

Hay, trees (used to be chickens, strawberries, pumpkins) + (phasing out trees due to health)

Beef (14 cows), hay (10,000 bales)

Hay, beef, Christmas trees

Blueberries, raspberries, pumpkins, squash, hay

Christmas trees

Chickens, garden produce, hay, corn silage, horse boarding

Hay

Sweet corn, garden vegetables (tomatoes, cukes, beans), sunflowers, hay, pumpkins, gourds, raspberries, squash, Indian corn, jams and jellies from their fruit trees

Hay

Ducks, chicken, guinea hens, eggs, cows sold as replacement heifers for dairy, beef cattle, hay

Horse breeding, training

Christmas trees, firewood, cattle

Hay, alfalfa, beef cattle

Dairy (cheese) and occasionally some heifers

Hay

Livestock including horses, llamas, sheep, chickens, guinea hens, donkeys

Vegetables such as tomatoes, squash, green beans, pumpkins, zucchini, herbs, peppers, and cucumbers, flowers, fruit trees, goats

HERE THE ANSWERS ARE RE-ORDERED AS A LIST TO SHOW THE RANGE OF REPORTED CURRENT AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN COLCHESTER:

Alfalfa
Beans
Beef cattle
Blueberries
Cheese
Chickens
Christmas trees
Corn (silage)
Corn (sweet corn)
Cucumbers
Dairy cattle
Donkeys
Ducks
Eggs
Firewood
Fruit trees
Goats
Gourds
Grapes
Guinea hens
Hay
Heifers (replacement heifers)
Herbs
Horses (breeding, riding, training, boarding)
Indian corn
Llamas
Peppers
Pumpkins
Raspberries
Sheep
Squash
Sunflowers
Tomatoes
Wine
Zucchini

Do you also work off the farm? Full-time, part-time?:

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1 = 6

Used to work full time at lumber mill on his farm, but retired now

Used to teach full time, but retired now

But husband does

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 10

Full-Time: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 9

Part-Time: 1

Do you lease land to others?:

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 17

But someone else uses a small portion for a garden

Someone else harvests the hay but no rent

YES: 1

Do you lease land from others?:

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 15

Used to before surrounding land was developed; 6 other farms all developed now. Also owned land in other states.

Used to, but age and health limit what he can do

YES: 1,1,1 = 3

Farms on his siblings' land too

Has farm grown or shrunk? (in terms of either acreage or range of products):

Grown: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

Shrunk: 1,1,1 = 3

Stayed same: 1,1,1,1,1,1 = 6

Added 12 acres since purchase

Same acreage but decreased range of products

Grown by adding range of crops and by renting land

Grown through clearing more and more of the land and by expanding range of crops

Son bought a 4 acre parcel from him

Increased amount of pasture (from woods) and added buildings

Added a few acres

Road building took 50 acres from them about 30 years ago

Used to also have cattle, but not now. Also sold some building lots.

Purchased land, in addition to what was inherited from family.

Farm acreage itself has stayed the same, but the number of animals and the business has grown greatly

Has bought acreage whenever possible, and lost some through public domain.

Increased the range of livestock

Do you want to expand your farm? Does anything prevent it?:

YES -- EXPAND: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 12

Would buy more land if available, but no contiguous land for sale.

When he retires, but not sure quite what yet, maybe boarding horses. Taxes keep him from building another barn for hay.

Can't because all land around him is developed. Tried to buy land nearby, but town said no 490 unless he cleared it and farmed it. As a result someone else bought and developed.

Size of farm will be limited by how much they can do themselves – don't want to hire anyone FT

They were looking at neighboring acreage, but the price was "crazy high," a half million apiece for 7 acre lots. Everything selling at development rates; would expand if land were affordable.

Taxes and dealing with the Town discourage growth of farm.

Would love to buy more land, but the cost of contiguous land is very high.

Land would have to be contiguous.

Farmland expands as land is reclaimed through his sand and gravel operations.

Would like to but land is too expensive, so it probably won't happen.

Would like to, but no land available around them, and lack of time also prevents

Would like to expand production.

NO EXPANSION: 1,1,1,1,1,1 = 6

Because of age

No – age.

Can't because no more open land to buy nearby.

Can't because there is no more farmland to buy in the area. Has acquired all that he can.

Do you have alternative activities in mind for your farm?:

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

Boarding horses

Considering hayrides but worry about liability issues

Soil manufacturing

Recycling of asphalt, concrete, stumps

Considered starting a farm market including products of other farmers or a greenhouse

Would like to do more educational work (already has interns and vo-ag students coming in) Possible add cattle, but not a priority

More flowers and house plants

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 10

Can't get help to do anything additional.

Has plenty going on now.

What changes would you like to make to your farm?:

Would like to get solar and wind energy but need tax exemption to do it.

Will phase out trees because not worth the effort anymore

Just keeping it nicer

New machinery and more modernization

Adding cattle back in again; stopped temporarily when wife was ill

Would love to have a pond, but wetlands officer said they couldn't disrupt the swamp created by road repairs. The restraints created by what the town calls wetlands is a problem for us.

Continuous improvement, such as more fences

Would like to do more on-farm sales. Would like to add some housing for employees, but town discourages trailers and wants certain types of buildings that make this tough to do.

Would like to put up equipment barns to protect his equipment.

Want to keep developing the equestrian portion of the business.

Would like to renovate parts

NONE: 1,1,1,1,1,1 = 6

Loves it as it is.

Has a prosperous business without any changes.

What are the biggest problems that you encounter in farming?:

TAXES: 1,1,1,1,1,1 = 6

Taxes are outrageous

SHORTAGE OF LAND: 1,1

Everything nearby is developed. Buying at current rates would also eat up his profit.

WEATHER: 1,1,1,1

Spend thousands on fertilizer, then get a drought

FUEL COSTS: 1,1

Costs \$400/month for fuel for his farm vehicles

FERTILIZER, SEEDS, SUPPLIES COSTS: 1,1

MACHINERY COSTS: 1

EXPENSES IN GENERAL: 1,1

Income from farm products doesn't match their costs

FINDING LABOR: 1,1,1

Can't pay competitively because of other expenses

Farming doesn't pay enough to hire anyone

HEALTH/AGE: 1

COMPLAINTS FROM PUBLIC: 1,1,1

Complaints about manure smell in spring, NIMBY

TOWN ADMINISTRATION ISSUES: 1,1

Regulations are so detailed and oriented toward residential, it's hard to do anything.

RISK: 1

No guarantees in farming

CROP OR ANIMAL DISEASES: 1,1,1

TRESPASSING: 1

Trying to match the cost to produce hay with the selling price!

Rising operating costs in general are a problem.

Vagaries of nature lower production and hurt business.

Town won't recognize state's agriculture regulations.

What would make it easier for you to continue farming in the future?:

Regulations are killing everything, such as DNR environmental regs. State takes a year to review even small changes. Can't spread manure anywhere.

Lower fuel costs, lower taxes. Town and Tax assessor have made it difficult. Assessor is a problem; took away tax status because he said papers on property not filed.

Finally assessor's office found the papers, but there were continuing issues.

Assessor is nasty, no courtesy, just eliminates your exemption.

To be left alone. Will sell to developer if it's too hard to continue, too much interference and taxation.

Lower prices for supplies, modernization, educating people about good food.

Getting 490 status would help; not in 490 program. [This farmer may be confused about his actual tax status, as he is on the 490 list and being assessed at \$1400 per acre.

He still feels that his taxes are high.]

To make enough from farming to not worry about selling the development rights

More land, which they can't obtain.

Tax breaks and incentives; town should work with farmers; better off not working with town up-front.

Town support of farming instead of making it harder for farmers.

490 A & F taxation are the only things keeping it going; taxes would kill us otherwise.

Tax relief! Machinery tax is a special irritant; you can be paying the same tax on an old machine as a new one.

Town could purchase development rights. We need to secure the open space fund; we heard talk that it would be put in the general fund.

Getting someone else to help with the work.

Assessor tried to revoke 490 status; farmers need to be sure of their tax status

Had to fight for right to conduct legal activities; town needs to support right-to-farm.

Town needs to observe right-to-farm laws regarding manure.

It would help if the community were more aware of the locally produced food sources in their own town.

Traffic on their road goes very fast and is a problem for the farm, but can't get town to address it, slow it.

Farmers can't count on positive support from the town.

Better prices for selling agricultural products because the costs to produce are so much higher.

Not to require open space if you subdivide. This is an unfair requirement. That land

can't be used for farming, and it keeps farmer from selling off parcels to support the farm.

If a farmer is adding value and integrity to the land, then let them do what they need.

Farmers are keeping land open and green; support this. Town is not helpful in improving farm; one has to find out what is permitted through mistakes and wasted time. It would be so easy to just give in and sell to a developer.

Understanding the town is a problem. We want to move some dirt to unblock a dammed up stream and make the area healthier (fewer mosquitoes to carry disease), but town won't allow.

Caring Community: could use a mentor, a local farmer to train workers in order to maximize productivity. Use to have a wonderful relation with a local farmer, but no longer. Group purchasing might help.

Do you have problems finding and keeping farm labor?:

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 7

Because can't afford to pay competitively.

No available affordable labor; kids don't want to work at prevailing rates.

Hard to find summer seasonal help; tries to rely more on machines now.

Can't even find labor. No one wants to do farm work.

Hard to find part-time labor, and laws for worker's compensation and other provisions make it hard to afford.

There is a high turnover when we use interns; they need a place to live locally or on farm.

We have to pay local teens twice the going rate in order to get them to do farm work.

Hard to get people who enjoy working with dirt.

NO: 1,1,1 = 3

Can't afford to pay anyone anyway

Not too much trouble, but some are better hires than others.

Not yet, but it soon will be crucial to be able to offer lodging in order to get and keep help.

N/A: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

[Many farmers keep their farms sized so that they can do the work themselves, or they have changed their products to eliminate need for outside help.]

Would a local farmers' market be beneficial to your farm? For what products?:

YES: 1,1,1 = 3

MAYBE: 1

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 12

We already run one on Fridays
Used to have own farm stand, but not now
Have own stand and don't have time to sell at another market
Maybe for Christmas trees
What they sell isn't a farm market product
Thought of starting our own farmers' market but haven't
Yes, need a town market.
Caring Community: that would be a great opportunity for our people

Do you use the Internet for information or research on farm-related issues?

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 14
Get info from UConn Extn. Or the Co-op.
Farm Bureau site.
Have a farm website.

NO: 1,1,1 = 3
But do use it for e-mail

Do you buy farm supplies locally? From whom?

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 9
Gano's, Perf. Lube, plumbing, hardware, town auction
Marvin's. Get our grain elsewhere because of cost.
Marvin's, and supports other local businesses as much as possible
Get equipment repairs in town; otherwise we buy cheaper supplies in Manchester at
Farmers Co-op
Most feed from Glastonbury, but use Mackey's occasionally; tractor & other equip. at
Marvin's; local builder for house and a barn
Marvin's for tractor repairs
We buy all equipment from Marvin's and buy products from others in town as much as
possible
We buy our hay from another farmer in town.
Mackey's and local hay

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 7
Do all my own repairs. Buy supplies for best price wherever I find it.
Local prices on feed, fertilizer not farm-friendly, but does get some parts from Marvin's
Don't need farm supplies
Try to keep my money in town, but have to buy feed from cheapest source.
Can't get most of what we need in town, except for some feed at Mackey's

What can the town do to help you farm? What can the state do?

Town needs to adopt state legislation already passed that benefits farmers.
Taxes are the biggest issue. Need better treatment from and relations with Assessor.
 Considered quitting because of the difficulties with him. Can't sleep at night without 490 taxation, can't afford to farm without it.
Town is over-administered with people trying to fix things that don't need fixing. We have to cut corners somewhere--expenses of government too high. Town has little open land left and shouldn't be in a hurry to develop.
Lower property taxes in addition to the farm taxation. Give farmers more publicity in town, perhaps in town mailings, because many people don't know that local farms sell products.
Assessment rate could be reduced because land not developed.
Hold the line on tax increases
Resolve their wetlands issue so that they can have their pasture land back again
Need tax incentives. Town not encouraging farms at all. Town needs to educate other people who complain about farm use. Would they rather have high density housing rather than green?
Town could purchase development rights.
Town must recognize that equestrian use is agricultural use.
Town should recognize state's agriculture regulations. That they don't is a source of problems.
State needs to tell towns like Colchester that agriculture is important, and towns need to listen and work to keep farming viable. State could also educate newer farmers on their rights.
Caring Community: could use more money, would like to have a mentor farmer
Nothing: 1

Is any of this farmland jointly owned with someone else?:

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 17

Are you satisfied with farming? Do you hope to continue?:

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1, 1/2 = 17 1/2
As long as Assessor doesn't harass him.
As long as town leaves him alone.
This is what keeps me going.
Will eventually have to quit and sell (no heirs), but hopes for another 10 years.

NO: 1/2
Husband satisfied, but wife not because it's hard work with no respite.

Do your children farm? Do they want to continue farming your farm in the future?:

YES: 1,1,1,1,1 = 5

Son is going to buy this farm

Son is active on farm and another may join him here

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

But they sometimes help at farm.

Not interested in farming

The kids help at the farm, but he doesn't know about whether they will continue in the future.

Kids live elsewhere and don't want the farm.

NO CHILDREN: 1,1,1,1 = 4

N/A = 1

What is the likely disposition of your farm whenever you choose to stop farming?:

DOESN'T KNOW: 1,1,1,1 = 4

Unclear

Probably will sell eventually

Willed to children and anticipates that land will be kept as farm.

Hope the kids will continue it.

Kids will probably continue it because contractor does the work.

Will farm as long as he is able, and son will probably take it over then as he lives next door

Will sell it as a single parcel as a farm. Would like to farm as long as possible, but labor and other problems may change that.

Children intend to farm, but if they get fed up with grief from regulations, they will not continue.

Would like to look into a conservation easement.

Still considering this.

Would like to sell the farm as a farm, but needs retirement money and will consider selling to developer.

Son will continue the farm.

The children will inherit equally; what they do with it is up to them.

Would you be willing to tell us the amount of your farm income?: Circle Range:

< \$10K 1,1

\$10K-25K 1,1,1

\$25K-\$50K 1,1

\$50K-\$100K 1,1

>\$100K 1

PREFER NOT TO ANSWER: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 7

N/A: 1

The expenses eat up all the income.
We are working on developing more business.

You are receiving PA490A taxation status? PA490F?:

YES, 490A: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 13

YES, 490F: 1,1,1 = 3

NO: 1,1,1 = 3

[However, one of these farms seems to be actually receiving it.]

Assessor doesn't want to give out 490 taxation. You have to file annually but no one is told that.

Farm would have been long gone without 490 taxation.

Used to have 490 but it was removed by the auditor, but they do have a farm equipment exemption. The auditor said that it would work out the same because of the different wetlands taxation, but it's the principle of encouraging/discouraging farming that rankles.

Have you talked to a retirement planner/financial advisor?:

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1 = 6

Husband is a financial planner.

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 10

Have you made formal arrangements to transfer your farm to your children or heirs?:

YES: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 8

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 9

No heirs

Problems of farming may make them sell the farm instead.

TYPES:

Flexible trust: 1

Trust: 1

Will: 1,1,1,1,1

Child will purchase farm: 1

Have you considered applying to the Farmland Protection Program or sought out any other farm preservation options/programs?:

YES: 1,1,1 = 3

Considered but not fully familiar with it

It's been in his mind because he would hate to have to sell farm.

Part of the farm is protected with an easement, and we are working to protect the remainder.

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 14

Not worth it because not paid enough money for development rights.

Familiar with them but unlikely he could get much – no prime soil

Not the best land, very rocky. Also mentioned Ruby Cohen's land and thinks that easement could be risky.

He doesn't agree with this sort of program.

Not actively looking for breaks.

Has reservations about some of the provisions; worried about public access.

May look into it.

Not yet.

Worried about the encumbrance if the development rights are sold. Wants flexibility.

Not interested in losing development rights.

Have you had a serious talk with a land developer?:

YES: 1,1,1,1 = 4

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 10

Has been approached, but hasn't discussed: 1,1,1,1 = 4

This is a way of life, want to continue

Once considered selling, but not to a developer; don't want to see it developed

Discussed it but thought that he would be getting a bad deal.

Talked with developer who wanted to make 4 house lots out of it, but they'd rather sell it as a farm.

Got an offer, refused it.

No interest in selling; wants to keep farm.

Developer made offer but backed out because a business on site not on partitioned land.

Developer still interested and calls him regularly.

Their child wants to buy farm and continue.

A developer wanted to put a road through their farm; they said no.
Thinking of developing a small portion of the farm himself.

Have you sold part of your farm?:

YES: 1,1 = 2

Sold parcel to son

Sold 8 or 10 acres as building lots

NO: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 15

But did do a land swap with neighbor.

But family had to sell half of it to the state for a road.

Not yet, but have a small portion that he might sell.

Have your farming friends discussed selling their farms to developers?:

YES: 1,1,1,1 = 4

NO: 1

DON'T KNOW: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1 = 11

Common topic, especially among older farmers who want to sell off portions to meet their taxes.

General feeling is to sell the farm if you can. Generally, the community loves having farmland, but not enough to put up money to preserve it.

Friends are running 50/50 in favor of selling to developers or not. What the future brings is always a defining issue. Taxes are a big part of the consideration.

Several farmers have talked of selling at least some of their land.

Approximate ages of owners:

Male head of family:

20-29: 1

30-39:

40-49: 1,1

50-59: 1,1,1,1,1,1,1

60-69: 1,1

70-79: 1

80+: 1,1,1

Female head of family:

20-29:

30-39: 1

40-49: 1

50-59: 1,1,1,1

60-69: 1,1
70-79: 1,1,1
80+: 1

Additional comments offered at the end of the interviews (some comments are paraphrased to preserve anonymity or cut down from longer statements):

ON THE NEED FOR SUPPORT FROM THE TOWN ADMINISTRATION:

Town must support farming despite manure or dust complaints; must tell newcomers to accept farm issues like these. People are buying homes without taking into account farm smells or trucks.

I use manure as a natural fertilizer to save money. The town should be supporting this. Instead, the town says that manure and silage are hazardous substances.

The town never sides with the farmer; it always sides with the NIMBYs. There is a constant battle with the town. When you have to fight the town, there are court costs. You can't recoup that expense; it is lost.

Go easy on the farmers. If not for farms, the cycle of residential properties, leading to building more schools, will spiral town costs upward.

Town is going to lose farms quickly [due to farmers' ages] and must work now to keep them.

The town needs to develop a real philosophy on why farms are important to the town, more than just "preserving a rural atmosphere." Talk about the points of why we must preserve farms.

The town has always seemed uninterested in supporting farms.

ON THE NEED FOR SUPPORT FROM THE RESIDENTS OF COLCHESTER:

We really need continual news coverage to teach local people about farms; education will bring support for conserving them.

The general farm illiteracy of the public is a problem.

It would be good for the public to know just how little the farmers clear on their farm products.

Local schools could teach students about food costs and the benefits of eating local food.

ON DEALING WITH THE TOWN ADMINISTRATION:

Can't make a pond, dig a well, or tap a water line in order to get water for his livestock; town won't work with him to solve this problem.

Farmers are selling whatever they can in order to survive; government needs to lower restrictions and be flexible to help them, and also needs to not change rules midstream.

The town zoning people need to better understand farming operations.

The town doesn't always show common sense. For example, the fuel storage limits are too small. I can't drive my tractor out daily to buy gas.

The town needs to be more flexible when making decisions. An example is that Farmer A can't let waste water go across the boundary into Farmer B's farm, even though Farmer B wants it.

Let the state Department of Agriculture do its job of regulating and inspecting farms, not the town health department.

Farmers need timely contacts with town and state offices. When something needs to be done, you can't wait around to hear from them.

The Town Planner should come out and meet farmers.

Town should support sales by farmers of products not strictly produced or grown on that farm. For example, let the farmer supplement income with ice cream sales. The town needs to be open-minded. Farmers need to do this to survive.

The town needs to be supportive of seasonal traffic at pick-your-own farms.

The town mentality is to force residential development.

Seems like there is policy-making in town by people who don't know agriculture.

The town is a problem. It wants him to keep farm intact, but isn't doing it in a helpful way. It has taken the town a long time to make decisions on things that would be beneficial changes for the farm, and it wants him to hire expensive contractors to gather wetland information.

Farm is trying to install a new building, but the town keeps adding new requirements for the project at the last minute. Every time they complied with a requirement, a new requirement would be added on. The town also tried to require elements that were not mandated. Farmer had to become an expert because the town wasn't doing the research on this type of building and homework for their meetings. Town officials were often not prepared for their meetings and forgot to bring necessary data.

Local developers are being allowed to develop properties without following the usual guidelines. For example, one was allowed to strip a slope to a river. Another didn't follow guidelines for wetland evaluation. Why can't farmers get the same flexibility?

The state Department of Agriculture tried to start a farmers' market on the town green, but the town denied it.

Zoning department wants to change the status of a pre-existing use on part of his land. Have to go to court. There is a constant tightening of what farmers can do with their land.

Dealing with town is a problem; they are not helpful with anything pertaining to farming.

Farmer wants to correct a swampy area created by the former owner. It breeds mosquitoes that might endanger their livestock with encephalitis, but the town won't allow them to correct the problem without a lengthy review process.

The town doesn't want to recognize his winery as a farm business; wants to tax it as commercial. The winery won this issue in court, but the town has interpreted the judgment as limited only to one assessment period. If the town wins this issue, the winery will have to go out of business and sell land to a developer.

Why is it so easy to subdivide in Colchester but not to farm?

ON TAXATION:

There are no incentives to buy land to keep and use as farmland; when he bought some land, town wanted to tax it as developed land immediately. Knows of a farm in town where cattle live on land that is taxed as residential.

The town wanted to tax each separate building [on the farm] at a building lot rate.

As long as the taxes don't get too crazy, we'll keep going.

A few years back, the town was possibly going to drop our 490 tax status; this was a big concern.

Farmer wants to install solar panels. Town can exempt these from taxation but has said it will tax them. This takes away the incentive to "go green."

Town tried to take [more than 85%] of our agricultural land out of the 490 program.

Part of his land is not under 490 taxation because if he sells it for building lots, he doesn't want 10% of it to go to the town.

All his retirement income goes to pay taxes on land. He has to do other things to make ends meet.

The state passed a law exempting \$100,000 of the value of farm use buildings from taxation, but it is not a mandate, and Colchester won't adopt it.

Tax costs are doubling every 12 years, at a rate of 6% per year. This is a huge problem, especially for seniors. Taxes are killing everyone.

The town and tax assessor have made it difficult for us to farm.

As people move into town, there is a greater demand for services, and farmers have a disproportionate burden for paying for these.

My assessment value is 28 times higher than when I bought this farm. The amount I pay in taxes is ridiculous! The town isn't concerned about it.

The assessor removed our 490A status from our horse business, saying that his definition of farming meant raising crops. We only found out about it when our tax bill went up.

ON THE GENERAL PROBLEMS OF FARMING:

It's too late now to worry about saving farms in Colchester.

This agriculture viability assessment should have been done twenty years ago.

Farming in Connecticut is nearly gone. We're just going to end up with only hobby farms.

The majority of farmers in town want to keep farming, but it may not be possible.

Instead of going to the casino to lose money, I farm.

I can't afford to insure my farm machinery. And if the farm burns down, that's it.

Everything is going up in cost. My social security check is much less than my expenses.

I would love to see my farm stay a farm, but I need money from it.

Has trouble with theft and destruction of property. He can't leave his equipment out anymore. Someone left his cattle loose. ATVs run over his property and destroy it.

Farm buildings are falling down everywhere. No one can afford to repair them.

The cost of producing farm products is too high in relation to what the farmer can sell them for.

People who come to town to develop property are driving up the farmers' expenses.

Feed costs go up faster than the income from eggs.

Hay is expensive. Access to low cost hay would really change their business immensely.

In some areas of the state, people buy farms only as tax write-offs, then they outbid real farmers for livestock and drive the prices up.

It's too expensive to farm. Income doesn't match expense. The only choice for the farmer is to sell the land, but then you have to pay a 35% capital gains tax.

As farmland is lost, we lose a resource that we can't ever regain. Because of development, there is no farmland left to buy or rent.

Pasture is hard to come by; most open land is woods or wetland.

ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAMS:

Town should take some initiative and not leave it up to the state to fund farm preservation.

If farmland is set aside as open space, it must be a hard and firm decision to keep it that way, without waffling. Look at what happened to the Cohen land.

Re: farm preservation, look at David Bingham in Salem and his activity.

There is a 35% capital gains tax on the sale of development rights – it's not worth it.

APPENDIX C: MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED TO PARTICIPATING FARMERS

Conservation Options: A Landowner's Guide, published by the Land Trust Alliance

Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities, published by the American Farmland Trust

Brochures on estate planning and farm succession published by the American Farmland Trust, Farm Transfer Network of New England, and Land for Good

A brochure on marketing published by Harvest New England

A brochure on Connecticut "FarmLink" and copies of state agricultural laws provided by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture

Handouts on farm transfer and farmland preservation from the Connecticut Farm Risk Management and Crop Insurance program of the University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Handouts of resources for land conservation and farmland preservation from the Connecticut Farmland Trust

A list of links to farm product marketing techniques created by CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture)

NOTE ON THE CONSULTANT

Llyn Kaimowitz has nearly thirty years of experience as a consultant to non-profits, corporations, and state and local governments. She provides consultation in the areas of organizational and governmental management, fundraising and grant writing, and planning and development of new agencies and programs. Her background includes conducting numerous surveys and assessments at both the state and local level. Former clients include the National Park Service, the City of Cincinnati, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Yale University, the Connecticut Historical Society, Connecticut Mutual (CM Alliance), the Ohio Historical Society, the City of Bridgeport, and the State of Connecticut.