

Town and Village of Salem
Agriculture and Farm Viability Plan

DRAFT

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The Town and Village of Salem

with assistance from



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Executive Summary

Farming has defined the landscape, economy and culture of the Town of Salem for generations. Agriculture is the foundation of the local economy, with many area residents deriving income from farming as well as other local businesses providing goods and services to local farms.

The business of farming is rapidly changing in Salem. Dairy farms have suffered recently from painfully low milk prices and rising business costs. Some local farms have responded by expanding to increase efficiency, while others are pursuing alternative production methods or selling more directly to consumers.

While the farming in Salem is changing, local support for agriculture is not. The Town and Village of Salem have expressed strong support for sustaining farms and related agribusinesses as a means of strengthening the local economy. There has also been strong local support for protecting the farm fields and woods that dominate the landscape and make the region so attractive for residents and tourists.

The Town and Village of Salem decided to work jointly in developing a local agricultural and farm viability plan as a means of creating a strong, supportive environment for local farms. This process began in 2008 with application and receipt of a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets that provided funding for plan development. A project steering committee was formalized to guide the plan development process and subsequently hired American Farmland Trust to assist with the project.

Interviews were conducted with 12 local farmers and landowners to understand challenges and opportunities facing local farms. Information gathered during these interviews was combined with data from the United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Census and other sources to create a profile of agriculture in Salem and Washington County. Additionally, 10 meetings of the project steering committee were conducted as well as 3 public forums to insure critical public input into the plan development process.

This research and intensive public participation process resulted in the development of four goals for the Salem Agricultural and Farm Viability Plan, including:

Goal #1: Strengthen agricultural infrastructure to support the viability of farms in Salem and Washington County.

Goal #2: Encourage agricultural education and act as an information resource about agricultural programs and opportunities.

Goal #3: Promote farms and the benefits that agriculture provides to the community.

Goal #4: Prepare to address the impacts of new development on agricultural viability.

Subsequently, recommendations were developed to accomplish identified goals as well as specific actions necessary to accomplish each recommendation. Plan recommendations include the following:

Recommendation 1: Establish a Town Agriculture Committee to promote opportunities in agriculture and lead implementation of the town's Agricultural and Farm Viability Plan

Recommendation 2: Encourage investments in agricultural businesses in Salem.

Recommendation 3: Support efforts to renovate rail infrastructure in Salem.

Recommendation 4: Support opportunities for compatible renewable energy generation on farms.

Recommendation 5: Use the Salem municipal website to distribute information for farmers and landowners and promote agriculture in Salem.

Recommendation 6: Educate new landowners moving to the community about the agricultural nature of Salem.

Recommendation 7: Act as a leader on county, state and federal issues impacting Salem farmers.

Recommendation 8: Support agricultural education programs to encourage the next generation of farmers and greater public appreciation of agriculture.

Recommendation 9: Showcase farms in Salem and help attract visitors to the area.

Recommendation 10: Visually identify Salem as an "Agricultural Community".

Recommendation 11: Quantify the economic importance of agriculture to Salem and Washington County.

Recommendation 12: Secure a voice for farmers in land use decisions.

Recommendation 13: Quantify the costs of new development.

Recommendation 14: Educate farmers and landowners on programs available to provide property tax relief and protect land from development, including the Agricultural District law and Purchase of Development Rights.

Recommendation 15: Ensure land use policies continue to remain farm-friendly.

The Town and Village of Salem are committed to supporting local farms and creating opportunities for current and future generations of farmers in the community.

Introduction

The town and village of Salem are located in a scenic valley between the Adirondacks and Vermont's Green Mountains on historic Route 22. The community is celebrated for its scenery as well as its rich agricultural heritage. Agriculture remains a major and vital part of the area's economy, with farmers and related businesses being an important part of the local tax base as well.

The Town and Village of Salem initiated this project to bolster support for local farms, agribusinesses and the region's farm landscape. Both the town and village recognize the importance of agriculture to the local economy, tax base and community and want to pro-actively support opportunities for farming to not only survive but thrive in the region.

This project began with a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to assist in the development of a municipal agricultural and farmland protection plan. This plan is intended to identify productive farmland, the value of farms and farmland to the local economy, the value of that land as open space, consequences of possible farmland conversion as well as the level of conversion pressure on that land.

This project has involved many partnerships and players. Both the town and village have been engaged in this planning process and intend to incorporate the final plan into their comprehensive or general development plans. Additionally, farmers, landowners, members of Salem's Town Board, Planning Board, County agencies, land trusts and Cornell Cooperative Extension and others have been engaged in this planning process.

The Salem Agricultural and Farmland Viability Plan incorporates appropriate elements of relevant agricultural, land protection and economic development plans that have previously occurred in Salem and the surrounding region. Below is a brief description of some of these plans with highlights that are most directly relevant to the Salem Agricultural and Farmland Viability Plan.

Village of Salem General Development Plan

The Village of Salem General Development Plan, originally written in 1975, was recently revised in 2007. The revision updated some of the goals and recommendations for growth within the Village limits. The plan is intended to be a "guide to future development" of the village for the next 25 years. It identifies that more than half the land in the Village is used for agriculture with several goals written with the objective to maintain this use of the land.

The greatest potential conflict between agriculture and the community in the Village of Salem revolves around the quality of drinking water. The Village sits on a shallow aquifer – 10-15 feet deep in many areas – that historically provided the drinking water for residences through individual home wells. Several water quality concerns, including high nitrate concentrations and E.coli contamination, resulted in the Village installing a municipal water system. Agriculture was implicated as the cause in both cases.

The water system was constructed in 2003 and has the capacity to provide water to 394 residences. A new goal was added to the updated General Development Plan that addresses this issue – “To reduce water pollution” – with an objective to “develop an efficient program to combat pollution of the Village’s streams and the aquifer that provides a recharge source to the village water supply.”

Town of Salem Comprehensive Plan

The Town Comprehensive Plan was most recently written in 1997 with an update currently underway. The 1997 Plan identified agriculture as a significant land use and also one of the largest contributors to the local economy with 3 out of the 4 largest employers at the time related to agriculture – Salem Farm Supply, Agway (now Cargill) and Woody Hill Farm. Agriculture is also identified for its importance as wildlife habitat. A town wide survey conducted in 1986 indicated that 76% of respondents believed that agriculture was very important to the local economy.

Two recommendations of the plan dealt directly with agriculture – Recommendations 13 and 14. Recommendation 13 indicates, “Prime agricultural land should be protected by minimizing its conversion to non-agricultural uses.” It goes on to outline several of the strategies repeated in this Farmland Viability Plan with an eye towards balancing the ability of landowners to take advantage of economic incentives to develop land and maintaining agricultural use of that land.

Recommendation 14 is particularly important to farmers in the Town of Salem. It is repeated here verbatim to further emphasize the importance of the ability of farmers to do business on their land without unnecessary regulations. It reads, “In the event land use controls are enacted in Salem, any laws or ordinances should not restrict or regulate farm structures or farming practices that are generally accepted agricultural practices unless such restrictions or regulations bear a direct relationship to the public health and safety.”

Washington County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan

Washington County was one of the first counties in New York to develop an agricultural and farmland protection plan. This plan defined a countywide goal: “to keep agriculture a vital and integral part of Washington County’s economy and rural lifestyle” and “to encourage the maintenance of sufficient resources, both natural and human, to support the continued predominance of agriculture as a land use system.” The following challenges facing local farmers were identified as:

- Low commodity prices;
- High costs of production;
- Rising property taxes;
- Increasing amount of regulation;
- Conversion pressures; and
- Declining farm community.

The plan’s goals include the following:

- Maintain and enhance the viability of agriculture through promotion and pricing

strategies;

- Promote recognition and awareness of the importance of agriculture by fostering community support among non-farm residents and raising awareness of the importance of agriculture in the private sector economy;
- Improve networks that support agriculture by coordinating team efforts and strengthening connections among members of the farm community; and
- Protect the land base and natural resources that support agriculture by supporting agricultural town planning, maintaining rural character, encouraging legislators towards property tax reform and protecting important farmland.

Washington County Economic Development Strategy

The Washington County Economic Development Strategy notes that agriculture has long been a major economic driver for communities across the county. Importantly, farming and related businesses have not moved to other countries with lower costs, like many of the manufacturing sectors that used to be located in Washington County. Agriculture is one a few industrial sectors in Washington County that grew between 2000 and 2003 with agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining employment growing by a combined 639% between 1975 and 2000.

The strategy includes agriculture as one of five industry sectors with growth potential in Washington County. It also describes an economic vision for Washington County that includes:

“Washington County is highly regarded for the outstanding quality of its environment. Preservation of productive agricultural lands will also demonstrate success in preserving the resources and quality of life that enhance Washington County. Economic growth is achieved within environmental limits and the protection of key agricultural and environmental resources is critical to the success of Washington County.”

The strategy makes the following recommendations related to agriculture:

Strategy 2.1 Proactively pursue agriculture development as a form of economic development by developing new markets and products.

Action 2.1.1 Promote agriculture and rural lifestyle as important to the long-term economic health of Washington County.

Action 2.1.2 Target the County’s economic development efforts towards the agricultural sector. This sector is already the focus of extensive investment and commitment by individuals, businesses, and the public sector. Agriculture should be fully integrated into the County’s economic development policy and all significant public investment and economic development initiatives should consider the consequences to agriculture.

Action 2.1.3 Work with the Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Agricultural Stewardship Association and the Washington County Farm Bureau to market Washington County’s unique agricultural resources to attract additional agribusiness and to retain existing farming operations.

Action 2.1.4 Improve and enhance agricultural marketing and agritourism marketing. Work with farmers to develop agritourism tours, such as visits to maple syrup farms, dairy farms, tree farms, fiber, etc.

Action 2.1.5 Work with the Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Washington County Farm Bureau to encourage local farmers to participate with the “With Pride from Washington County” program to enhance individual marketing efforts. This program allows farmers to utilize stickers, signs, promotional brochures, to promote Washington County agricultural products.

Action 2.1.6 Pursue non-dairy agriculture markets for new growth. The County must support and assist local farmers in site identification, land assemblage, and funding research to ensure that such facilities become a reality. Encourage the development of agribusinesses within the County. In agriculture, agribusiness is a generic term that refers to the various businesses involved in food production, including farming, seed supply, agrichemicals, farm machinery, wholesale distribution, processing, marketing, and retail sales. Agribusiness refers to the range of activities and disciplines encompassed by modern food production.

Action 2.1.7 Partner with the Cornell Cooperative Extension to update the Washington County Farm Fresh Guide using new GIS information to enhance marketing efforts of the local agricultural industry, including local roadside stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own operations, nurseries and other agricultural items of interests such as fruit wineries, maple syrup, dairy, and herbs. Update the map to highlight annual seasonal tours such as the Maple Farm Tour hosted in March or the Washington County Fiber Tour in May.

Action 2.1.8 Seek grant funding from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets for the creation of Farmer's Markets Pavilions throughout Washington County.

Action 2.1.9 Work with the Greater Adirondack Resource Conservation and Development Council serving Washington County to further promote and protect the forestry and wood products industry in Washington County. The Council's mission is to promote the wise use of natural resources and enhance the economic vitality of the Greater Adirondack Area.

Action 2.1.10 Fully support the Agricultural Economic Development Specialist position in Washington County.

Strategy 2.2 Support, sustain, and market the County's existing agriculture and agroforestry businesses.

Action 2.2.1 Continue to promote the websites of Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Agricultural Stewardship Association, Adirondack Wood and the Washington County Farm Bureau that provide information to new and existing farmers, including but not limited to supportive agri-business information, Ag Economic Development Programs (AED), and grant opportunities for farmland protection to encourage and support new and existing farmers in Washington County. Utilize the websites to connect agriculture producers with each other on issues and topics. Expand the website to connect agriculture producers with the consumers through the "With Pride with Washington County" Program. All products purchased through the website should feature the program's logo, educating consumers of what is currently available and allow them to order the products direct from the local producers.

Action 2.2.2 Provide technical assistance to agri-businesses with taking advantage of marketing opportunities including online and mail order; sales to restaurants and specialty food stores; cooperative marketing; ethnic markets; subscription marketing and CSA farms (community supported agriculture); entertainment farming and agritourism; farm stands, roadside markets, and on-farm sales; pick your- own; and farmers markets.

Action 2.2.3 Provide information to local farmers on the different mechanisms available to assist farmers in maintaining their properties. These include agricultural assessments, partial reduction in real property taxes for eligible NYS farmland, American Farmland Trust estate planning, and Farm Building Exemptions through NYS Office of Real Property Services (ORPS). Work with farmers to identify ways to reduce taxes.

Action 2.2.4 Work with local communities to promote agriculture and forestry industries. Create natural partnerships between the agriculture and forestry industries with parks, historic sites, festivals, fee hunting, and bed and breakfast operations for business start-ups and enterprise development.

Action 2.2.5 Work with existing organizations, such as the Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Agricultural Stewardship Association, to implement existing programs, such as the Donation of Development Rights (DDR), the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), the Agricultural Economic Development Program.

Action 2.2.6 Develop a County Open Space Plan to promote appropriate stewardship and maintenance of the County's public and privately owned lands.

Action 2.2.7 Continue to support the countywide Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program through the Agricultural Stewardship Association. Institute a transfer tax to fund the PDR Program.

Action 2.2.8 Inventory prime agricultural lands and vacant lands utilizing the expertise of the Agricultural Stewardship Association and updated GIS information. Identify and prioritize key properties throughout the County that should be preserved, as well as those properties that are most suitable for development. Utilize the inventory to apply for open space grants for the purchase of development rights from priority farms and open space properties.

Action 2.2.9 Encourage local communities to enact zoning, subdivision review, cluster subdivision regulations, scenic ridgeline protection overlays, and other land use regulations to preserve agricultural lands.

Action 2.2.10 Use available economic development tools to foster a viable agricultural economy. The agricultural industry can be supported through Agricultural Districts, agricultural tax exemptions, and any other appropriate tax exemptions. The County can apply for and facilitate the dissemination of loans and grants from State government agencies, as well as from quasi-government agencies, to local farmers. The County should apply for Grow-NY funding to assist business development whenever possible.

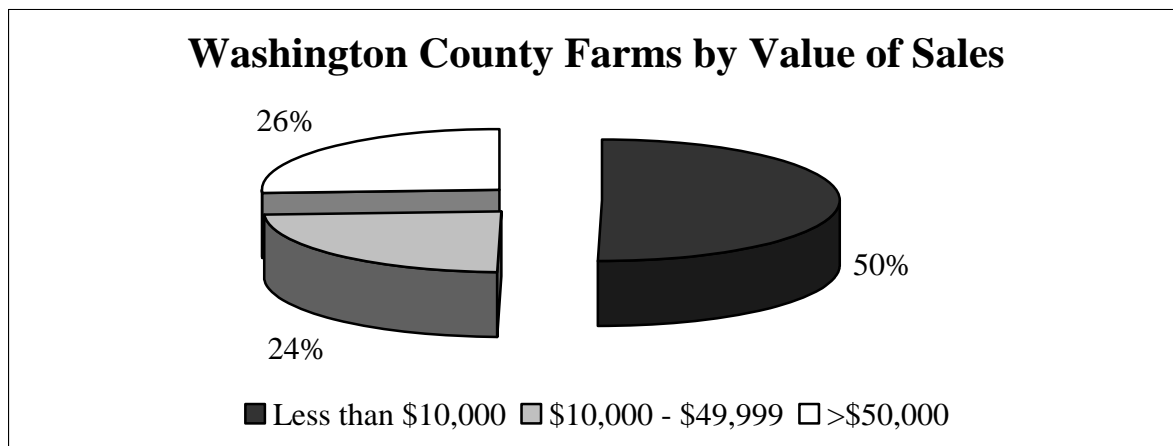
Action 2.2.11 Replicate Greenwich's Future Farmers of America program to facilitate relationship building between local educational institutions and the local agricultural community. Through the program students are introduced to the agricultural industry, while farmers benefit from the fresh perspective on target markets and marketing opportunities.

Land in Agriculture

Washington County - Overview

According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, there were 843 farms encompassing 202,877 acres of land in agriculture in Washington County - approximately 38% of the land area in the County. This acreage of land in agriculture represents a reduction of 3,217 acres in farming since 2002.

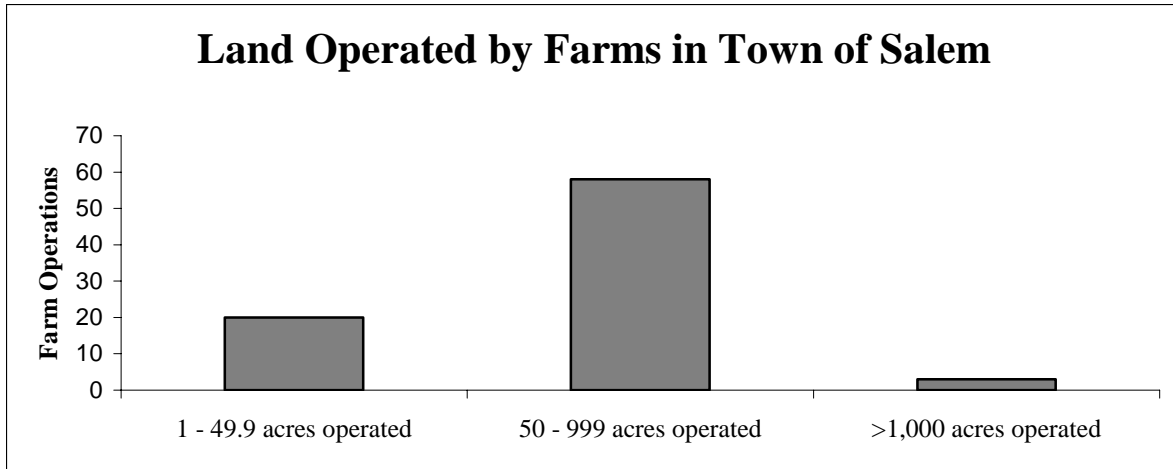
Washington County is home to a diverse agricultural sector with farms ranging from only a few acres to more than 1,000 acres. In 2007, the median farm size was 120 acres, slightly larger than the statewide median size of 95 acres. 57% of these farms were between 50 and 500 acres with 29% of farms being less than 50 acres and 13% being greater than 500 acres in size. This diversity in farms is also visible in the high degree of variability between the value of sales on farms across Washington County. More than 50% of farms sell less than \$10,000 in farm products.



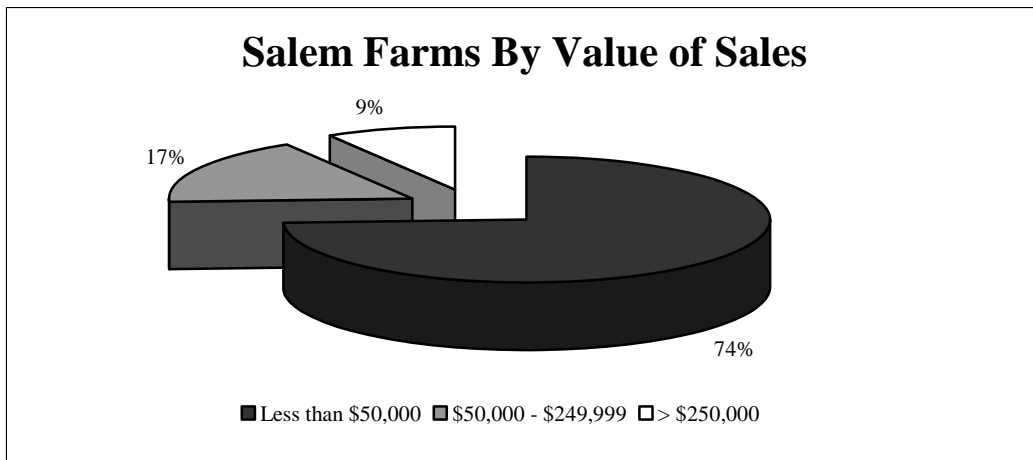
Salem - Overview

According to the Census of Agriculture available by zip code¹, there were 81 farms in Salem in 2007. The vast majority of farms in Salem operate on 50 – 999 acres, with only 3 farms operating more than 1,000 acres.

¹ Data presented represents the 12865 and 12873 zip codes.



Similarly, approximately 74% of farms in Salem sell less than \$50,000 in farm products annually. Roughly 21% of farms in Salem sell meat, milk, fruits, vegetables or other farm products directly to consumers for consumption. There was a 300% increase between 2002 and 2007 in the number of farms in Salem selling directly to consumers.



There is a diversity of products being grown and raised in Salem, including dairy, fruits, vegetables, equine, other livestock as well as flowers and plants. Livestock farms are a significant part of the landscape with 71 farms reporting that they raise cattle, chickens horses, pigs or sheep.

Table 1 Top 10 Farm Products in Salem According to 2007 Census of Agriculture

Crop or Livestock	# of Farms
1. Forage, hay or haylage	39
2. Equine	27
3. Beef cattle	12
4. Dairy cattle	12
5. Corn silage	12
6. Chickens	11
7. Other livestock	11
8. Maple Syrup	10
9. Horticultural products	9
10. Vegetables	8

Soils

Salem has a mixture of productive soils as depicted in the following Salem Soils Map. The most productive soils for agricultural use have been identified in two categories, prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance. The United States Department of Agriculture defines these terms as follows:

Prime Farmland - Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.²

Farmland of Statewide Importance - Farmlands of statewide importance include those soils in land capability Class II and III that do not meet the criteria as Prime Farmland but are nearly Prime Farmland and economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods, Some may produce yields as high as Prime Farmland if conditions are favorable.³

The most productive soils for agricultural use in Salem frequently correspond with river and creek corridors along Black Creek, White Creek, Beaver Brook, West Beaver Creek, Camden Creek and the Battenkill River. As noted in the Salem Soils Map, there is a concentration of these high quality soils in and around the Village of Salem.

Agricultural Districts

A majority of both the town and village of Salem are enrolled in state-certified Agricultural Districts, as depicted in the Salem Agricultural Districts Map. These districts, Consolidated Agricultural Districts #5 and #8, provide important right to farm protections to farmers operating on enrolled properties. They also require additional planning measures, such as Notice of Intent filings and Agricultural Data statements, for publicly funded projects and land use activities in these districts. Inclusion of such a great extent of land in these Agricultural Districts is also an indication of the significance of agriculture in Salem.

² According to USDA NRCS webpage: <http://soils.usda.gov/technical/handbook/contents/part622.html>.

³ According to USDA NRCS webpage: <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/soils/importantfarm.html>.

Agricultural and Farmland Resources Map

Multiple sources of data are available to identify properties that are partially or fully in agricultural use. However, these data sources are frequently inconsistent. To address this situation, the project steering committee integrated data from Washington County Agricultural Districts #5 and #8 and Real Property Assessment Data with direct knowledge from farmers and landowners in Salem. The following Agricultural and Farmland Resources Map depicts land that are believed to be partially or fully in agricultural use as of 2008.

Protecting Viable Agricultural Land

The Town and Village of Salem are strongly committed to supporting active agricultural production as the foundation of the local and regional economy. Substantial areas of farmland in both the Town and Village are enrolled in Agricultural Districts and have been identified on the Agricultural and Farmland Resources Map as being in recent agricultural use.

The following sections of this plan identify strategies for strengthening the economic viability of Salem’s farm community and retaining land in active agricultural use. The Salem Agricultural and Farm Viability plan encourages that such strategies be employed broadly and target all farms and farmland identified in the Agricultural and Farmland Resources Map to retain a viable agricultural sector in Salem.

Holy Cow!

Dairy Farms Importance to the Regional Economy

Dairy farming is the largest sector of Washington County agriculture. Milk sales accounted for 76% of Washington County’s \$112 million in sales of farm products in 2007, with the sale of cattle and calves accounting for an additional \$11.2 million.

According to research from Pennsylvania State University, dairy farms have an annual economic impact of \$13,737 per dairy cow. In 2007, Washington County had 22,752 dairy cows. By these estimates, Washington County’s dairy sector has an annual economic impact of \$312,544,224!

2009 was an extremely difficult year for Washington County dairy farmers due to low milk prices. Industry experts indicate that the average dairy farm in New York lost \$1,000 per dairy cow in 2009. These estimates indicate that Washington County dairy farmers lost \$22.7 million last year. Difficult economic conditions have contributed to the loss of dairy farms in Washington County with 2,058 fewer dairy cows in 2007 compared with 2002, a reduction of almost 8%.

SALEM SOILS MAP

SALEM AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS MAP

SALEM AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND RESOURCES MAP

Value to the Agricultural Economy

Washington County

The value of agricultural products sold from farms in Washington County in 2007 was \$112 million, an increase of 37% from 2002. The bulk of this value - \$98.9 million or 88% - remains in livestock and livestock products, with \$13.3 million in crop sales, including greenhouse and nursery products. Dairy continues to be the number one agricultural sector in Washington County with \$85.6 million in dairy product sales in 2007, up from \$61.1 million in 2002.

There was also a corresponding increase in the cost of production from 2002 to 2007, up about 18% or \$22,000 per farm resulting in a total net income from farm operations in the county of \$27.1 million, or \$32,165 on average per farm in 2007. Farms in Washington County spent over \$13 million in hired labor payroll in 2007, a significant contribution to the local economy. The market value of land and buildings on farms in Washington County more than doubled from 2002 to 2007, going up on average of \$774/acre.

Salem

In the Town of Salem, of the 81 farms reported by the 2007 Agricultural Census, 60 made less than \$50,000 annually in farm product sales, 14 were in the \$50,000 - \$249,999 range and 7 sold more than \$250,000.

Agriculture is clearly a significant part of the economy in the Town of Salem. One dairy farm employs 20 full time people, with 13 of these employees living in this community. Another employs 15 people in various parts of the business with longevity.

Agriculture was the primary income on 38 of the 81 farms or 47% of the farms. From 2002 to 2007, however, there was a 28% increase in the number of farm operators who worked off farm – indicating the possibility that the cost of agricultural production had forced farmers to seek off farm income to support the family.

Agritourism & Direct Marketing

Selling farm products directly to consumers is a strategy increasingly being utilized by farmers in Salem and elsewhere in Washington County. 120 farms in Washington County sold products directly to consumers for consumption in 2007 – roughly 14% of the county’s total farms. These farms sold roughly \$2.76 million in farm products directly to consumers, a 51% increase from 2002.

Salem is also home to several major agritourism events including:

Washington County Fiber Tour – Started in 1992, the Fiber Tour is held each April and brings the public to local farms raising sheep, llamas, rabbits and other animals. Participants can visit local farms, watch spinning, knitting, weaving and felting demonstrations, learn about raising livestock and shop for handspun and dyed yarns, unique woven and knitted items, high quality fleeces, cuts of lamb, and more.

Washington County Cheese Tour - Each fall, the Washington County Cheesemakers Guild presents The Cheese Tour. The Cheese Tour gives area farms the opportunity to explore the world of farmstead and artisan cheese in this drive-yourself tour of our cheesemakers in the Washington County area. Farms are open for tour and display their facilities, their animals, and their cheeses.

Al Fresco Dinner Begun in 2003 by the Historic Salem Courthouse Preservation Association (HSCPA) as a fundraiser for the Community Center, Al Fresco supports local farms and food producers by sourcing food from the region. Al Fresco 2009 began with a dinner for 400 people on Saturday evening and continued on Sunday with a Chefs’ Brunch, Art and Agricultural Market, and Farm Tour.

Open Space Value

Washington County is celebrated for its rolling, scenic landscape that includes a patchwork of fields, forests and farms. Interspersed between the farms and forests are small villages, such as the Village of Salem, that have maintained their rural charm with many of the historic homes still occupied by the families of their original owners.

This landscape has inspired countless artists, such as Grandma Moses, and attracts thousands of tourists each year. This landscape is a key element of the town's agritourism businesses and is the backdrop for regional events such as the Cheese Tour, Fiber Tour, Al Fresco Weekend and other farm and food events.

Well-managed farmland also acts as a buffer to the many streams, rivers and lakes in Salem and Washington County. Farm fields can naturally filter nutrients and sediment and help keep waterways clean and healthy for wildlife habitat. Rivers in Salem like the Battenkill are well-known for their trout fisheries and depend on clean water to sustain healthy fish populations are draw tourists to the region.

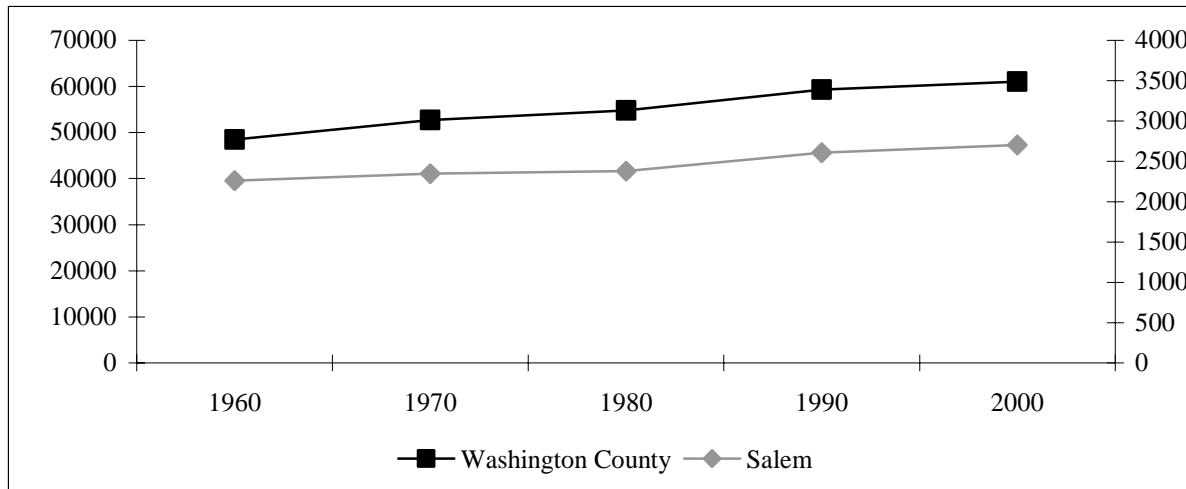
Importantly, Salem is home to three major aquifers that run Northeast/Southwest through the town. They include: 1) Black Creek/West Beaver Creek, 2) Dry Creek/White Creek and Camden Creek/Battenkill. Well-managed farms act as a natural buffer to these aquifers as permeable farmland enables recharge of these important water resources. By contrast, impermeable surfaces such as roads, driveways, parking lots and buildings encourage rapid runoff that can limit aquifer recharge and lead to nutrient and sediment runoff into nearby waterways.

SALEM AQUIFER MAP

Indicators of Conversion Pressure

The 2007 Census of Agriculture indicates that there was a reduction of 3,000 acres of land in farms since 2002 in Washington County. This represents a 1 to 2% reduction of land in farms. This modest change of land in farms is consistent with farmer interviews and population data that indicate a modest degree of conversion pressure in Salem. As identified in Table 2, Salem’s population grew by less than 20% between 1960 and 2000, slightly less than Washington County’s overall population growth of 25% for the period.

Table 2 Population of Salem and Washington County According to United States Census



However, the development of the nearby Luther Forest Technology Campus and other growth in nearby Saratoga County has the potential to drive residential development into nearby Washington County. The campus will be home to the “most advanced semiconductor manufacturing facility in the world”. While communities in western Washington County, such as Easton and Greenwich, are more likely to experience residential development stemming from this development and associated growth in Saratoga County, this location is less than 40 miles from Salem.

Part of the reason for residential growth stemming from new developments at the Luther forest Technology Campus relate to the stark differences between home sale prices in Salem and Washington County and neighboring Rensselaer and Saratoga Counties. The median home sale price in Rensselaer County is roughly 30% higher than Washington County while Saratoga County’s median price is almost 90% greater.

Table 3 County Residential Sales and Median Sale Prices, NYS Office of Real Property Services

County	2006 Sales & Median Price	2007 Sales & Median Price	2008 Sales & Median Price
Rensselaer	2030, \$152,175	1676, \$165,000	1351, \$165,000
Saratoga	3248, \$236,400	2988, \$241,703	2337, \$240,000
Washington	810, \$120,000	663, \$128,800	445, \$128,000

Consequences of Farmland Conversion

The fragmentation of productive farmland has multiple impacts on current, and future, generations of farmers. Farmland conversion results in the permanent loss of productive farm soils. As some farmers say, “concrete is the last crop”.

The impacts of farmland conversion are magnified as high quality soils tend to be converted first as they are well-drained and easily suited to septic systems and require fewer improvements to develop. Additionally, development patterns in the region have historically concentrated along rivers, streams and lakes – many of the same locations of the region’s best farmland.

As residential development spreads across a farm landscape it also increases land prices. Increasing land prices has the dual impact of making it more difficult for existing farmers to purchase land needed to expand and for new generations of farmers to purchase their first farm.

Additionally, new non-farm neighbors frequently do not understand the sights, sounds and smells of modern farm practices. The siting of new houses adjacent to active farm operations sets the stage for future conflicts that can be divisive in a community and expensive should they lead to legal action.

Analyzing the Costs vs. Benefit of New Residential Development

Many communities desire new development as a means of increasing a local tax base and reducing property taxes for local taxpayers. While it is true that an acre of land with a new house generates more total revenue than an acre of hay or corn, this tells us little about a community’s bottom line. In areas where agriculture or forestry are major industries, it is especially important to consider the real property tax contribution of privately owned working lands. Working and other open lands may generate less revenue than residential, commercial or industrial properties, but they require little public infrastructure and few services.

Over the last twenty years, Cost of Community Services Studies (COCS) studies have been conducted across the nation to compare the net fiscal impacts of different land uses to local budgets. More than 15 COCS studies have been conducted in New York and have consistently demonstrated that farmland, open space and forestland generate more revenue than they receive in services, while residences generally require more in services than they pay in taxes. Below is a summary of the average results of these 15 studies:

Farm, Forest and Open Land:	\$0.29/\$1
Commercial:	\$0.26/\$1
Residential:	\$1.27/\$1
Cost of Services Provided Per Each Dollar Provided in Revenue	

See the Cost of Community Services Factsheet in the Appendix for more information about these studies.

Public Outreach

Public input was particularly important to this planning process. Public outreach was seen as a two-way communication stream. The community was given several opportunities to provide input on the needs of the agricultural industry in Salem and the strategies that would best support farm businesses and keep land available for farming. In addition, the Town of Salem had an opportunity to educate the community about the development of the plan. The Town employed several different methods to ensure public participation including.

Steering Committee

A steering committee was developed to lead the development of the Salem Agricultural and Farmland Viability Plan. This committee included members from the Salem Town Board, Planning Board, local farmers, agribusiness representatives and landowners. This committee met on a regular basis, usually monthly, to guide plan development as well as the planning process.

Agricultural Interviews

In February and March of 2009, 12 farmers, landowners and agricultural stakeholders were interviewed about their perspective of the current state and future of agriculture in the Town of Salem. Liz Brock, New York Field Representative for the American Farmland Trust, conducted the stakeholder interviews in person. Stakeholders were selected by the steering committee to represent a cross section of agricultural enterprises and included agricultural landowners, farm service providers and farmers raising dairy cows, vegetables, trees and flowers.

Public Meetings

A series of informational meetings were held during the planning process for this document. These meetings served as opportunities to define project goals, identify challenges and opportunities facing local farmers and develop and discuss project recommendation. These included the following meetings:

- October 26, 2009 at 7:00 at the Historic Salem Courthouse
- August 19, 2009 at 7:30 at Pat and Albert Sheldon's Farmstand
- April 28, 2009 at 7:00 at the Historic Salem Courthouse

Interview Summary

In February and March of 2009, 12 farmers, landowners and agricultural stakeholders were interviewed about their perspective of the current state and future of agriculture in the Town of Salem. At the time of the interviews, milk prices were at a recent all-time low, input prices remained high and land values were low due to a slump in the housing market. The following themes came out of these conversations.

The agricultural industry is strong in Salem. *“You can’t think about agriculture in Salem without thinking about the entire region.”* Everyone interviewed shared a common sentiment that agriculture was very strong as an industry in the Town of Salem. Many farm families have been in Town for multiple generations and there has been an increase in the number of new farms cropping up around Town marketing niche products like alpacas and flowers. There is good access to potential markets for products as Salem is centrally located between Glens Falls, Saratoga Springs, and Manchester and Bennington, Vermont. Many interviewed said that the “big three” dairy farms – Woody Hill, Chambers and McEachrons – kept a bulk of the good farmland soils in agriculture. When farm properties go up for sale, those interviewed said, one of those farms buys the land in most cases.

In addition, all farmers interviewed said that the availability of agricultural service providers was excellent – with Salem Farm Supply, Carovail and Cargill all within town borders and other service businesses like Battenkill Veterinarians and Premier Dairy Service within a 20-minute drive of Town.

Few farms had formal succession plans in place to transition the farm to the next generation either from lack of planning or lack of a next generation to take over. Those farms without a plan for the future said that the land would probably be sold with the expectation that one of the dairy farms in town would likely purchase it.

Despite the strength of agricultural businesses in Town, several interviewees indicated that the future was uncertain given the high input costs and decreased profit margins experienced by most sectors of agriculture in the region. As one farmer put it, the “Path towards the future is not being lit with a bright light.”

The connection between the community at-large and agriculture is changing. *“Used to be that two-thirds to three-quarters of kids on the school bus had a parent working on a farm.”* There is a perceived growing disconnect between the agricultural community and the community at-large in Salem among farmers and stakeholders interviewed. Farmers shared that everyone in town used to have a direct connection to agriculture – people either grew up on a farm, or worked on a farm. There is a common sense among those interviewed that this has changed over the last several years as residents have sought work outside Salem’s borders and newcomers have “found” Salem as a retirement or second home location.

This shift in population was viewed to have several impacts. The commuter nature of the community now was partially blamed for the loss of businesses that support the community as a whole, including the grocery store, as residents do their shopping on the way home from work.

In addition, the general consensus was that while the community as a whole appreciates the aesthetic of agriculture, they don't always understand the realities of commercial agriculture and the benefits it provides to Salem. Those interviewed all shared a general need to increase awareness of agriculture among the changing population of Salem to insure a supportive business environment and well educated neighbors for farms in the future.

The pressures on land are not from developers right now, but from other farmers and the bad economy. *“These economic times make it tough; if someone offered me \$5,000/acre for the land, I'd have to think about it.”* Most stakeholders interviewed have not felt pressure from residential development or even seen much occurring in Town. Some said that they thought more newcomers are purchasing existing older homes and fixing them up instead of building new homes. There is some question whether Salem will be suspect to the same development pressure predicted on the western side of the County due to the development of the Luther Forest Technology Park in Malta. Most of the good agricultural land is currently tied up in agriculture through ownership or rental and indeed, most farmers said that the biggest competition for land was from other farmers, not residential development.

A few farms had neighbor-relations issues with the main topics of concern revolving around odor and dog nuisance issues. All farmers interviewed shared that they attempted to be proactive when it came to potential neighbor conflicts either by working to be sensitive to neighbor needs or by purchasing land neighboring the farm when it becomes available. At least two farmers expressed potential concern over future residential development and issues regarding water quality due to the shallow aquifers in Town. High property taxes were also raised as a challenge to owning land in almost every interview. One farmer put it this way, “We work hard to pay the taxes.”

The main challenges currently facing farms stem from economics. *“Dad had better help. Better help isn't going to work here now.”* With the shift in the community and availability of different jobs, has come a decrease in the availability of quality affordable labor to meet the needs of farms in Town. Farming is hard work and finding people that will work that hard for a farm salary continues to prove limiting for some farm businesses. One farmer indicated that she had scaled back the size of the business in order to decrease her dependence on labor outside the family.

The current economic environment is causing significant concerns for farmers on many fronts. Those who have retirement accounts shared massive losses with the failing national economy while at the same time, the land - the 401k of most farmers - is worth significantly less as real estate values have declined in the region. Global competition for agricultural products combined with the cost of doing business in New York was also raised as significant areas of concern over the future of farm businesses. One stakeholder said that the “old business models won't do” for agriculture and that “whether it's a niche market like Seth's [McEachron] or an alternative crop to milk, like biofuels – you have to innovate to be successful.”

The consensus among interviewees was that Town has been fairly supportive of agriculture to date and that tools suggested through the plan should focus on maintaining this positive business climate. *“Protecting the farmer's right to do business is critical. Protection of way we*

do business and the right to do business.” Most farmers had a hard time coming up with specific ways the Town could assist them in doing business in the community. Indeed, when asked about tools the community might employ to help promote farms or support farm businesses, many said that it wasn’t the job of the Town to provide marketing assistance or other tools that provide incentives to farms. Most farmers weren’t particularly interested in permanent land protection tools such as Purchase of Development Rights programs as they thought it was “cashing” out on the farm to continue to run the business and limited the potential of the land for the future. No one was opposed to others using such tools however.

Marketing tools that would be useful included increased access to high speed internet for online sales and continuation of many existing programs like the Al Fresco dinner, fiber and cheese tours, Battenkill Kitchen and Farm to Chef Express. Interviewees said that infrastructure should be supported including the rail system and maintaining roads to ensure access for milk trucks.

Farmers were wary of new land use regulations including zoning, though several felt that it may make sense to discuss these issues now while challenges are few. One farmer said that it was important that all land use regulations at the Town should be “one, enforced and two, enforced equitably.” Many of those interviewed shared a need for some kind of property tax relief for farms. Lastly, there was a general understanding of a need to educate the public on the benefits that farms provide and the importance of doing business locally – not just in agriculture, but buying locally more generally to keep service businesses such as hardware stores and pharmacies open in the community.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

INTERNAL FACTORS	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Tourism - region is beautiful and agriculture is a draw	Increased cost of production in all commodities/ Decreasing profitability
Awareness of and appreciation for agriculture in the community	Challenge to find quality labor and provide housing
Quality environment to grow crops - soil, water, weather	Lack of zoning - housing being placed in ways that prevent future use of land for agriculture
There is a critical mass of farmers here - agriculture is the strongest industry	Taxes are high relative to the value farmland provides to the town
Strong agricultural support industry and agencies in Salem and region - tractor/vets/feed/fertilizer/CCE/SWCD/ASA	Limited by lack of reliable high speed internet access in some areas. Challenging to some farm businesses using the internet
Diverse agricultural community - niche/specialty farms compliment the strong dairy presence	Railroad infrastructure important but aging and not used as much as it could be
Close proximity to markets and people interested in buying local	Hard to get enough customers locally to support businesses. Have to take products out of town
Strong programs that help support farm businesses (ie farm tours, Farm to Chef Express, Battenkill Kitchen)	Competition for land from other farmers (rental) and from development (lost for good) - have to go further from home to find land
FFA Program still in schools	
EXTERNAL FACTORS	
Opportunities	Threats
Growth in specialty farming - value added, direct retail, fiber production	Fragmentation of land as house lots are sold - "death by 1,000 cuts"
Cooperative arrangements between farmers for marketing/distribution or staffing at farmer's markets	Luther Forest/AMD - potential to increase price and development of land
Methane digestion/composting/ alternative energy crops	Government regulations (primarily state and federal)
Salem hasn't yet been "found" by outsiders - an opportunity to protect agriculture while pressures are low	Younger generation is leaving town/farming and not returning
Agritourism through events like Al Fresco dinner, Cheese Tour. Diversity of ag products in Salem makes tours easy	Lack of public awareness of the realities of agriculture - manure management, traffic, equipment on roads
Huge demand for slaughterhouse in region	Lack of affordable housing for farm labor
"My land is my 401k" - how to keep value in farmland for the future while encouraging development "done right"	More land currently being rented than owned by farmers - potential is there to lose access to this land if landowners decide to sell
Connection of agriculture with music and arts community in Salem	
Capitalize on consumer interest in buying local and reducing carbon footprint	

Goals, Recommendations and Actions

GOAL: STRENGTHEN AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT THE VIABILITY OF FARMS IN SALEM AND WASHINGTON COUNTY.

The Town of Salem boasts the location of three critical agricultural infrastructure businesses for farms in eastern New York and New England – a feed mill, fertilizer company and equipment dealer. Salem’s role as a hub for agricultural infrastructure is important not only to the community itself, but to the entire region.

Cargill’s feed mill delivers animal feed to all of New England, while Salem Farm Supply covers a 100-mile radius around Salem into three states. The Town and Village should support and expand this base of infrastructure in order to maintain the viability of its farms and support a diversified tax base for the community.

“I’m 2.5 miles from equipment, 2 to feed, 2.5 to fertilizer and 5 to a livestock dealer – that’s why we call it paradise.”

- *Farmer from the Town of Salem*

Recommendations:

1. Establish a Town Agriculture Committee to promote opportunities in agriculture and lead implementation of the town’s Agricultural and Farm Viability Plan

The Town should establish an Agricultural Committee to promote and advance agriculture in Salem and be the lead party in implementation of the town’s plan. It could include current and retired farmers, agricultural business owners and farmland owners and take the lead in implementation of the town’s agricultural and farm viability plan. Additionally, the committee could provide guidance to Town Boards and Committees on the potential impacts of proposed development projects on farms in Salem.

The Committee would not have regulatory authority, but could also serve in other capacities as outlined in this plan to promote agriculture and be a voice for farmers at the county, state and federal level. The Committee could also be involved in the development of any land use policies in the future – providing guidance on the full spectrum of issues farmers face and ensuring that any such regulations place a high priority on continuing agricultural uses of land and protecting the rights of property owners. A sample Town Law establishing an Agricultural Committee can be found in the Appendix.

2. Encourage investments in agricultural businesses in Salem.

The Town and Village leadership should pursue opportunities to attract public and private incentives to agricultural businesses in Salem. Potential sources include programs such as:

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

- Agricultural Research and Development Grants
- Farmland Viability Grants

- Pride of New York

United States Department of Agriculture

- Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants
- Value Added Producer Grants

Other Funders

- New York Farm Viability Institute
- Northeast SARE
- Small Business Administration
- New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
- Hudson River Greenway

Salem should work with local farmers, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the County Department of Planning and other agency partners to invite state and federal legislators as well as agency representatives to existing farm events in Salem as well as special meetings and farm visits to discuss funding needs and opportunities.

Key funding needs identified during the plan development process include:

- High speed internet
- Value added processing included slaughterhouses
- Rail maintenance and improvements
- Marketing for agritourism events and businesses

In addition to pursuing funding opportunities, the Town and Village can work with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Washington County Department of Planning and other agencies to provide information to new and existing farm businesses on existing programs that secure low interest loans or other business development support. Such programs include the Washington County Local Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce Economic Development and programs provided through First Pioneer Farm Credit. The Town could provide links to these resources on their website.

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) is a resource that provides information on agricultural economic development. The Washington County office of CCE has historically offered technical services and grant writing assistance for local farmers and agricultural business owners through the Agricultural Economic Development Program. Salem should support full funding for this CCE program.

Finally, many farm businesses are increasingly dependent upon the internet to promote their businesses, provide information about their goods and services and in some cases market their products. High-speed internet is not available in all areas of Town. The Town could research where gaps in access currently exist and research opportunities available at the state or federal level to assist in expanding service to rural areas.

Actions:

- a. Promote efforts to attract county, state, federal and private incentives for agricultural businesses existing in or locating in Salem.
- b. Provide information on economic development programs available for agriculture through the municipal website and meetings with business owners.
- c. Support funding for Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Agriculture Economic Development Program and other economic development initiatives benefiting agriculture in Salem and Washington County.
- d. Support efforts to expand high speed internet access throughout Salem.

3. Support efforts to renovate rail infrastructure in Salem.

Several agricultural support businesses in Salem depend upon the access to rail to provide lower cost services and products to farmers in the region. While these businesses could move products via tractor-trailer, doing so would increase their cost of doing business and therefore increase the cost to the farmer. Currently, the railroad system is aging with its infrastructure limiting the maximum use of this transportation network. In addition, expansion or improvement of the infrastructure could provide new and creative opportunities for farmers to economically transport products to markets.

While it is beyond the Town's ability to directly improve the infrastructure of the Battenkill Railroad, it can lend support to efforts lead by Washington County. The Town leadership can write letters of support, make phone calls to legislators and be a proactive voice about the importance of rail infrastructure to the local economy and community.

Action:

- a. Lend support to efforts to attract local, state and federal financing to renovate rail infrastructure to Salem.

4. Support opportunities for compatible renewable energy generation on farms.

There are increasing opportunities for farms to play a role in renewable energy generation, including but not limited to methane digestion, and production of biofuel crops. These opportunities provide a new "crop" for farmers and also have the potential to reduce energy use on farms, both with the potential to increase farm viability.

This unique opportunity could be pursued with support from the Town as they work with Cornell Cooperative Extension and others to research grants and incentive programs available at the state and federal level for such construction and development. Careful community consideration should be paid in locating any possible energy generation facilities to ensure compatibility with existing land uses and proximity to working farms.

Action:

- a. Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension and others to research and pursue opportunities for renewable energy generation on farms.

GOAL: ENCOURAGE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND ACT AS AN INFORMATION RESOURCE ABOUT AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES.

There is a strong sense of community in Salem that has historically been supportive and understanding of agriculture. In addition, there are strong agricultural education programs to teach children about the science of and opportunities available in agriculture. With the age of farmers increasing, a new generation must be trained and willing to take over the farm businesses of today. And as the population continues to grow and change, a general understanding of the realities of agriculture must continue to be instilled in the community in order to ensure a future for working farms in Salem. Salem can take advantage of capable local partners to help disseminate information about agriculture – for landowners, farmers, residents and children.

Recommendations:

1. Use the Salem municipal website to distribute information for farmers and landowners and promote agriculture in Salem.

The municipal website currently serves as a clearinghouse of information about Salem for visitors and residents. Digital technology makes it very easy for the Town to provide links to current information for farmers, landowners and residents. A separate “Farm” page on the website could link to resources for farmers, including information about agricultural assessment and grant opportunities. This same page could link to resources for community members interested in learning more about agriculture, including agritourism opportunities and event information. Using the Internet would ensure that information was kept current and would capitalize on collaboration with agricultural organizations active in Washington County, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, and the Agricultural Stewardship Association.

Action:

- a. Create a farm page on the Salem municipal website highlighting the benefits that agriculture provides and important information for farmers and landowners.

2. Educate new landowners moving to the community about the agricultural nature of Salem.

New residents to the community may be attracted to the rural nature of Salem without a real understanding of the sights, sounds and smells related to working agricultural land. Currently, the Town of Salem Right-to-Farm Law requires that anyone purchasing property in Salem within a state-certified Agricultural District sign a Real Estate Disclosure Notice at the time a purchase and sale contract is signed. This notice indicates to the buyer that they are moving into a working agricultural area and makes them aware of what might be expected with that. As so much of the community is influenced by agriculture, this law could be expanded to require a Real Estate Disclosure Notice when property is purchased anywhere in the Town or Village of Salem. This may limit potential future conflicts between new landowners and farmer neighbors and help educate new comers on the agricultural nature of the community.

Actions:

- a. Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension to biannually conduct meetings with realtors in the region to discuss the Real Estate Disclosure Notice required by the Right to Farm law in Salem and confirm its appropriate implementation.
- b. Amend the Right to Farm Law to require a Real Estate Disclosure Notice whenever property is purchased in the Town or Village of Salem.
- c. Distribute the Cornell Cooperative Extension Brochure “Are You Thinking About Moving to the Country” at the Town Office and other key locations.

3. Act as a leader on issues with impact on farmers in Salem.

The Town and Village leadership should play a role in advocating whenever possible for the needs of the farmers in their community. The Agricultural Committee could work with local groups such as Washington County Farm Bureau, Agricultural Stewardship Association and others to educate Town leadership when there is an issue that warrants action.

Actions:

- a. Act as an advocate for local farmers by passing town resolutions and engaging municipal organizations to advocate for farmers in Salem and relevant issues at the county, state and federal level.

4. Support agricultural education programs to encourage the next generation of farmers and greater public appreciation of agriculture.

Salem still maintains strong traditional agricultural education programs such as an active FFA chapter in the Central School and 4-H programs offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension. In addition, new programs being offered through the Salem Historical Courthouse are increasing awareness of and exposure to agriculture for community youth. These programs help educate youth about agriculture and are critical to workforce development and the succession of farms in Salem. The students in these programs could be engaged to help implement many of the tools outlined in this Plan to further their education and participation in local agriculture.

Action:

- a. Engage FFA and 4H students in community public education about agriculture; students could work with the Town to assist with tours and events about modern farm practices.

GOAL: PROMOTE FARMS AND THE BENEFITS THAT AGRICULTURE PROVIDES TO THE COMMUNITY.

Agriculture is a driving force behind tourism in Salem. Countless agricultural tours visit farms in Salem and numerous community events showcase farm products and the heritage of this community. The Town can take a larger, more organized role in promoting farms within its boundaries, improving farm visibility and educating visitors and residents alike about the benefits that farms bring the community as a whole.

Recommendations:**1. Showcase farms in Salem and help attract visitors to the area.**

Many promotional events already occur in the Town of Salem organized by volunteer groups and affiliations of farmers, including, the Cheese Tour, the Fiber Tour, the Al Fresco Farm Tour, the Chamber's Harvest Fest and others. The Town can play a role in supporting and adding value to these existing events while also making the public more aware of opportunities to "shop locally" in Salem for agricultural products.

Cornell Cooperative Extension currently generates a farm map for all of Saratoga and Washington Counties. Participating farms must pay a modest amount to have their location and information listed in the publication. The Town should work with CCE, Salem Chamber of Commerce, County Tourism office and Agricultural Stewardship Association to expand the visibility and distribution of this map and investigate opportunities to promote Salem and Washington County as a premier farming region on tourism websites, blogs and other internet options.

Salem could also work with these partners as well as artists, historical sites and other tourism establishments in the community to evaluate the opportunities for other promotional materials about agri-tourism events and farms in Salem. Such materials could advertise local farms, farm tours and harvest festivals. Such a publication should be strategically distributed in print and online to promote farms in Town while at the same time increasing tourism to other businesses in the Town and Village.

Actions:

- a. Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension, County Tourism Office and Salem Chamber of Commerce to brand Salem and Washington County as a premier farming region and promote agri-tourism opportunities in Salem and Washington County.
- b. Actively support agri-tourism events that bring visitors to Salem by investigating funding from Hudson River Greenway and other potential funders for tourism events and evaluating the extension of municipal liability insurance coverage or use of town equipment for seasonal events.
- c. Insure that Salem's land use regulations and other policies support the creation or expansion of Bed and Breakfasts or other tourism improvements that are compatible with agriculture and encourage visitors to spend more time in Salem and Washington County.

2. Visually identify Salem as an "Agricultural Community".

While Salem has "Right-to-Farm" signs upon entering the community, many residents and guests may not know what that means. While education is clearly necessary on what it means to have a Town Right-to-Farm Law, the Town could post signs at key entrances to the community advertising that clearly and positively identify Salem as a proud farming community and signify the importance of farms. Such signage should be consistent with other agritourism promotions and would have the dual benefit of

enhancing regional agritourism efforts as well as raise the awareness of residents and visitors that agriculture is supported in Salem as a business and a land use.

Actions:

- a. Create signs for display on gateway routes into Salem that identify the community as a proud farming community with an economy, history and landscape closely connected with agriculture.

3. Quantify the economic importance of agriculture to Salem and Washington County.

Beyond tourism and the scenic vistas it provides, agriculture is a mainstay of the economy of Salem. It has value as a supplier of jobs and payer of public services through taxes. Residents may not understand the financial contribution that farms and farmland provides to the community. For example, research shows that farmland pays more in taxes than it demands in services like schools and fire or emergency when compared to residential uses. The intrinsic value of farmland is often well understood, but education as to its economic value may be beneficial in promoting agriculture as an important land use in the community. In addition, residents are often largely unaware of the economic realities that face farmers in their daily businesses. Education about the challenges faced on farm may increase local purchasing and support of other recommendations in this plan.

Actions:

- a. Encourage Washington County to update its Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan and quantify the economic impact of agriculture to the county.
- b. Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Salem Chamber of Commerce and other partners to document the economic value of farms in Salem in terms of jobs and contributions to the local tax base and promote this information.

GOAL. PREPARE TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF NEW DEVELOPMENT ON AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY.

Currently, farmers in Salem don't feel significant development pressure. When quality agricultural land goes up for sale, in most cases a farmer purchases the property. There is recognition, however, that the quiet real estate market currently existing in Salem could change very quickly, especially given the development of the Luther Forest Tech Park across the river in Malta, NY. This goal seeks to identify tools that can be considered if or when residential development pressure threatens the viability of farms in Salem.

Recommendation:

5. Secure a voice for farmers in land use decisions.

To date, farmers have often been involved on Town Boards and Committees that handle decisions. The Town should support the goal of maintaining at least one agricultural representative on such boards as the Planning Board and the Town Board. Such a goal will ensure that farmers and agricultural business owners continue to play an active role in land use decisions. In addition, Boards will benefit from the input provided by such members on how land use decisions may impact neighboring agricultural uses.

Actions:

- a. Support a goal to have an agricultural representative on all Town Boards and Committees.

6. Quantify the costs of new development.

Developers are often quick to site the positive economic benefits of new residential or commercial development; including an increase in tax income or increase in potential customers for local businesses. New residential or commercial development will also have negative impacts on the community in terms of the quantity of services required, the volume of traffic on roads and other impacts. These effects will have impacts on farms in Salem and should be considered when approving new proposed subdivisions.

Actions:

- a. Require a cost analysis as part of major subdivision process including, but not limited to: increase in school age children, increase in traffic and public service usage.

7. Educate farmers and landowners on programs available to provide property tax relief and protect land from development, including the Agricultural District law and Purchase of Development Rights.

The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) is a voluntary method of private land conservation that pays landowners to permanently protect their land for agriculture. The land is protected by way of an agricultural conservation easement that runs with the deed to the property and permanently extinguishes the right to develop the property for non-agricultural uses. In exchange for this, landowners are compensated for the value of the development rights. Value is determined by way of two appraisals – one of the property at its fair market value and one as if the restrictions were in place. The difference between the appraisals represents the value of the development rights.

Most farmers interviewed were not interested in the use of permanent conservation easements to liquidate equity held in their land while protecting the property for future generations. However, many also indicated that they did not fully understand the logistics of the program. Currently, the Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA), a land trust dedicated to protecting working landscapes in Washington and Rensselaer Counties, holds workshops on farmland protection tools and provides information to agricultural landowners. This education is key towards making landowners aware of their options for their land, now and in the future.

In addition, there are two large Agricultural Districts in Salem that provide many Right-to-Farm the benefits of which landowners may be largely unaware. Such educational workshops could also cover the benefits of Agricultural Districts and the Right-to-Farm law.

Action:

- a. Work with the Agricultural Stewardship Association to educate landowners in Salem about agricultural conservation easements and options for permanently protecting farmland;
- b. Distribute the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets publication “Farms for the Future: An Overview of New York’s Farmland Protection Programs” and other resources about farmland protection options at key community locations and online on the Salem municipal website.

8. Ensure land use policies continue to remain farm-friendly.

Currently, most farmers and landowners interviewed and at public meetings were not interested in the use of further land use regulations, such as zoning, to protect farmland or farm businesses. However, community members recognize that zoning may be discussed as an option for the community in the future.

This plan acknowledges that if zoning is pursued as a tool, the process that develops it is critical to its success in supporting farm businesses. The process must be inclusive and engage farmers and other agricultural stakeholders early and often. For example, the steering committee for its development should include significant representation of farmers, landowners and agri-business members.

In addition, at least one public meeting to discuss any proposed change in land use regulation should be held sometime during the months of December – March to ensure optimal farmer participation. Any proposed development of land use regulations should be public, with posting of meetings provided in all local newspapers and through mailings to farmers and landowners. Defining the process will ensure that farmers and agricultural landowners will have ample opportunities to participate in the development of zoning, should that ever occur.

In addition, all zoning and subdivision regulations must be based on a Comprehensive Plan. Adopting this plan as part of the updated Town of Salem Comprehensive Plan makes a strong statement about the importance of agriculture and the efforts of the Town to support it. This can guide future regulations, as they cannot be in contradiction with the goals and recommendations of a Comprehensive Plan.

Action:

- a. Adopt the Agriculture and Farm Viability Plan as part of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan and Village General Development Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY LEVEL	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
Establish a Town Agriculture Committee	High	Town Board
Encourage investments in agricultural businesses in Salem	High	Ag Committee, Town Board, Cooperative Extension
Support efforts to renovate rail infrastructure in Salem	High	Ag Committee, Town Board
Research opportunities for renewable energy generation, as compatible with farm operations	Medium	Cooperative Extension, Ag Committee
Use the Salem municipal website to distribute information for farmers and landowners and promote agriculture in Salem	High	Chamber of Commerce, Ag Committee
Educate new landowners moving to the community about the agricultural nature of Salem	High	Cooperative Extension, Ag Committee
Support agricultural education programs	Low	Ag Committee
Promote farms in Salem and bring visitors to the region	High	Ag Committee
Visually identify Salem as an "Agricultural Community"	Medium	Ag Committee
Quantify the economic importance of agriculture to Salem and Washington County	Low	Ag Committee, Washington County AFPB
Act as a leader on issues with impact on farmers in Salem	Medium	Town Board, Ag Committee
Secure a voice for farmers in land use decisions	Medium	Town Board
Quantify the costs of new development	Low	Town Board, Planning Board
Educate farmers and landowners on programs available to provide property tax relief and protect land	Medium	Ag Committee, Assessor, ASA
Ensure land use policies continue to be farm friendly.	High	Town Board, Ag Committee

APPENDICES