



Farmland Protection

Assessment Worksheet



Community Environmental Management

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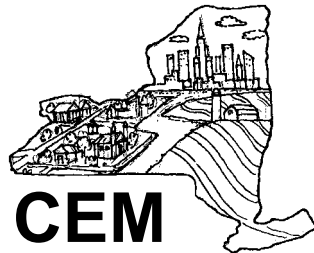
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Introduction

Why Save Farmland?*

Fertile soils take thousands of years to develop. Creating them takes a combination of climate, geology, biology and good luck. So far, no one has found a way to manufacture them. Thus, productive agricultural land is a finite and irreplaceable natural resource.

Agricultural land also supplies products with little market value, but enormous cultural and ecological importance. Some are more immediate, such as social heritage, scenic views, open space and community character. Long-range environmental benefits include wildlife habitat, clean air and water, flood control, groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration.

Yet, despite its importance to individual communities, the nation and the world, our farmland is at risk. It is imperiled by poorly planned development, especially in urban influenced areas, and by the complex forces driving conversion.

Agricultural land is desirable for building because it tends to be flat, well drained and generally is more affordable to developers than to farmers. As a result much more farmland is being converted than is necessary to provide housing for a growing population.

Fiscal & Economic Stability

Saving farmland is an investment in community infrastructure and economic development. In addition, distinctive agricultural landscapes are often magnets for tourism.

Agriculture contributes to local economies directly through sales, job creation, support services and businesses, and also by supplying lucrative secondary markets such as food processing. Planning for agriculture and protecting farmland provide flexibility for growth and development, offering a buffer against fragmented suburban development while supporting a diversified economic base.

Development imposes direct costs to communities, as well as indirect costs associated with the loss of rural lands and open space. Privately owned and managed agricultural land generates more in local tax revenues than it costs in services. Studies on municipal tax bills find that tax bills generally go up as communities become more developed. Even those communities with the most taxable commercial and industrial properties have higher-than-average taxes. Local governments are discovering that they cannot afford to pay the price of unplanned development.

* Condensed from American Farmland Trust Fact Sheet, *Why Save Farmland*, May 2002.

Environmental Quality

Well-managed agricultural land supplies important non-market goods and services. Farmlands provide food and cover for wildlife, help control flooding, protect wetlands and watersheds, and maintain air quality. They can absorb and filter wastewater and provide groundwater recharge. New energy crops even have the potential to replace fossil fuels.

Converting farmland to development has detrimental long-term impacts on environmental quality. Water pollution from urban development is well documented. Development increases pollution of rivers and streams, as well as the risk of flooding. Paved roads and roofs collect and pass stormwater directly into drains instead of filtering it naturally through the soil. Septic systems for low-density subdivisions can add untreated wastes to surface water and groundwater, potentially yielding higher nutrient loads than livestock operations. Development often produces more sediment and heavy metal contamination than farming does and increases pollutants such as road salt, oil leaks from automobiles and runoff from lawn chemicals that can lead to groundwater contamination. It also decreases recharge of aquifers, lowers drinking water quality and reduces biodiversity in streams. Urban development is a significant cause of wetland loss.

Increased use of automobiles leads to traffic congestion and air pollution. Development fragments and often destroys wildlife habitat, and fragmentation is considered a principal threat to biodiversity. Keeping land available for agriculture while improving farm management practices offers the greatest potential to produce or regain environmental and social benefits while minimizing negative impacts. From wetland management to on-farm composting for municipalities, farmers are finding ways to improve environmental quality.

Heritage & Community Character

To many people, the most compelling reasons for saving farmland are local and personal, and much of the political support for farmland protection is driven by grassroots community efforts. Sometimes the most important qualities are hardest to quantify – such as local heritage and sense of place. Farmland maintains scenic, cultural and historic landscapes. Their managed open spaces provide beautiful views and opportunities for hunting and fishing, horseback riding, skiing, dirt-biking and other recreational activities. Farms create identifiable and unique community character and add to the quality of life.

Finally, farming is an integral part of our heritage and our identity as a people. The ongoing relationship with the agricultural landscape connects us to our history and to the natural world. Our land is our legacy, both as we look back to the past and as we consider what we have of value to pass on to future generations. Public awareness of the multiple benefits of working lands has led to greater community appreciation of the importance of keeping land open for fiscal, economic and environmental reasons. As a result, people increasingly are challenging the perspective that new development is necessarily the most desirable use of agricultural land, especially in rural communities and communities undergoing transition from rural to suburban.

How This Worksheet Can Be Used To Assist A Community

This farmland protection worksheet can be used to help a community:

- 1) More fully understand farmland protection concepts and options
- 2) Assess where they are relative to implementing an effective farmland protection program
- 3) Identify farmland protection needs
- 4) Begin to map out a farmland protection strategy for the community based on where they are today

The worksheet includes:

Part 1 - Community Risk Assessment Factors

The more factors the community checks, the more prepared they will be to reduce the amount of farmland being lost.

Part 2 - Community Problems & Needs Assessment

This section assists communities in focusing on specific problems associated with the loss of farmland, the causes of the problems and the impacts. This part also enables a community to evaluate its capacity to address farmland protection through the identification of barriers it faces in implementing one option or another, and it allows for identification of assistance needed to overcome a specific barrier or obstacle.

Additional Resources

Technical References:

The following reference materials are also available to assist communities in New York State with their farmland protection efforts:

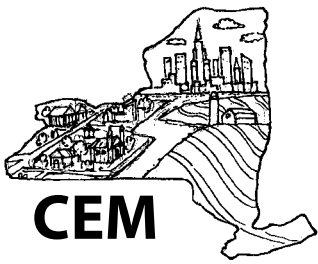
- 1) *Farming on the Edge: Sprawling Development Threatens America's Best Farmland*, American Farmland Trust, Washington, DC – 2002
- 2) *Action Guide: Agricultural & Farmland Protection for New York*, American Farmland Trust, Saratoga Springs, NY – 2000
- 3) *Saving American Farmland: What Works*, American Farmland Trust, Washington, DC – 1997
- 4) *Farmland Protection: Options for the 1990's*, Empire State Chapter Soil & Water Conservation Society, Syracuse, NY – 1991
- 5) *Disappearing Farmlands: A Citizens Guide to Agricultural Land Preservation*, National Association of Counties Research Foundation, Washington, DC – 1980

Funding Assistance:

- NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets
 - State Agricultural and Farmland Protection Planning Grants for developing County Farmland Protection Plans.
 - Purchase of Development Rights Grants pay farmland owners for permanently protecting the land for agriculture.
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - Farmland Protection Program provides matching funds to State, Tribal or local governments and non-governmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements.

Websites:

- American Farmland Trust
www.farmland.org
- NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets
www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/agsservices/farmprotect.html
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmland/2002/



Community Environmental Management

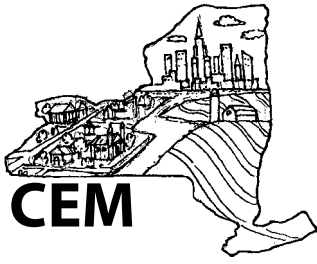
- Farmland Protection Worksheet -

Part 1- Community Risk Assessment Factors

The following is a list of assessment factors communities can use to evaluate the health of agriculture within their community and their ability to support and retain farmland. The more factors that pertain to your community, the more prepared your community will be to reduce adverse environmental, social or economic impacts from the future loss of farmland.

Please check those factors that reflect the current status of agriculture in your community.

- The public understands the importance of maintaining a viable agricultural industry in their community
- The community supports preventing the loss of their best farmland through effective planning and smart growth that directs development to less productive land
- There is limited potential for farmland being converted to non-farm uses
- Most of the farmland being converted to non-farm uses is considered marginally suited for agriculture
- Existing or planned sewer and water services do not extend onto farmland
- The community's comprehensive land use plan addresses the need to protect and retain prime and important farmland
- Incentives are provided to keep land in agriculture
- Farmland is taxed at its agricultural value, instead of its potential for development
- Agriculture is included in local economic development plans
- Farmers have been made aware of the options they have besides selling their farmland for development
- Most of the farmland in the community/watershed is enrolled in agricultural districts
- The community has attempted to minimize conflicts between farms and other rural residents
- Farmers are participating in the State's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program that encourages farming practices that enhance the environmental benefits of farmland
- A large percentage of land being farmed is owned by those farming and rented farmland involves long term leases that are based on a conservation plan
- Farmers are or are planning to expand or make long -term investments in their farms
- There is high potential for intergenerational transfer of farm ownership



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Part 2 – Problem & Needs Assessment

This assessment will help determine how the loss of farmland is impacting your community and your community’s capacity for addressing these impacts.

Problems Associated with Loss of Farmland	Causes	Impacts	Remedial & Preventative Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Loss of open space amenities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unplanned or poorly planned suburban development (sprawl) 2. Local officials and the public believe farmland loss is inevitable and make no effort to mitigate the potential for loss 3. Public works projects (ex: post offices, schools) built on prime ag land when other alternatives exist 	<p>Check those impacts that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Loss of the most productive ag soils as these soils are also the most suitable to build on – Increased property tax assessments due to leap frog development increasing the cost of providing public services – Loss of groundwater recharge due to increase in paved areas – Increased land use conflicts as homes are built next to farmland – Increased nonpoint source pollution impacts due to stormwater runoff – Loss of community heritage and sense of place – Loss of wildlife habitat and biodiversity – Loss of outdoor recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing etc. – Loss of scenic vistas 	<p>Strategy: Develop a farmland protection plan for your community</p> <hr/> <p>Strategy: Increase public awareness of the importance of maintaining a viable ag industry within their community</p>

Management Options (Indicate with a "✓" if community has implemented or use a "?" if community is interested)	Barriers to Implementation	Community Assistance Needs¹
<p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Form an ag protection task force or committee to design a package of conservation techniques to protect farmland and sustain agriculture — Conduct a technical analysis of the local farmland status including soil types and land usage to help determine which kinds of farmland should be preserved — Review planning and zoning ordinances; make adjustments and pass reforms that address the needs of agriculture — Coordinate local farmland preservation tools so local policies don't work at cross purposes (ex: ag. zoning can be undercut if the local capital improvement plan calls for the extension of sewer and water lines into prime farming areas) — Provide for a flexible balance between preservation of farmland and the development of housing and industry (It's not the extent of development that undermines local agriculture initially, as much as "leapfrog" or "checkerboard" type development that leads to a domino effect) 		
<p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Help the public understand the multiple benefits of agriculture to a community's quality of life using the AEM Ag & the Community Worksheet — Prepare a historical view of the land and people of a community to help the public understand their local heritage and develop a sense of place — Conduct an analysis to compare the cost of community (public) services required by ag land versus developed areas and the potential long-term fiscal impacts if extensive ag land is converted to urban uses. 		

¹ List assistance needed: info/education, assessment/planning, BMP design/implementation, regulatory options, project funding, etc.

Problems Associated with Loss of Farmland	Causes	Impacts	Remedial & Preventative Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Erosion of the local ag economy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decline in ag support infrastructure 2. More marginal ag land being farmed 3. Less ag land being owned by farmers reducing the land available to sustain existing farms 4. Neighbor complaints and lawsuits regarding routine farm operations 5. Communities enacting ordinances to restrict ag activities 	<p>Check those impacts that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Farmers stop reinvesting in their farms — Farmers have to travel greater distances for supplies and equipment repairs — Farming marginal ag land results in more negative environmental impact and requires more conservation investment — Reduced ability to grow fresh local food increasing dependence on imported ag products — Farmers feel unwelcome in their own community 	<p>Strategy: Support farming and encourage its economic viability</p> <hr/> <p>Strategy: Minimize conflicts between farmers and other rural residents</p>

<p align="center">Management Options</p> <p align="center">Indicate with a "√" if community has implemented or use a "?" if community is interested</p>	<p align="center">Barriers to Implementation</p>	<p align="center">Community Assistance Needs</p>
<p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Offer technical assistance to farmers in marketing and promotion. — Permit roadside stands, greenhouses and pick-your-own operations. — Allow seasonal operations to use off-site signs to attract customers. — Establish a local farmers market. — Promote agritourism. — Include agriculture in local economic development plans. — Extend economic incentives to improve ag support industries and encourage new ones. — Increase farmer awareness of the options they have besides selling their farmland for development. 		
<p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Establish agricultural protection zones. — Encourage farmers to conduct an environmental assessment of their farms (AEM) and support conservation programs that share the costs with farmers who provide ecological goods and services such as wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge and scenic open space. — Require setbacks on adjacent residentially zoned land — Require agricultural nuisance notices as part of real estate transfers. 		

