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*Creating an*  
***Agricultural Commission***  
*in Your Hometown*

*by Lorraine Stuart Merrill*  
***NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture***

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UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



# What is an Agricultural Commission?

The purpose of an agricultural commission is to protect agricultural lands, preserve rural character, provide a voice for farmers, and encourage agriculture-based businesses. For years New Hampshire farmers have served as stewards of land and water resources, and provided habitat for native plants and animals. As New Hampshire communities grow and change, citizens are looking for ways to support local farms, and foster new ones.

Agricultural commissions are a new idea for New Hampshire municipalities seeking to balance growth and quality of life issues, and preserve local character. A New Hampshire town or city may choose to establish an agricultural commission to promote, enhance and encourage the interests of farming, agricultural resources and rural aspects of community life. Citizens can use an agricultural commission to help keep farming viable and vibrant in their community, whether rural, small town, suburban or urban. **An agricultural commission gives farming a voice, but is *not* regulatory.**

Establishing an agricultural commission is an option for communities that value their local farms and rural character, keeping land in open space and healthy, locally-produced foods. An agricultural commission has no regulatory or enforcement authority. In general, an agricultural commission serves a similar role for local agriculture as a heritage commission for historical resources, or as the non-regulatory aspect of a conservation commission for natural resources. Heritage and conservation commissions, and other municipal boards, may spend some time on agricultural issues, but they also have many other responsibilities that prevent them from concentrating on agriculture.

An agricultural commission focuses primarily on agriculture. It will typically work cooperatively with other town or city governing and land use boards and commissions to make sure the concerns and interests of farmers are better understood and considered in their decision-making processes. An agricultural commission may:



- Advise and work with other boards and commissions on issues facing farming in the town,
- Conduct inventories of agricultural resources,
- Conduct inventories of historic farms and farm buildings,
- Educate the public on matters relating to farming and agriculture,
- Serve as a local voice advocating for farmers, farm businesses and farm interests,
- Provide visibility for farming,
- Give farmers a place to go to for help,
- Help resolve farm-related problems or conflicts, and
- Help protect farmland and other natural resources.

boards, and enhancing the value of agriculture in the public mind as an essential component of the local quality of life.

The NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture, an informal network of farmers, agricultural, environmental and historic preservation organizations, government agencies, UNH Cooperative Extension, and others committed to sustaining agriculture in the state, is working to make New Hampshire citizens aware of this new tool for sustaining agriculture in their own communities.

In 2006, the NH Farm Viability Task Force, created by the legislature and appointed by the Governor, included establishment of agricultural commissions as one of 10 key recommendations.



Photo Jean Jennings

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### Where did the idea come from?

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The idea of creating of local agricultural commissions was pioneered by residents of urbanizing communities in Massachusetts, Washington, and California who valued and wanted to cultivate their agricultural heritage and resources. In these states, such commissions gained acceptance and became an important voice for agriculture. These areas confronted many of the same challenges facing New Hampshire: towns with a strong sense of community and desire to preserve rural character, experiencing rapid population increases and rising land values. Rather than allow agriculture to be pushed from their towns, these pioneers found a way to promote the interests of agriculture through public education, contributing input to town governing and land use

“Local Agricultural Commissions can be the voice of agriculture in each municipality. They would ensure that agriculture remains in their town by identifying barriers to the viability of



Photo Jean Jennings

farming, such as local regulations or ordinances,” the Task Force concluded. The goal of this recommendation is to “create local agricultural champions who promote farms and offer advice to other town boards on how to encourage towns to be farm-friendly.”

Each community may choose to adopt an agricultural commission. Typically, selectmen or town or city councilors appoint members representing the principal elements of the local agricultural community and agricultural businesses, by geography, commodity and size of farm. An agricultural commission may include other supporters of farming and land preservation as well as people who also serve on other town boards and commissions, such as the planning board or conservation commission. This can facilitate communication among town leaders about ways to enhance agriculture, and provide opportunities for education and informed debate on proposed local ordinances that may affect agriculture.

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### What does a commission do?

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Agricultural commissions do not have any enforcement powers or regulatory authority. Their role is to advise other town boards and advocate for farming.

Agricultural commissions serve as an information bridge between farm businesses and the non-farm public. For example, the planning board may draft an amendment to the town zoning ordinance regulating signs. The agricultural commission can advise the planning board of potential impacts on farm businesses, and recommend ways the ordinance could be written to assist farm businesses, such as allowing temporary signs for seasonal crops.

## Town of Lee NH Agricultural Committee

A group of farmers in Lee, a community of about 4,400 people in Strafford County, located in New Hampshire’s rapidly growing Seacoast region, began meeting informally in the late 1990s. Laura Gund, an early organizer, says they first came together to try to change some local ordinances. Although that effort did not bear fruit, the same group got together again when the town began working on a new master plan. About 20 farmers and other residents with an interest in local agriculture met one to two times a month from 2004 through 2005 to develop a strong master plan section on agriculture. Results include an updated definition of agriculture, a local Right-To-Farm ordinance, and more. “The whole package passed; agriculture is very supported in Lee,” reports Gund.

The informal group decided that they wanted to become an official town committee. Selectmen approved the creation of the Lee Agricultural Committee in 2006. Since nearly all members wanted to continue to serve, selectmen appointed nine members and nine alternates. Members represent the diversity of agricultural entrepreneurs in town, by age, gender, and size and type of farm. A few members are not farmers, but strong supporters of agriculture. Gund says these members help the farmers in the group to better understand the perspectives of their non-farming neighbors.

The committee meets monthly, has undertaken an ambitious agenda, and plans to seek a budget appropriation. They started a highly successful farmers’ market on town-owned land in 2006, and are working on a long-term project to develop a year-round cooperative market. The committee is working on a sign ordinance to allow seasonal signs to advertise farm produce and services. The committee counts over 80 agricultural enterprises in town, from backyard horses and small horticultural businesses to a 150-cow dairy farm and a vineyard/winery.



Photo: Josh Jennings



Actions by town boards that unduly restrict farm businesses are often taken without specific consideration of consequences to farmers. Agricultural commissions provide a positive way for the governing bodies of the town to consider the effects on agriculture before taking action.

Other potential activities of an agricultural commission may include:

- Publicizing farm retail outlets in the town
- Fundraising for farmland protection and economic development
- Providing mediation and conflict resolution on farm-related disputes
- Collaborating with other town boards to review development proposals
- Holding educational workshops on intergenerational transfer of property
- Conducting an inventory of farms and barns
- Discussing state and federal grant and land protection programs
- Starting local farmers' markets
- Obtaining technical assistance on conservation easement planning, woodlot management, nutrient management, environmental stewardship, and non-point source pollution management
- Adopting local Right-To-Farm bylaws
- Hosting farm festivals
- And much, much more.



Photo Caroline Robinson

## Getting started

Agricultural commissions provide a mechanism for towns to take positive action to remain or become more farm-friendly. Assuring that voters understand and support the concept before the town votes to establish an agricultural commission requires considerable preparation and groundwork.

Any local resident or group interested in farming, farm businesses, growth, rural character, open space, and related issues in their community, can start organizing support for an agricultural commission. There is no one formula to assure a town will adopt an agricultural commission, but towns that have organized agricultural commissions usually follow these steps:

1. Individuals or groups express interest in an agricultural commission and one or two people agree to coordinate organizational tasks.
2. In some towns, one of the first tasks is building a case that the town has agricultural enterprises in need of a voice. Many towns overlook agricultural businesses, assuming that greenhouse growers, Christmas tree growers, hay producers, or pick-your-own berry or flower growers are somehow not really farms.
3. Organizers of an agricultural commission should consider making a preliminary inventory of



Photo Caroline Robinson

## Hatfield MA Agricultural Commission

When residents of the small Connecticut River Valley town of Hatfield, MA began updating their town master plan in 1999, a survey revealed that farming and farmland were among the activities and features valued most by its citizens. Ninety-seven percent of respondents value the continuation of farming in their town. To help support that goal, the 2001 master plan recommended creation of an agricultural advisory commission. Within months, voters approved the new five-member commission. Three members must be engaged in the business of farming or related agricultural industries, and one must also serve on the Hatfield Land Preservation Advisory Committee.

In its first year the Hatfield Agricultural Commission sponsored two seminars on state, federal and private farm support and farmland protection programs, one for farm and forest land owners and one for town officials. Working with the select board and public works department, the commission developed a proposal for agricultural water rates for farm operations, which has been implemented.

The town passed a Right-To-Farm bylaw proposed by the commission, and as a reminder prints it on a strip of paper enclosed in the mailing of annual census forms. In March 2005, the commission held its first "Forum for Farmers," an opportunity for farmers in town to meet with representatives of various town boards and departments to ask questions and discuss issues. Issues raised at the meeting included the need for "Go Slow, Farm Vehicle" road signs around town (four have been installed), providing public education on Integrated Pest Management programs, and better notification of the new agricultural water rates. The commission has published "Hatfield's Farms," a popular brochure listing the town's farms and farmstands.

Of all the commission's activities, the Mural Project has perhaps made the greatest impression. With a seed grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and strong support of numerous local businesses, the commission partnered with the town's high school art program to produce an 18' X 48' outdoor mural depicting farm scenes, activities, and farmers in town. The first mural, displayed on a barn in a prominent location along a main road, was unveiled in late May, 2005, to wide acclaim and featured in numerous local press accounts. The mural remained on display throughout the summer months and then was moved to the town's farm museum for permanent display. In 2006, the Cultural Council provided a second grant for a new mural that was unveiled in July. Support for the murals is very high in town and the high school art department is very anxious to produce new installations each year for the foreseeable future. The plan is to permanently display the murals on various barns around town.

agricultural operations in their town to generate data about the number, size, scope and diversity of farm businesses and services in town. This will help to identify a "farmer network" of potential supporters.

4. Talk with farmers, community decision makers, residents, boards and committees to assess and build interest in creating an agricultural commission.
5. Gather support from farmers and town leaders for a public exploratory and informational meeting about organizing an agricultural commission.
6. An agricultural commission exploratory meeting helps determine if creating an agricultural commission is a good idea for the community.
  - Invite farmers directly, and invite residents and the public through postings, press releases and community newsletters.
  - Have knowledgeable people or members of established agricultural commissions speak about the purpose and activities of these commissions, and how the community benefits.
  - Ask an active farmer, town administrator and/or selectman to facilitate the meeting.
  - Following the presentations and opportunity for questions and answers, the facilitator should ask the audience: Is an agricultural commission a good idea for our town? Do you think we should organize an agricultural commission?



Hatfield Agricultural Advisory Commission  
Smith Academy Art Students



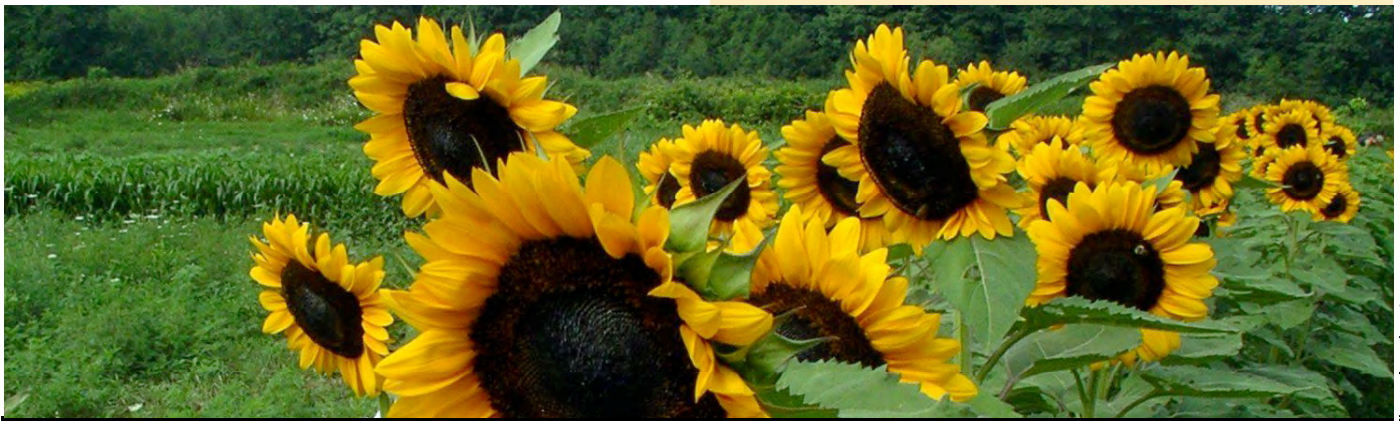
- The facilitator then asks for volunteers to serve on a steering committee to develop an article to establish an agricultural commission for the town meeting warrant, and educate voters and town officials about the article and its benefits.
7. The steering committee volunteers convene to agree on a date, place, and time to meet. Include representatives on the steering committee from the board of selectmen or council, and staff such as administrator, planner, or health officer.
  8. Typical steering committee work includes:
    - selecting a chair
    - meeting all deadlines and requirements and drafting a warrant article or council motion for review by town counsel and submission to the board of selectmen or town or city council
    - developing and implementing a public education plan for the agricultural commission vote
  9. The article is presented at town meeting for discussion, questions, and vote.
  10. Selectmen solicit applications for agricultural commission membership. Often the selectmen, the appointing authority, will seek advice on appointments from the steering committee.
  11. Selectmen notify members in writing, with list of all members' addresses and phone numbers, and charges them to meet within a certain date.
  12. Selectmen may facilitate the first meeting of the appointed agricultural commission membership.

## Rehoboth MA Agricultural Commission

Located just 10 miles east of Providence, RI, Rehoboth, MA is a town whose agricultural heritage extends back to the 1640s. With a population of 11,000, the town still retains much rural character. However, Rehoboth is under the greatest development pressure of all Southeastern Massachusetts Regional Planning Authority communities. Barbara Link, a transplanted landscape architect and land planner, found in Rehoboth the ideal place to start her Agraria Farm. But the conversion of countryside to sprawl development reminds her all too much of growing up in Fairfield County, CT in the 1950s. Link found that many residents shared her concerns "for the sprawl creeping through town, eating up farms." Yet the large number and variety of farms were not respected as businesses in town, she says, nor valued for the economic benefits they provide.

When Rehoboth decided to pursue forming an agricultural commission, Link says it helped to find out what other towns were doing. "We saw the vibrancy among the farmers, and the return of hope," she says. Still, she cautions, communications involved in an effective commission are quite complex. "The last thing you need is another do-nothing commission or failure." Resource people in different regions of the state are providing training in communication and negotiation skills to Massachusetts agricultural commission members.

Rehoboth established its agricultural commission in 2003, and has since passed a Right-To-Farm bylaw and put together an agricultural preservation council to coordinate planning and funding for farmland protection. Link says their agricultural commission has brought farmers together to share information and work together for a stronger voice in town affairs. Perhaps most importantly, farmers and farming are now viewed much more seriously. "We showed people that farmers have some political currency. We've stood up to pressure, and educated the community," she says. "We're putting farmers back in the face of Rehoboth as a community. People are mindful that it is a farming community. Developers are now very mindful of farmers, and farmers realize they have options besides selling to developers."





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## How commissions work

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Members attend meetings regularly, and serve to fulfill the purpose of the agricultural commission as stated in the ordinance. (Example: serve as facilitators for encouraging the pursuit of agriculture and promote agriculture-based economic opportunities in the town.) Members report on issues of concern, serve on subcommittees, vote and conduct business based on Robert's Rules of Order.

Alternate members attend meetings regularly and vote in the absence of a regular member. Alternates and other participants, often referred to as advisors and circle of friends, play a key part in the success of the commission. Several established agricultural commissions have found these positions extremely helpful.

Advisors are volunteers who serve at the request of the agricultural commission members. They attend meetings and provide information, expertise and recommendations to help guide the work of the agricultural commission. They may also provide clerical and organizational assistance, help members navigate local politics, advise agricultural commission members on connecting with agricultural service providers, and help plan meetings, social events and public education events. Seeking the involvement and contributions of individuals who are interested in agriculture is very important.

Circle of Friends are people in the community (or connected to the community) who possess particular skills, experience and abilities that can help the agricultural commission achieve its goals. Friends of agriculture, including graphic artists, legal counsel, soil scientists and journalists, are honored to be asked for help when the task is well-defined, short-term and achievable.



Photo Lorraine Stuart Merrill



Electing officers is one of the first responsibilities of a newly organized agricultural commission. Officers lead the commission through meetings, public events and community relations. Suggested roles and responsibilities for officers:

*Chair*

- Preside at all meetings of the commission.
- Conduct all meetings with openness, efficiency and respect. Conduct business according to Roberts Rules of Order and the state's open meeting laws.



Photo Penny Verret

- Call special meetings as needed.
- Sign documents prepared by the commission for submission to the board of selectmen or other town boards and commissions.
- See that decisions of the commission are implemented.
- Represent the commission in dealings with the board of selectmen and other boards and organizations.
- Exercise the same right as any other member to

vote on matters before the commission and to speak for or against proposals, provided that the chair speaks for or against a proposal that has been formally moved and seconded at a public meeting.

*Vice-Chair*

- Assist the chair as requested.
- Accept and undertake duties delegated by the chair.
- Preside over meetings or perform other duties of the chair in the event the chair is absent or unable to act.

*Secretary*

- Record minutes of commission meetings.
- Provide notices of special meetings.
- See that all meetings are posted in the same places as those of other town or city boards.
- Prepare agendas for meetings in consultation with the chair and members.



Photo Josh Jennings

- Serve as custodian for minutes and records.
- Receive and inform the commission of correspondence or directives concerning business of the commission.
- See that the town clerk or town administrator receives copies of minutes.

#### *Treasurer*

- Maintain records of commission budget, income, and expenditures.



Photo Caroline Robinson

### **Develop a Plan of Work**

Each local agricultural commission determines its own plan of work, often seeking advice and input from members of the farm community as well as others in the community interested in a vibrant local agriculture. The following examples of how agricultural commissions may approach

their plans of work are from Massachusetts towns.

#### **Town of Westport (2001)**

*Said Commission shall serve as facilitators for encouraging the pursuit of agriculture in the town of Westport, and shall promote agricultural-based economic opportunities in the Town.*

#### **Town of Rehoboth (2003)**

*Said Commission once appointed shall develop a work plan to guide its activities. Such activities include, but are not limited, to the following: shall serve as facilitators for encouraging the pursuit of agriculture in Rehoboth; shall promote agricultural-based economic opportunities in Town; shall act as mediators, advocates, educators, and/or negotiators on farming issues; shall work for preservation of prime agricultural lands; and shall pursue all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community.*

#### **Town of Hatfield (2001)**

*The duties and responsibilities of the commission shall include, but not be limited to:*

- 1) Advising the Hatfield Land Preservation Advisory Committee on transactions and acquisitions involving agricultural lands in town;*
- 2) Advising the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and Historic Commission on projects and activities involving agricultural lands in town;*
- 3) Engaging in projects and activities to promote the business of farming, farming activities and traditions, and farmland protection in town including educational programs and community events;*
- 4) Reporting on its projects and activities on an annual basis within the Town Report.*



Agricultural commissions often form subcommittees that may include other volunteers to implement the plan of work. Here are examples of efforts undertaken by commissions.

- Prepare an inventory of agriculture to help residents appreciate the diversity, scope and economic contributions of farming in their town, and to identify agricultural and natural resources, such as protected lands, under farm stewardship.
- Build relationships with town boards to help increase mutual understanding of the mission and authority of all town boards and commissions, build trust and credibility, facilitate effective communication and education efforts, help manage and reduce conflict, and allow collaboration on changes in planning, zoning, health and finance that positively affect agriculture.
- Educate the public, new residents, town boards and youth about the people, businesses and lifestyles associated with farming to help make agriculture more visible in the community, and to increase awareness of issues related to retaining farm families, farmland and farm businesses. Increased knowledge can result in more informed decisions.
- Manage and resolve conflicts within the community. The Dartmouth, MA Agricultural Commission designates one member as the contact person when issues arise, and has developed a conflict-resolution protocol.
- Adopt a local Right-To-Farm ordinance to reinforce community support and awareness of the NH Right-to-Farm Law (RSA 432:32-35) and the NH definition of agriculture (RSA 21:34A).
- Perform farmland protection activities, including the promotion of planning and zoning that supports agricultural land and businesses. Commissions can learn about state, federal and non-profit programs to protect farmland, and work with landowners, local conservation commissions, conservation districts and other agencies to conserve farmland.

- Use the NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture publication “Preserving Rural Character Through Agriculture: A Resource Kit for Planners” as a tool for finding ways to help the town to become more farm-friendly.

### **Establish a Budget**

Funds and an operating budget are needed to accomplish the work of an agricultural commission, just as most town standing committees have a line item budget. Agricultural commission budgets generally range from zero to \$1,000. An agricultural commission gains credibility from even a modest appropriation. Typically the budget is based on the plan of work for the year. Some agricultural commissions have sought and received grants from land trusts and other non-profit or business sources. See Resource Section for funding ideas.

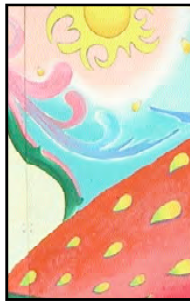
### **Communicate with the Public**

Open meetings provide a place for members of the agricultural commission and the public to engage in the give-and-take of opinion, advocacy, and resolution. Keeping communication open with other town boards, town staff, businesses and residents helps further the mission, goals and vision of the commission.

Communication with the public generates awareness of the agricultural commission and local agriculture, and encourages public participation. Publicity and outreach efforts, open and welcoming conduct of meetings, liaison relationships with other town boards, and maintenance of public records all contribute to positive communication. Sponsoring or participating in local fairs, farmers’ markets, farm or food festivals, farm-to-school programs or other town events helps nurture community connections to local agriculture.

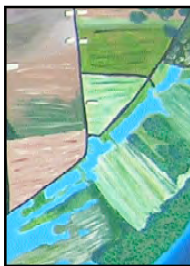
# Resources for Agricultural Commissions

Assistance is available to organize and support the activities of an agricultural commission. Please contact the organizations below for information and suggestions.



## **New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food**

*Contact:* Gail McWilliam Jellie, Director  
Division of Agricultural Development  
New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food  
PO Box 2042  
Concord, NH 03302  
(603) 271-3788  
gmcwilliam@agr.state.nh.us  
<http://agriculture.nh.gov/>



## **University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension**

*Contact:* Juli Brussell, Program Leader, Agricultural Resources  
UNH Cooperative Extension  
59 College Road, Taylor Hall  
Durham, NH, 03824-3587  
(603) 862-2033  
juli.brussell@unh.edu  
[www.extension.unh.edu](http://www.extension.unh.edu)



## **New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture**

*Contact:* Nada Haddad, Extension Educator, Agricultural Resources  
UNH Cooperative Extension, Rockingham County  
113 North Road, Brentwood, NH 03833  
(603) 679-5616  
nada.haddad@unh.edu  
[www.extension.unh.edu](http://www.extension.unh.edu)



## **New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources**

*Contact:* Linda Wilson  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
NH Division of Historical Resources  
19 Pillsbury Street  
Concord NH 03301-3570  
603-271-3483  
Linda.Wilson@dcr.nh.gov  
[www.nh.gov/nhdhr/](http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/)





**Southern New Hampshire Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Area Council** (Cheshire, Hillsborough, Rockingham, Strafford, Merrimack, and Sullivan counties)

*Contact:* Susan Hoey, Coordinator  
 10 Ferry Street, Box 4, Suite 422  
 Concord, NH 03301  
 (603) 223-0083  
 susan.hoey@nh.usda.gov  
 www.nhrcd.net/



**North Country RC&D Area Council** (Belknap, Carroll, Grafton and Coos counties)

*Contact:* Rick DeMark, Coordinator  
 719 North Main Street, Room 220  
 Laconia, NH 03246  
 (603) 527-2093  
 richard.demark@nh.usda.gov  
 www.nhrcd.net/



**New Hampshire Farm Bureau Federation**

*Contact:* Rob Johnson II, Executive Director  
 295 Sheep Davis Road  
 Concord, NH 03301  
 (603) 224-1934  
 robj@nhfarmbureau.org  
 www.nhfarmbureau.org



**Center for Land Conservation Assistance**

*Contact:* Dijit Taylor, Director  
 Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests  
 54 Portsmouth Street  
 Concord, NH 03301  
 (603) 717-7045  
 dtaylor@forestsociety.org  
 www.clca.forestsociety.org



**American Farmland Trust**

*Contact:* Jesse Robertson-DuBois, New England Field Representative  
 1 Short Street, Suite 2  
 Northampton, MA 01060  
 (413) 586-9330 ext. 21  
 jrobertson@farmland.org  
 www.farmland.org



Photo: Jean Jennings

**Vital Communities** (Upper Connecticut Valley communities of Bath, Landaff, Haverhill, Benton, Piermont, Warren, Orford, Wentworth, Lyme, Dorchester, Hanover, Canaan, Orange, Lebanon, Enfield, Grafton, Plainfield, Grantham, Springfield, Wilmot, Cornish, Croydon, Sunapee, New London, Claremont, Newport, Goshen, Newbury, Charlestown, Unity, Langdon, Acworth, Lempster, and Walpole)

*Contact:* Lisa Johnson, Valley Food & Farm Coordinator  
104 Railroad Row  
White River Junction, VT 05001  
(802) 291-9100 x103  
lisa@vitalcommunities.org  
www.vitalcommunities.org

### **Potential sources of grant funds for agricultural commissions:**

#### **New Hampshire Charitable Foundation**

Community Impact Grants are available to address a range of needs and opportunities to improve NH communities, including support of agriculture.  
37 Pleasant Street  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 225-6641  
info@nhcf.org www.nhcf.org

#### **New England Grassroots Environment Fund (NEGEF)**

To increase engagement and participation in grassroots environmental initiatives and to build and connect healthy, sustainable communities in New England, NEGEF funds community involvement in projects that address a wide range of environmental issues including: agriculture, air quality, alternative energy, aquifer protection, biotechnology, community gardens, environmental justice, energy conservation, forestry, global warming, land trusts, marine environment, public health, sprawl, sustainable communities, toxics and hazardous waste, trails, water quality, watershed management, wetlands, wildlife, and youth-organized environmental work.

New England Grassroots Environment Fund  
PO Box 1057  
Montpelier, VT 05601  
(802) 223-4622  
info@grassrootsfund.org  
www.grassrootsfund.org

#### **Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NESARE)**

NESARE offers Sustainable Community Grants to organizations such as community nonprofits, Cooperative Extension, local governments, educational institutions, planning boards, farming cooperatives, and incorporated citizens' groups. The purpose of the Sustainable Community Grants program is to reconnect rural revitalization and farming. Projects can address diverse issues such as land use, nutrition, employment, markets, education, farm labor, public policy, and environmental quality. NESARE seeks proposals that will bring together farmers, local government, citizens, community nonprofits, extension, civic and environmental organizations,





Photo Penny Vermet

and others who contribute to community vitality. Projects should support appropriate growth, improved quality of life, a cleaner environment, and farm diversity and profitability.

NESARE is also a source for information about books, brochures, websites and other information that may be helpful to community advocates for agriculture.

NESARE  
University of Vermont  
Hills Building  
105 Carrigan Dr.  
Burlington, VT 05405-0082  
(802) 656-0471  
nesare@uvm.edu  
www.uvm.edu/~nesare

#### Acknowledgements

The NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture is an informal network of organizations and individuals dedicated to enhancing the social, economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture in New Hampshire. The Coalition brings together members of the farm community and the non-farming public with agricultural, conservation and community development professionals to implement a shared vision: *Agriculture is a valued and vital part of New Hampshire's economy, environment and communities. A dynamic agriculture makes New Hampshire a better place to live, work and visit. The future of agriculture in New Hampshire depends on profitable farms that can nurture families and be passed on to future generations.*

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*Author:* Lorraine Stuart Merrill

*Editor:* Lynda Brushett

*Graphic Designer:* Caroline Robinson

For additional information, please visit the UNH Cooperative Extension website:  
www.extension.unh.edu

(TOWN STATIONARY)

(DATE)

Dear (TOWN) Farmers:

I would like to cordially invite you to a very important agricultural meeting scheduled for (DATE). A **Proposed Agricultural Commission Exploratory Meeting** will be held at (TIME) at the (PLACE), in the (ROOM). Refreshments will be provided.

[If appropriate, insert announcement of participation by a resource person]

The purpose of this exploratory meeting is to introduce (TOWN) residents, most particularly farmers, to the concept and benefits of a Town Agricultural Commission and discuss if (TOWN) should pursue organizing an Agricultural Commission of our own.

An Agricultural Commissions is:  
a non-regulatory, town board,  
a voice for the agricultural community,  
a resource for mediation, and  
a link to assistance providers.

Your attendance is very important. If this is a concept that makes sense to you, your input and that of your fellow farmers may lay the groundwork for moving the idea of an Agricultural Commission to the next Town meeting.

Please call (CONTACT PERSON) at (PHONE # OR EMAIL) if you plan to attend or if you have any questions.

Look forward to seeing you,

NAME



# NEWS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(DATE)

CONTACT: (NAME)  
(PHONE)  
(E-MAIL)

### **Agricultural Commission Exploratory Meeting Planned**

A public meeting to explore a proposed Town Agricultural Commission for the town of (TOWN) will be held on (DATE) at (TIME) at the (PLACE) in the (ROOM). Refreshments will be provided.

(If appropriate, insert announcement of any speakers who will introduce or explain the concept).

The purpose of this exploratory meeting is to introduce (TOWN) residents, most particularly farmers, to the concept and benefits of a Town Agricultural Commission and discuss if (TOWN) should pursue organizing an Agricultural Commission.

An Agricultural Commission is a non-regulatory, town recognized entity which provides a voice for the agricultural community, a resource for mediation, and a link to assistance providers.

###

# **Proposed (TOWN) Agricultural Commission Exploratory Meeting**

**Date  
Time**

**Place  
Address**

**Purpose:**

To introduce (TOWN) residents, most particularly farmers and those interested in the future of farming and farmland, to the concept and benefits of a Town Agricultural Commission.

Discuss if residents of (TOWN) should pursue organizing a Town Agricultural Commission.

## **AGENDA**

6:30 pm	<b>Refreshments</b>	
6:45 pm	<b>Welcome</b>	(local official)
	<b>Introductions</b>	(NAME) (facilitator)
	<b>Why We are Here</b>	
7:00 pm	<b>Value of Agricultural Commissions</b> (Agriculture Commission Power Point Presentation and possibly speakers)	(NAME)
7:30 pm	<b>Questions &amp; Answers</b>	(ALL)
8:00	<b>Next Steps</b> (Steering Committee; organizational process)	(facilitator)
8:30	<b>Adjourn</b>	



**(TOWN) Agricultural Commission  
Steering Committee**

(DATE)

(TIME)

(PLACE)

Introductions

Select facilitator for meeting

Select recorder for meeting

**To Do**

Review regulations/rules regarding composition of boards and commissions

Review schedule/process for submission of article for (DATE) Town Meeting Warrant

**Draft /Submit Article**

Assign responsibility for submission and follow up on status of the article.

**Identify Next Steps**

Develop communications plan (town boards, Town Meeting members, newspaper articles, media advocacy...) to introduce and gain support (identify and understand opposition) for the warrant article.

Assign tasks

Steering Committee member listing of names, addresses and contact numbers

Prepare agenda for next meeting

Schedule next meeting

Other

Adjourn

**EXAMPLE**  
**Agricultural Commission**  
**Membership Considerations**

**Guiding Principles:**

**Members:**

Members should reflect:

Geographic distribution

A cross-section of types of farming in town

Large, medium and small sized farms

Members should be trusted, credible and connected to the agricultural community.

Demonstrated interest and ability to understand, appreciate and promote the purpose of the Agricultural Commission

**Selection Process:**

Board of Selectmen take the lead and have authority for process and selection

Open application process

Board of Selectmen accept recommendations from Agricultural Commission Steering Committee

**Steps:**

Draft and run a news release stating that the Board of Selectmen is accepting applications from individuals interested in serving as a member of the Town Agricultural Commission.

Consider a simultaneous direct mailing to those on your agricultural mailing list.(list used for Exploratory Meeting)

Provide a minimum of 2 weeks for applicants to return applications.

Board of Selectmen reviews applications.

Board of Selectmen receives recommendations from Steering Committee.

Board of Selectmen makes selections and establishes member terms.

Board of Selectmen notifies members in writing (with list attached of all members, terms, addresses and contact numbers) Letter notes date, time and place of first gathering. (within 2 weeks of written notification)