

*The Adirondack Council  
Position Statement on Agriculture  
In the Adirondack Park  
July 2009*

***Background:***

Historically, farming in the Adirondacks was limited to the Champlain, Ausable, Saranac and Hudson Valleys where soils are fertile enough to raise crops. There were also many small farms in the Adirondack interior that were important when rural settlements produced their own meat, vegetables, grain and hay. Farming in the Adirondacks reached its greatest extent over a century ago and has generally declined since then due to economic competition from the Midwestern states, higher production costs and lower prices. The approximately 200 farms that remain are located on the most productive soils at the edges of the Park and continue to struggle for economic survival. (Source: Adirondack Atlas, 2004)

Today, there are about 52,000 acres of farmland open space in the Adirondack Park. (Source: Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project, 2009) In order to secure a regional food supply, protect the Park's wildlife and natural resources and promote a deeper, more sustainable economy, a commitment to providing economic incentives for members of the food/farming community (farm input suppliers, small-scale farms, locally owned or cooperative markets, and local eaters) is imperative. As concerns about food security and fuel miles increase, there is a growing demand for locally grown and value-added foods provided by Community Supported Agriculture farms (CSAs), and small family farms. The higher cost of imported fossil fuels is also opening a market for potentially carbon-neutral biomass energy crops such as willow, successfully demonstrated by SUNY/ESF at the Tully, NY research station. In addition, small-scale sustainable farming enhances the quality of life in rural communities, provides food and shelter for wildlife, protects wetlands and watersheds, and maintains air quality.

The Adirondack Council has a long tradition of working to benefit farmlands and agricultural communities in the Park. In 1983 the Council successfully led a coalition that won legislative approval for statutory language requiring that the state pay its share of taxes for lands where it holds conservation easements, making it possible for farmland owners to sell development rights to conservation organizations for retirement while keeping town tax bases intact. In 1993 the Council worked with the American Farmland Trust, the Nature Conservancy and others to advocate for the establishment of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). In 2005 the Council supported Senate Bill #1398 that established penalties for operating all-terrain vehicles on farm land or land used for agricultural purposes without permission from the land owner. In partnership with the Farm Bureau, the Council advocated to protect farmers from legislation that would have impacted their rights to working the land. The Council actively promotes programs such as Adirondack Harvest, a community organization with a strong commitment to sustainable farming and keeping local food available and affordable. The Council also continues to call for increased funds to prevent and control invasive plant, insect and pathogen species which pose threats to our native ecosystems and working farms and forests.

### ***Adirondack Council Position on Agriculture in the Adirondack Park:***

The Adirondack Council will advocate for the conservation and improvement of agricultural lands for the sustainable production of food and other agricultural products, and for the protection of ecological and scenic open space resources. We will support farming that upholds rural quality of life, clean air and water, and native wildlife.

#### Opportunities for action:

- Promote increased opportunities for profitable and sustainable production and sale of high quality agricultural products, and expand consumer choices for locally produced healthy food. Make local food available for local people.
- Create economic incentives for small-scale farmers to produce North Country products and transport them to local and downstate markets.
- Advocate for the executive agencies to reconcile the differences between the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Law and Adirondack Park Agency Act in order to strengthen the protections for farmlands as open space by limiting the potential for subdivision and non-agricultural development.
- Clarify the intent of the right to farm laws and define agricultural uses to close loopholes that permit “hobby farm” development on resource management and rural use lands reserved for farming or forestry.
- Advocate for increases in County Farmland Protection Planning Grants to assist communities with saving small farms.
- Promote the use of conservation easements for the purpose of maintaining scenic, open space, historic, agricultural or natural conditions of farmlands.
- Support public education and outreach on best management practices for farmlands, including:
  - Restoration of wide riparian corridors and streamside buffers (at least 50 feet on small bodies of water and 100 feet on larger bodies) to filter nutrients, protect wildlife habitat, reduce erosion and improve water quality;
  - Planning and design of farm lands and scheduling production activities to conserve biological diversity and mimic natural cycles, for example: developing crop rotation and nutrient management cycles that protect geomorphic characteristics, as well as wildlife habitats and movement; raising crops and livestock that best fit the Adirondack environment; practicing predator safe and pasture-fed livestock management practices; and maintaining hedgerows, forested linkages and native wildflowers to enable wildlife movement, natural pollination and seed dispersal;
  - Managing the waste stream so that manure works as an organic fertilizer, not as a pollutant;
  - Using organic or Integrated Pest Management practices to reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides and increase natural controls;
  - Developing affordable farm worker housing ownership opportunities for aspiring local farm workers, with development clustered on the farm or in nearby villages.
- Support the Adirondack Harvest network, Community Supported Agriculture (e.g., Essex Farm) and organic agriculture (e.g., Rivermede Farm).
- Explore willow biomass and late-cut grasses for energy production on fallow or grassland-bird farm lands in the Lake Champlain Valley and possibilities to use CP railroad for bulk transport to regional power plants.