

May 1, 2007

Ag Pulse

Madison County....The Heart of New York

Dear Town Official:

This is the seventh in a series of newsletters being sent to you by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Madison County on behalf of the Madison County Farmland Protection Board.

We hope that you find the information in this newsletter helpful. We welcome your comments. Call us at either 684-3001 or 655-2075.

Sincerely,

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Extension Issue Leader

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Community Educator



What Are Real Farms?

Information taken from, Nelson Bills, Department of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-7734
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The centerpiece of the New York farm and food system is the commodities and services produced on New York farms. But today, because of changes in farming and shifting demographics, many New Yorkers do not have a working knowledge of the modern farm sector. The point of departure is the definition of a farm and distinctions drawn between “big” and “small” farms, “family” and “corporate” farms, “real” and “hobby” farms, and so on.

The official Federal definition counts farms as places producing farm commodities having a market value of \$1,000 or more per year. This

definition is very inclusive and extends to operations that generate little, if any, net cash receipts for the farm operator in any given year. The 2002 Census of Agriculture reported about 37,000 New York farms. The 2002 Census numbers are higher than previous years because the USDA made statistical adjustments that compensate for under-enumeration. The 1997 Census reported about 32,000 farms.

Some observers infer that so many small farms suggests that the New York farm sector lacks economic vibrancy or that the sharpest policy focus should be on farms that produce commodities in large quantities. To the contrary, differences in farm size simply mirror forces at work throughout the wider economy. And the evidence clearly shows that both large and small farms are essential components of rural New York’s working

landscape.

Operators of small farms are among an army of New Yorkers who operate a business on a small scale, are multiple job holders, or bring in household income from multiple sources. Federal statistics show that New York has more than 1.6 million business establishments – entities that report \$1,000 or more in gross receipts each year. 70% of these entities are very small businesses operated by proprietors that have no payroll. Farm proprietors, similarly, often operate on a small scale, and about 28% of them have a payroll.

Dividing farms into classes based on the volume of sales and the proprietor’s age/employment shows that 16 percent of all New York farms are operated by individuals who are at retirement age – 65 years and up; these farmers

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Farmland Protection Board Members:

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account for a nearly proportionate share of total farm sales (19%) and farmland acreage (16%) – see box. Another 39% can be classified as residential/lifestyle farms.

These farms are operated by individuals who report an off-farm job as their principal occupation. These farms generate a small share of crop and livestock production (8%) but own or lease about a fifth of all New York farmland.

As with the nation as a whole, a very small percentage of all New York farms can be classified as non-family farms controlled by institutions, non-family corporations, or the estate of deceased persons. Some of these non-family farms

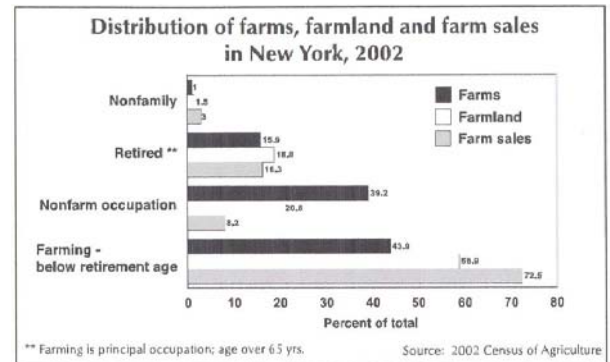
generate substantial revenue but account for well under 5% of farmland acreage or market sales.

The remaining New York farms, numbering about 16,300 in 2002, are operated by family farmers who are not at retirement age and who report farming as their principal occupation. These farms account for 44% of all New York farms and nearly 75% of all market sales; these large farmers control almost 60% of all farmland.

This diversity in agriculture means wide variation in farm size. But, New York's very largest farms are increasingly influential in producing farm commodities. In 2002, just 1,082 farms, each with market

sales over \$500,000, accounted for about 50% of total sales statewide.

The 1997 Census reported that New York about 7.2 million acres of land in farms. Adjustments in 2002 to deal with for undercounts of farms boosted farmland to nearly 7.7 million acres or 25% of total land area.



State Funding Will Soon Be Available To Assist Municipalities To Develop Agricultural And Farmland Protection Plans

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets is developing an application for municipalities to develop local agricultural and farmland protection plans.

One of the most important duties granted by the legislature to a municipal government is the authority to undertake comprehensive planning and to regulate land use. Local government can play a vital role in farmland protection by creating a supportive business environment for agriculture by insuring that comprehensive plans and land use regulations contain clear language and explicit policies that are supportive of the local agriculture industry.

The Department of Agriculture intends to provide state assistance payments to municipalities to develop, revise or adjust agricultural sections of local planning documents. Municipalities are encouraged to evaluate and adopt a variety of planning strategies and policies to protect and

strengthen the farmland base within their community.

Interested municipalities are eligible for grants up to \$25,000 or 75% of the cost (which ever is less) of developing a local protection plan. The guidelines for local grant funds are expected to be released from the Department this summer (2007).

The Guidelines and Application will also be posted on the Departments web site, www.agmkt.state.ny.us under Funding Opportunities. Grants will be awarded on a first come first serve basis.

Plans need to: 1) identify the location of any agricultural lands proposed to be protected; 2) provide an analysis of the value of proposed protected lands to the economy of the municipality; 3) their open space value; 4) describe the threats to productive farmland and consequences of farmland conversion and 5) develop programs and strategies to promote and maintain the economic

viability of the local agricultural industry and its agricultural land base.

For more information about the municipal grants program, contact: John Brennan Farmland Protection Specialist
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