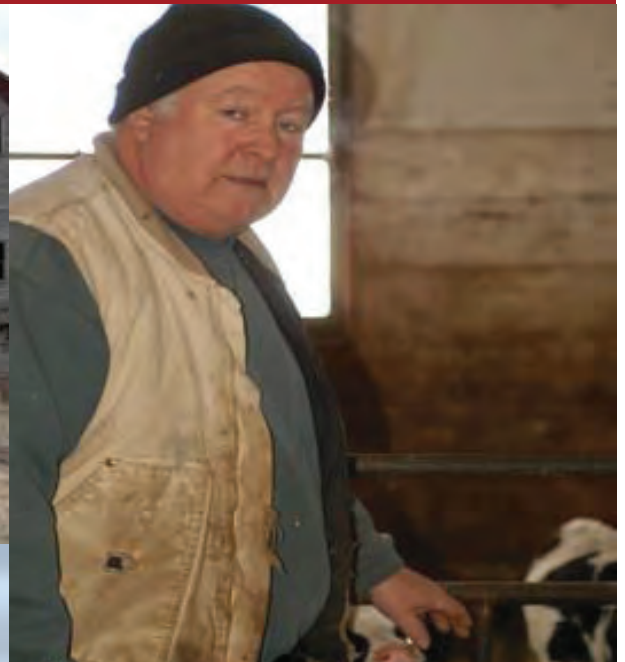




Seward, New York

AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN



Prepared by the Town of
Seward

with assistance from
American Farmland Trust

Town of Seward

Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan



Adopted March 13, 2011

Prepared by:

Town of Seward

Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Committee

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Executive Summary

Seward is a rural community located in Schoharie County. Farming and the scenic open space agricultural land provides are what residents value most about their community. In order to accommodate future development while ensuring that farming continues to be a viable enterprise, the town has developed an agriculture and farmland protection plan. The goals of the plan are to:

- Goal I: Support Agriculture at the Town Level
- Goal II: Foster Economic Opportunity for Agriculture
- Goal III: Educate the Public About Agriculture
- Goal IV: Protect Natural Resources and Open Space

What follows are the recommendations the plan makes to achieve the above goals.

Goal I: Support Agriculture at the Town Level Recommendations

A. Land Use Planning

1. Form an Agricultural Advisory Committee
2. Represent Agricultural Interests on Appointed Boards
3. Provide Training in Agricultural Land Use Planning
4. Develop a Comprehensive Plan that Supports Agriculture
5. Educate Realtors and Home Builders About Benefits of Retaining Agricultural Land
6. Consider Conservation Subdivisions
7. Consider Cooperative Farm Subdivisions

B. Agricultural Districts

1. Ensure Agricultural District Law is Followed
2. Educate Town Officials, Staff and Assessors

C. Property Taxes

1. Ensure All Interested and Eligible Landowners Receive Agricultural Assessment
2. Consider Adopting Agricultural Assessment for Service Districts
3. Train Assessors on Assessing Agricultural Land and Structures
4. Ensure Accuracy of Property Type Classification Codes
5. Protect Farms From Negative Impacts of Commercial and Industrial Development

D. Working Lands

1. Make Roads Safe for Agricultural Equipment
2. Develop Farm Rental Network
3. Maintain Agricultural Data at the Town Level

E. Land in Transition

1. Market Town to Farmers
2. Provide Assistance to Farmers in Transition to Keep Land in Agriculture
3. Encourage Beginning Farmers

F. Farmland Protection

1. Educate Landowners About Conservation Easements
2. Research Viability of Lease of Development Rights Program
3. Review Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Every Five Years
4. Participate in Updating Schoharie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan

Goal II: Foster Economic Opportunities for Agriculture

Recommendations

1. Disseminate Information About Economic Opportunity
2. Support Government Initiatives to Stabilize Milk Prices
3. Collaborate to Develop Agricultural Cooperative

A. Livestock

Action i: Raise and Market Grassfed and Pastured Meats

Action ii: Take Advantage of Ethnic Market

Action iii: Offer Horse Boarding

B. Crops

Action i: Develop Local Value-Added Processing Infrastructure

Action ii: Produce and Market Custom Hay

C. Direct Marketing

1. Support Dairy Farmers Converting to Direct Marketing
2. Expand Area Farmers Markets
3. Sell Local Farm Products to Tourists
4. Encourage Farmers to Work Together to Participate in Urban Markets
5. Increase Rural Access to High Speed Internet
6. Support Development of Community Supported Agriculture

Goal III: Educate People About Agriculture

1. Produce Brochure About Agriculture for Town Residents
2. Educate Children in Community About Agriculture
3. Support Development of Social Network for Farmers

Goal IV: Protect Natural Resources and Open Space

1. Work Together to Protect Water Quality
2. help Farmers Take Advantage of Natural Resource Conservation Programs
3. Research Opportunities for On-Farm Production of Renewable Energy
4. Produce and Market Biofuels

Introduction

The Town of Seward lies in northwestern Schoharie County. The western town line borders Otsego County. The Town of Sharon Springs lies to the north, the Towns of Carlisle and Cobleskill to the east and the Town of Richmondville to the south. The Town includes the small hamlets of Dorloo, Gardnersville, Hyndsville, Janesville and Seward.

The Town of Seward is an approximately one-hour drive from the City of Albany, the state's capital, and two-and-a-half hours from the New York Metropolitan Area, the largest city in the United States. The Town is in close proximity to the Village of Cobleskill, which is home to over 4,500 people, as well as the State University of New York at Cobleskill (SUNY Cobleskill) and its School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



Portions of three state highways, NYS Routes 10, 145 and 165, cross through the Town of Seward. Route 10 is the busiest of the three. According to the NYS Department of Transportation statistics approximately 2,700 vehicles a day travel Route 10, less than 1,360 on Route 145 and less than 1,000 on Route 165

Agriculture has historically been and remains the foundation of the Town of Seward's economy, producing food, employing people and paying taxes. Seward's farms provide open space, buffer natural resources and protect water quality. Schoharie County's Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan names the *Seward/Sharon Dairy Area* as one of the County's four significant agricultural areas.

The Town of Seward is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, forest, scattered residential development and very limited commercial development. The town is 36.5 square miles or 23,360 acres in size. The entire town is included within agricultural district number three with the exception of some of its hamlets.

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census of Population Seward had a population of 1,646 and 685 households. This is a slight decrease from the 1990 population of 1,651. The Census estimated the town's population in 2008 to be 1,729. 1,763 people lived in the Town of Seward at the time of the 2010 census.

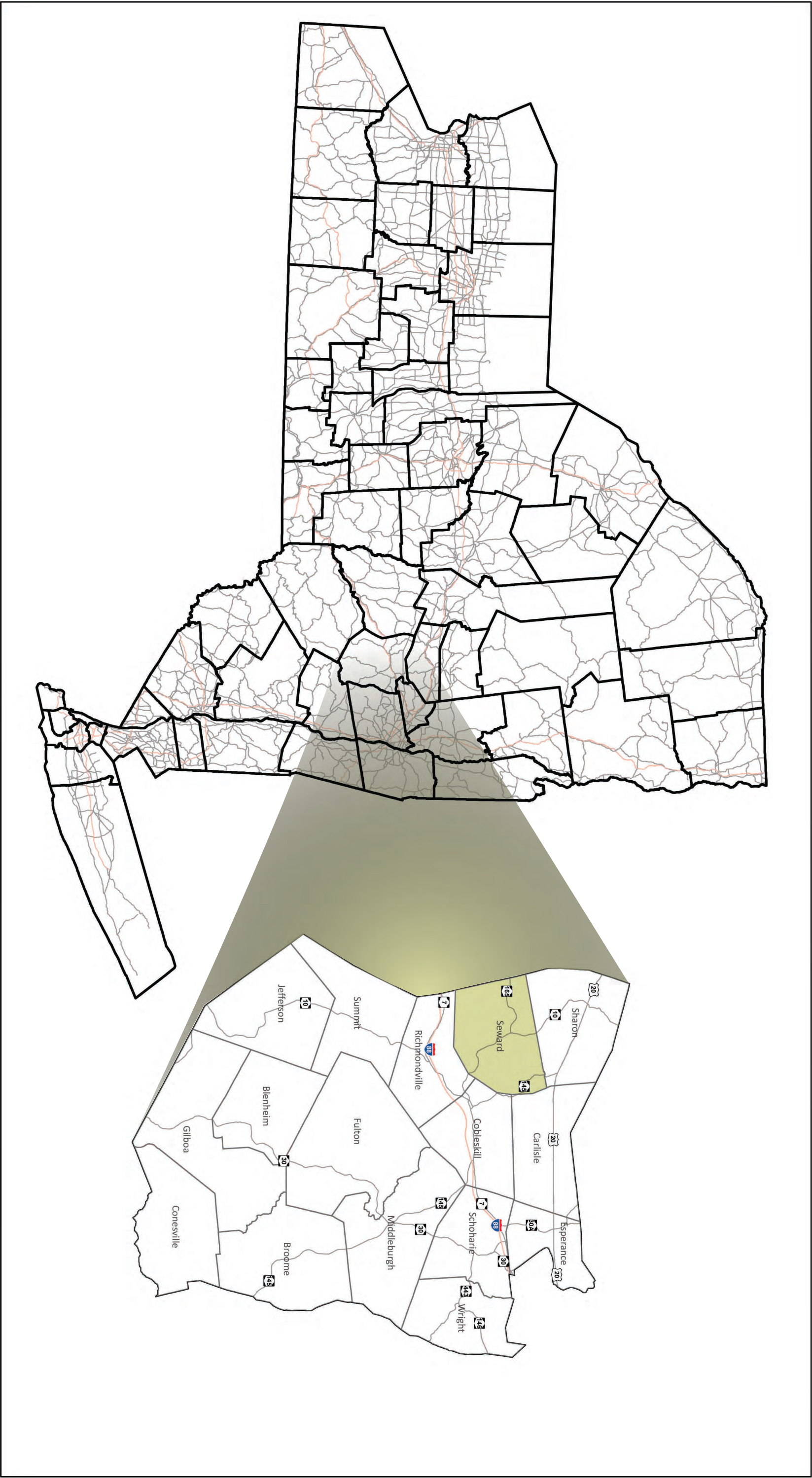
Vision Statement

The Seward community is extremely supportive of farming and will remain so in the future, believing that the best way to protect farmland is to keep farms profitable. The town will continue to sustain its established farms by maintaining the existing contiguous tracts of agricultural land which enable commodity farmers to produce their crops without significantly impacting residential areas. The town will simultaneously support local agriculture by promoting alternative and value-added agricultural enterprises.

Definition of Agriculture

The Town of Seward employs the same definitions of agricultural activities as appears in New York State Agriculture and Markets law without the requirements of gross revenue or acreage required in order to receive agricultural assessment when identifying agriculture within the town. According to the state definition, which can be found in its complete form in the appendix (Appendix A) of this plan, agriculture includes the production of crops, livestock and livestock products and shall include but not be limited to the following: field crops; fruits; vegetables; horticultural specialties; livestock and livestock products; maple sap; Christmas trees; aquaculture products; woody biomass; and apiary products.





Planning Process

In 2007 the Town of Seward and the neighboring Town of Carlisle, with Seward acting as lead agency, applied for a grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) of \$50,000 to fund the joint development of two municipal agricultural and farmland protection plans. This funding is made available through NYSDAM's Agricultural and Farmland Protection Program which supports local efforts to protect agricultural land and ensure the economic viability of the agricultural industry.

Farming is vital to the health of New York State's economy, environment and communities. The importance of farmland is reflected in the New York State Constitution:

"the policy of this state shall be to conserve and protect its natural resources and scenic beauty and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural lands for the production of food and other agricultural products..."

In 1992 the Agricultural Protection Act was passed creating the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Program to support local efforts to protect agricultural land and ensure the continued economic viability of the state's agricultural industry. The program funds the development of local agricultural and farmland protection plans and implementation grants such as funds for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

Local governments play an important role in protecting farmland. New York is a "home rule" state where town government officials make land use decisions and enforce them through local laws such as zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. Agriculture and farmland protection plans are developed at both the town and county level. The majority of the counties in the state with farmland, including Schoharie County, already have agriculture and farmland protection plans in place. The state is now making funding available to counties to update their plans. Schoharie County is eligible to apply for renewal and plans to put in an application.

Agriculture and farmland protection plans enable communities to take stock of existing agricultural resources, including working farms, high quality farmland, and farm-related infrastructure. The plans recommend strategies for retaining farmland, educating the non-farming public about agricultural practices and ensuring that local regulations do not impede farmers' ability to take advantage of economic opportunities that will help them grow their business.

On February 27, 2008 the state awarded Seward and Carlisle a grant to develop municipal agricultural and farmland protection plans for each town. The Seward and Carlisle town boards then appointed committees made up of farmers and other residents to oversee the development of each town's plan. From these two



committees a joint executive agriculture and farmland protection plan committee was appointed to meet regularly to develop the plans.

The committee hired American Farmland Trust (AFT) as a consultant to help in the development of the plan. AFT is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to saving farmland and supporting a sustainable future for farms and communities. AFT's New York State office is headquartered in Saratoga Springs with field representatives working across the state. In addition the towns have received assistance from the Schoharie County Planning and Development Agency (SCPDA), the Schoharie County Cooperative Extension (CCE) as well as the county's Soil and Water Conservation District and Real Property Tax Service Agency.

While developing the plan the committee:

- inventoried the various types of agriculture in Seward and conducted a windshield survey of farms in the town
- created a map of the town's current active agricultural land by working with aerial photographs and maps
- conducted extensive community outreach
- analyzed the economic impact of agriculture on the towns
- reviewed the town's land use regulations and offered suggestions on how they could be revised to be more farm friendly
- formulated goals to accomplish with the plan
- drafted recommendations for how those goals could be achieved, along with suggestions on how to implement the recommendations

The intention of this plan is to balance a steady increase in residential and commercial development and the rights of individual property owners with the community's collective desire to remain a farming town. This plan establishes goals for sustaining agriculture and makes recommendations on how to achieve these goals. The recommendations are offered as a guideline for town planning and the Town Board must approve any actions recommended by this plan before they can be undertaken.

By developing an agricultural and farmland protection plan the Town of Seward has positioned itself to remain a viable farming community as it grows in the future. Through strategies such as supporting farmers with farm friendly land use policies, working regionally to foster new economic opportunities for agriculture, and guiding dense residential development away from working agricultural land, Seward intends to accommodate growth while continuing its agricultural tradition.

Community Outreach



The Town of Seward sought and received much helpful input from the community during the development of the plan's goals and recommendations. American Farmland Trust conducted interviews with ten farmers and owners of agricultural lands in the Town. Seward held a public meeting during which the members of the community shared their thoughts and concerns about the business of agriculture and the use of farmland in the town through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) exercise led by American Farmland Trust (Appendix B).

In addition the town, in cooperation with the Schoharie County Planning and Development Agency (SCPDA), conducted a survey of town residents on the topic of land use (Appendix F). Although the primary purpose of the survey was to provide the town with information that could be used in the drafting of a comprehensive land use plan, the survey included many questions about agriculture and was an excellent resource during the development of the town's agricultural and farmland protection plan.



The farmer interviews included conversations with non-farming owners of agricultural land who leased the land to farmers; active and retired dairy farmers; crop farmers; horse-owners; and farmers raising grass-fed livestock. Topics discussed included:

- Economic Impact of Agriculture
- Loss of Farmland to Residential Development
- Taxes
- Retirement and the Next Generation of Farmers
- Local Foods & Tourism
- Farmland Protection

A summary of the farmer interviews can be found in the appendix (Appendix C) of this plan.

Farming in Seward

Palatine Germans from Dorlach, Germany, fleeing religious persecution, first settled Seward in the mid 18th century. They called their settlement New Dorlach. They struggled to make a living off the land and were assisted greatly by the Native Americans who already made the region their home. The community barely survived severe violence and destruction during the Revolutionary War. Originally part of the Town of Sharon the town officially formed in 1840 and was named after William H. Seward, senator, governor and secretary of state.

As it grew the town became home to many dairy farms. “The Dairy Interest in the town has become of marked proportions,” wrote historian William Roscoe in the *History of Schoharie County 1713-1882*. “The pure spring water of the hills, and succulent grasses, unite to make dairying a special feature of the farmer’s pursuits.” The town became a center for cheese and butter making, producing more cheese than any other town in Schoharie County. During the late 1800s the town was home to three major cheese producers: Seward Valley Cheese Factory; Seward Centre Cheese Factory; and Gardnersville Cheese Factory.

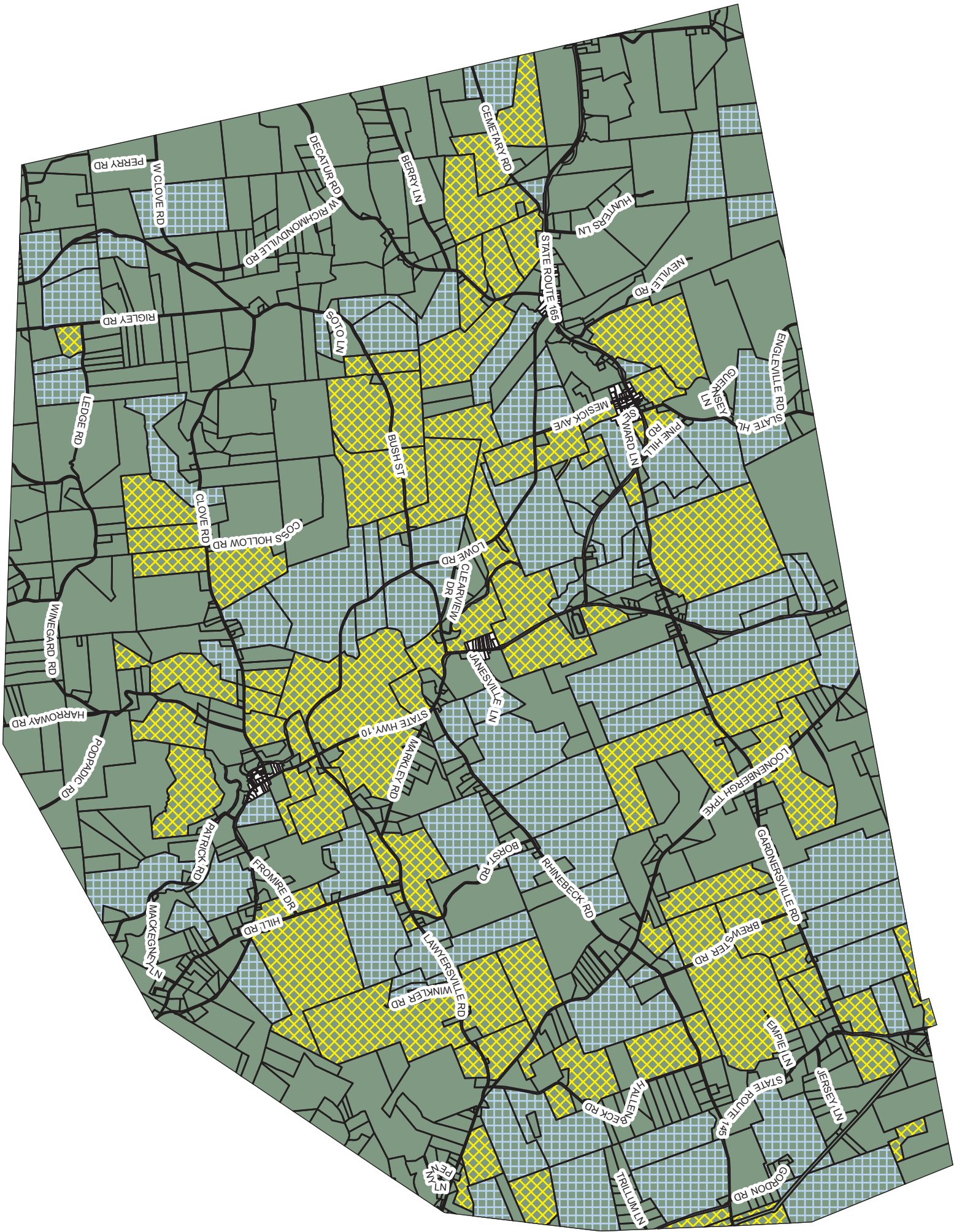
According to the Schoharie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan the towns of Seward and Sharon constitute the County’s “standout farm areas” in terms of general agriculture. “They represent the prime dairy farm areas of the County and, along with portions of Carlisle, the single largest block of agricultural district land in the County.”



The prolonged volatility of the prices paid to modern New York dairy farmers combined with rising operating costs has resulted in a steady decline in the number of dairy farms. According to the assessor’s records of property receiving agricultural assessment, today only 15 dairy farmers work agricultural land in the Town of Seward. Some of these farms have dairy farms located in Seward and some dairy farmers whose farms are located outside of Seward own or rent farmland in the town.

There has been some interest in the town in organic dairy and several farmers in Seward and neighboring towns have converted to organic milk production to take advantage of the higher pay price. However, organic dairy has suffered alongside conventional dairy in the latest and most severe downturn.

Other farmers in Seward are raising beef, pork, poultry and organic forage crops for livestock feed. Also raised in the town are horses, sheep, meat goats, bees, fruit and vegetables. According to the town’s agricultural assessment records the town has: one vegetable farm; one tree farm; two beef and pork operations; three farmers producing and selling hay alone; one organic hay and crop farmer; six farmers raising hay and beef; one farmer raising hay and horses; and one farmer raising hay and goats. These farms in addition to the dairy activity add up to a total of 31 farms.



Legend

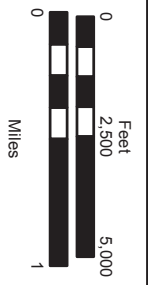
Parcel

Agricultural Assessment Received for Self

Agricultural Assessment Received for Rent

Roads

Agricultural District



Soils

The entire Town of Seward, 23,360 acres in size, falls entirely within agricultural district number 3. The northern half of the town, bordering Sharon Springs encompasses part of a broad swath of Mohawk-Honeoye association soils that run from east to west, beginning in the western regions of the Towns of Carlisle and Cobleskill, and moving through Seward into Sharon Springs creating the *Seward/Sharon Dairy Area*, referred to as one of the four most significant agricultural areas in county's agriculture and farmland protection plan.



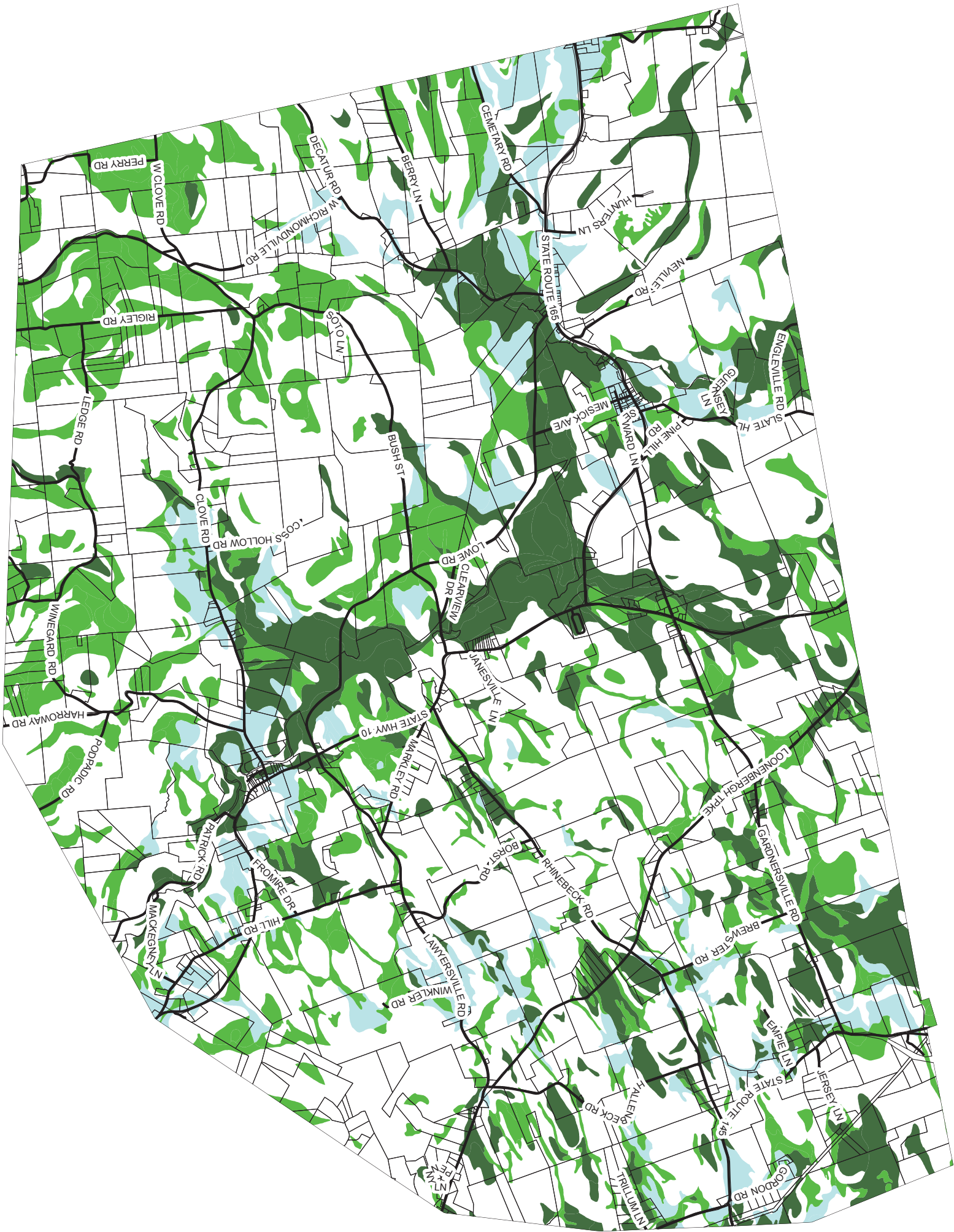
According to the *Soil Survey for Schoharie County* Mohawk-Honeoye association soils are among the better soils formed in glacial till in the county. Mohawk-Honeoye association soils are deep, high lime soils that can be gently sloping or increasingly steep and range from well to moderately-well drained. Because of the range in slope from gentle to steep these soils are best suited to dairy farming, along with the production of corn, oats and hay. Areas too steep, stony or wet for cultivation provide farm woodlots and pasture.



A narrower band of Darien-Nunda association soil runs through the middle of the town. This section features deep, medium-lime soils on moderate slopes that range from somewhat poorly drained to well-drained. The Darien-Nunda association is also suited to dairy farming as well as producing corn, oats and hay. Some areas are too wet to cultivate. The southern part of town is composed of a Lordstown-Morain soil association. These moderately deep soils are well drained but strongly acid. Much of the area with the

Lordstown-Morain soil is too steep and rocky to be cultivated but is still useful as pasture. A significant amount of this land has been reforested.

(See Appendix D for complete soil definitions from the NRCS *National Soil Survey Handbook*)



Legend

Parcel

Roads

All areas are prime farmland

Farmland of statewide importance

Not prime farmland

Prime farmland if drained



Environmental and Recreational Benefits of Farmland in Seward

Working farmland is responsible for much of the open space in the Town of Seward. Ninety percent of the respondents to the Town of Seward land use survey wanted to preserve the rural nature of the Town. Open space and a rural environment are critical to town residents' quality of life.

Agricultural land also provides food and cover for wildlife, helps control flooding, and protects wetlands and watersheds. Farmland absorbs and filters wastewater and run off and provides groundwater recharge that protects the quality of drinking water in the town.

Farmland and associated woodlands provide opportunities for outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, cross country skiing, bicycling and snowmobiling. Many farmers allow hunters access to their land during hunting season. With permission from farmers not-for-profit snowmobile clubs such as the Sharon Pathfinders maintain over 200 miles of trails in the region. The snowmobilers express appreciation for the access farmers grant them with an annual landowner appreciation dinner.



Prioritizing Agricultural Land

State agricultural and market law provides for the development of municipal agriculture and farmland protection plans. According to the language of the law plans shall include the “location of any land or areas proposed to be protected.”

The Schoharie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection plan places a priority on preserving land in agricultural districts with soil groups rated as “highly suited” for agriculture. The plan singles out what it refers to as the “Seward/Sharon dairy area” as one of four significant agricultural areas. According to the County plan these major blocks of farmland should be designated as core agricultural districts which should include not just commercial agricultural land but also adjacent and intervening buffers in order to protect the industry from incompatible land use activities and complaints from non-farming neighbors.

The entire Town of Seward, with the exception of some hamlet areas, is included in agricultural district number three and already receives the protections that come with the state’s agricultural district program. The County plan refers to the agricultural district program as “an excellent tool to which zoned communities can link their land use planning and on which the County, if it desires, can build a lease or purchase of development rights program for interested farmers.”



Some Seward farmers interviewed during the research for the development of this plan believe that the high quality of farmland in certain parts of the town combined with its likelihood of being developed is enough to justify some form of protection. They believe other farmland does not need protection because it is unlikely to be developed. “What would make sense would be for the town to set aside a few farms worthy of preservation that are good to build on. That makes sense to me.” said

one farmer. “If they don’t get protected, when a farmer quits a developer will buy the land and subdivide it to make money. Next thing you know you have missed an opportunity.”

The Schoharie County agricultural and farmland protection plan’s third stated goal is to “preserve a critical mass of both farmers and agribusiness to support competition and provide a foundation for a sound agricultural economy, maintaining a base of 100,000 acres of Schoharie County land in farming (including 50,000 acres in cultivation).”

Many farmers in Schoharie County worry that without large, contiguous tracts of farmland, agriculture will no longer be a viable industry in the town and have expressed interest in protecting a critical mass of farmland. The town’s farmers believe that a critical mass of farmland is composed of fields large enough to be worked with existing equipment without requiring undue travel on roads busy with commuter traffic. The broader question of exactly what constitutes a “critical mass” of farmland is complex.

In 2002 American Farmland Trust conducted a study entitled “Is There a Critical Mass of Agricultural Land Needed to Sustain an Agricultural Economy? Evidence from Six Mid-Atlantic States.” According to this study the critical mass concept is based on the idea that a certain amount of agricultural activity must be sustained in order for the agricultural economy in an area to remain viable. As production levels decline below a given threshold, costs will rise. A decline in agricultural profits and thus a higher relative return for conversion to other uses, such as residential housing, may increase the rate of loss of farmland in the area. Increased property taxes brought about by the increased demand for services that comes with residential development will escalate costs further for agriculture, causing yet more farms to go out of business continuing the cycle of farmland loss and residential development.

The Town of Seward’s agriculture and farmland protection plan asserts that all active farmland in the town constitutes a critical mass of agricultural land and is a priority for protection including prime soils that occur in the Residential and Residential Agricultural Zone. This plan recommends the town consider requiring that newly constructed houses on lots composed of prime soil in the Residential and Residential Agricultural Zone not be sited in the middle of the field of prime soil but instead be sited along the edges of the field to allow for continued agricultural production.

The fact that so much working farmland remains in the Town of Seward is testament to the town’s efforts to protect agricultural land from development. Even in developed areas much of the housing that has gone in is along the roads, leaving the remaining land behind them available for agriculture. To date developers have not been willing to invest money in constructing roads for developments located off the main road. However, eventually developers will become interested in this land. In order to protect priority agricultural land from such development this agriculture and farmland protection plan recommends consolidating development with the use of land conservation tools such as those described below.

- **Conservation Subdivisions vs. Cluster Housing:** This plan recommends that the town consider the concept of conservation subdivisions and the ways in which conservation subdivisions differ from cluster development, which is currently a part of Seward’s land use regulations.

Cluster Housing: Residential cluster development groups houses on a portion of the available land while reserving a significant amount of the remaining land as protected open space and farmland. A higher density allowance often acts as an incentive for the developer to plan for cluster design. In cluster design generally the housing sites are designated first and the open space tends to be the land unsuitable for development that is left over.

Conservation Subdivisions: Conservation subdivision takes the cluster design concept one step further requiring the agricultural land to be set aside for conservation lands to be designated first. When farmland protection is the goal, this would be land best suited to agriculture. The house are then located in a way that allows the housing sites to take the most advantage of their proximity to the farmland. This undeveloped land is not an afterthought or what is “leftover” but instead the organizing principle of the development.

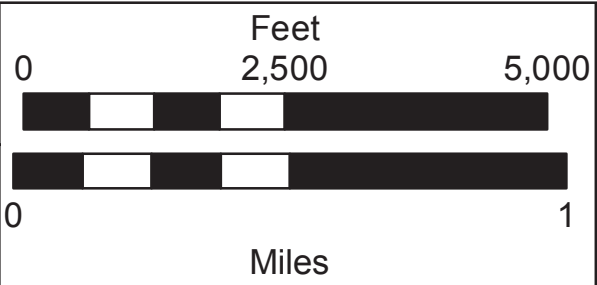
Town land use regulations should be updated to encourage conservation subdivisions as a means of protecting high quality agricultural land and specify that land set aside as part of a subdivision should not just be considered open space but be available for agriculture. (See Appendix E for a *Rural Design Workbook* chapter on conservation subdivision design.)

- **Cooperative Farm Subdivision:** This plan recommends the town research the viability of cooperative farm subdivisions as a means toward accommodating rural residential growth while protecting farmland. Though similar to cluster housing or conservation subdivision in that land is subdivided for houses while leaving a large section of undeveloped land intact as open space, with a cooperative farm subdivision the land left open is agricultural land intended for the mutual use of the subdivision's homeowners who reside adjacent to the land. Cooperative farm subdivisions are often used for horses. The Town of Charlton, in Saratoga County, is an example of a town that allows for cooperative farm subdivisions (www.townofcharlton.org).



Legend

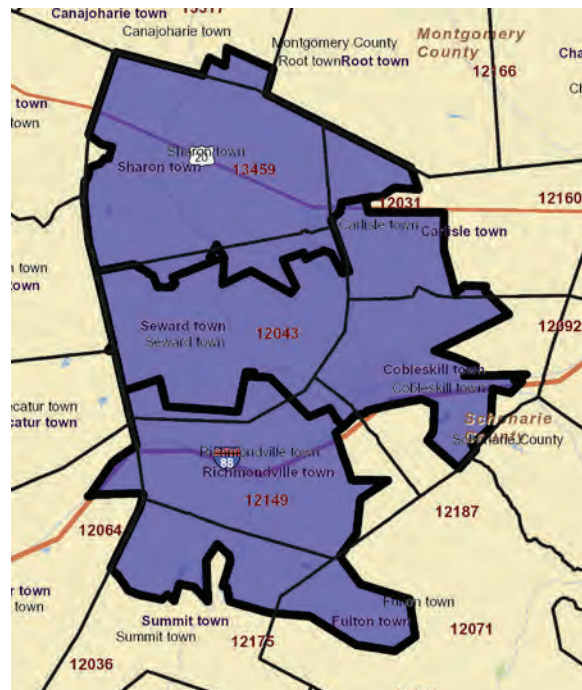
- Roads
- Parcels Receiving Agricultural Exemptions
- Prime Farmland
- Soils of Statewide Importance
- Seward Zoning Boundary**



Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Agriculture in the Town of Seward

As an industry, the total economic impact that agriculture has in the Town of Seward is undeniably significant. As previously indicated, the town primarily consists of rural residential and agricultural land uses. There is no significant impact from retail, manufacturing, or service based businesses located within the town.

A full inventory of agricultural census data is not available at the town level. However, an analysis of the 2007 agricultural census data by zip code is available, and can provide us with some reasonable information to further assess the economic impact that agriculture has on the area surrounding the Town of Seward. However, we must be mindful that the Town of Seward is serviced by 3 different zip codes that also encompass the Towns of Sharon, Carlisle, Cobleskill and Richmondville (see map below)



(Source: ESRI – Business Analyst)

In the Town of Seward as is the case for all of Schoharie County, the largest sector of the agricultural industry is by far dairy farming. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the sale of dairy products in 2007 was valued at \$21,287,000 or 60% of the total sales of agricultural products in the County (\$35,153,000). Of the 74 dairy farms included in this value, approximately 10 are located in the Town of Seward and 5 additional dairy farms utilize portions of land in the town although the headquarters of their operations are located in a neighboring town. Using an average value of milk products sold of \$288,000 per farm, (based on total value of all sales in the county \$21,287,000 divided by 74 farms) it is reasonable to value the amount

of dairy products sold in the Town of Seward at \$2,880,000. Using a conservative economic multiplier of 2.5¹, that \$2.8 million in dairy sales becomes a value of \$7.2 million whence it is turned over within the community. If we apply a more widely cited dairy agricultural economic multiplier of 3.2 to this figure, the overall economic impact of the Town of Seward's dairy farms is valued at \$9.2 million. Again, this is an estimated value, assuming that each dairy farm is of equal size, which we know is not the case. This value also does not take into account that one of the dairy farms located in the Town is an organic dairy, which receives a higher premium than conventionally produced fluid milk. In addition, we also must recognize that while some of the \$2.8 million in milk sold is turned over within Seward itself, the economic multiplier effect is much more significant on the county and regional economies. As it may have been in the past, many of the products and services utilized by a dairy farm may not be right in their own town, but New York Farm Bureau estimates that most dairy farms purchase most of their equipment, feed, and services from companies that are within 50-100 miles of them.

As much as the dairy industry has dominated agriculture in the town, region and state over the last 75 years, dairy farming is equally a sector at risk. While this plan was under development the New York's Dairy Farmers were hit with the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Dairy Farmers were receiving less than \$12 per hundredweight (cwt) for milk for much of 2009 while the estimated cost of production was well over \$17/cwt.



Although the price of milk has somewhat rebounded researchers from Cornell University have estimated that the dairy industry continues to reel from the economic downturn. Some dairy farms lost nearly ½ of their farm's total assets, which will take years, if not decades to rebound from.

According to the Schoharie County Office of Real Property Services (SCORPS), the total market value of all property (land only) receiving an agricultural exemption in the Town of Seward in 2010 was \$10,022,060.00. The value of land and buildings on parcels receiving an agricultural exemption was \$17,467,360.00. Given the Town of Seward and County tax rates from 2010, property taxes generated from agricultural parcels include:

\$127,530 paid to Schoharie County

\$81,318 paid to the Town

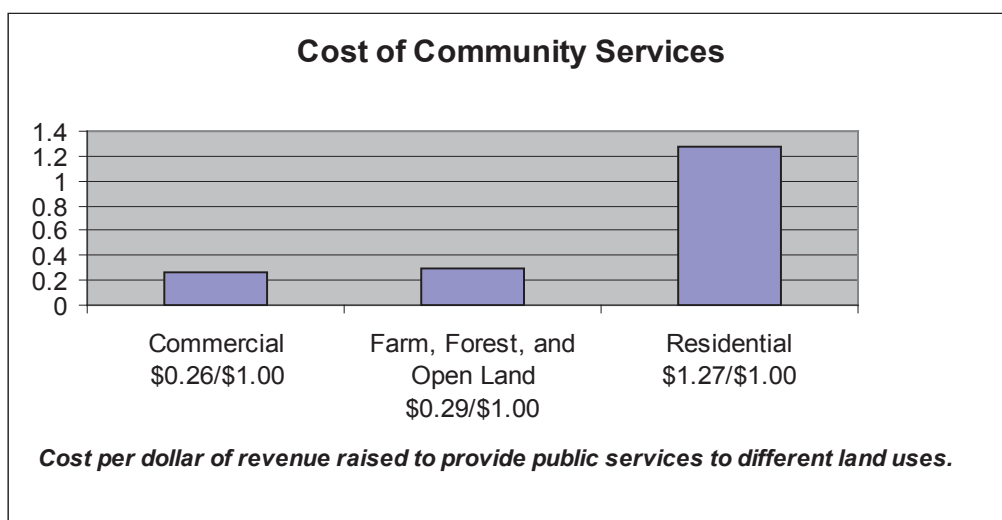
\$300,745 paid to the Cobleskill-Richmondville Central School District

In addition, property taxes to the School Districts of Sharon Springs at a rate of \$25.998529 (per thousand).

¹ The concept refers to the fact that each dollar generated by a specific industry is subsequently recirculated throughout the local economy. The frequency of recirculation determines the overall impact the particular industry has on the local economy. Professor Nelson Bills of Cornell University has developed economic multipliers for regions within New York State. The economic multiplier for the central New York region, including Schoharie County is 3.235.

It is widely accepted that there are numerous tax advantages to maintaining an agricultural base within the town and minimizing residential development. Cost of Community Service Studies (COCS), developed by American Farmland Trust determine the difference between taxes generated by different types of land uses and the cost of services each type of land use requires. As you can see from the graph below, farm, forest, and open land by far pays more than it requires in services while residential development actually costs more to serve than what they generate in tax dollars.

Figure 1: Cost of Community Services



Information from Haight et al. "New York Agriculture Landowner Guide". Saratoga Springs: American Farmland Trust, 2009.

Communities pay a high price for unplanned growth. Scattered development frequently causes traffic congestion, air and water pollution, loss of open space and increased demand for costly public services. It is important for communities to understand the relationships between residential and commercial growth, agricultural land use, conservation and the property tax base. Cost of community services studies help address misperceptions that are commonly made in rural or suburban communities facing growth pressures. It is true that an acre of farmland may generate less revenue than an acre of residential property, working lands require little public infrastructure and few services. Cost of community services studies conducted over the last 20 years show that farmland generates more public revenue than they receive back in public services. In nearly every community studied, farmland has generated a fiscal surplus to help offset the shortfall created by residential demand for public services. This is true even when the land is assessed at its current agricultural use.

Conversion Pressure

Housing development in the Town began to increase significantly during the 1970s, a decade during which 108 new houses were constructed. During the 1980s another 103 houses were built. By 1990 there were 662 houses in the Town of Seward. According to the Schoharie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan 44 of these were second homes. The county plan states that between 1989 and 1993 26 single family building permits were issued and between 1989 and 1997 674 real property transfers occurred.

According to the U.S. Census, in the year 2000 there were 685 houses in the Town of Seward, an increase of only 3 percent since 1990.

Between 2001 and 2011 another 83 permits for privately-owned residential buildings have been issued. If all of these construction projects were completed the number of houses in Seward is now 768, an increase of 12 percent since the year 2000.

Figure 2: Building Permits

Town of Seward Building Permits Residential	
Year	Permits
2011	2
2010	4
2009	6
2008	7
2007	4
2006	14
2005	10
2004	6
2003	6
2002	12
2001	12
Total	83

Source: census.gov [Annual New Privately-Owned Residential Building Permits
Seward town, New York (Schoharie County - 095)]

The Town of Seward is an approximately one-hour drive from the Greater Capital Region and two-and-a-half hours from New York City, the largest city in the United States. The town is in close proximity to the Village of Cobleskill, which is home to over 4,500 people as well as the State University of New York at Cobleskill (SUNY/Cobleskill).

Portions of three state highways, NYS Routes 10, 145 and 165 cross through the Town of Seward. Route 10 is the busiest of the three. According to the NYS Department of Transportation statistics approximately 2,700 vehicles a day travel route 10, less than 1,360 on Route 145 and less than 1,000 on Route 165.

Seward is located approximately 3 miles north of Interstate Route 88, with Route 145 serving as a connection. Route 145 also connects the town to US Route 20, which runs just north of the town's northern boundary line. A Wal-Mart regional distribution center is located on Route 20 near Sharon Springs. Seward is located between the distribution center and the I-88 interchange with NYS Rt. 145. This convenience for trucking may result in increased commercial development.

Close to Cobleskill and within driving distance of the Capital Region, Seward is attractive to commuters looking for a rural home. The town has also attracted people from the New York Metropolitan Area seeking retirement homes or second homes. Realtors based in the Village of Cobleskill actively market agricultural land in Seward to downstate residents and during the crisis in milk prices have approached struggling dairy farmers offering them the option of selling their land for residential development.



In addition, Cobleskill is home to the State University of New York of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill, a primarily residential institute with a student body of 2,600 and a staff of 650. The college is one of only six remaining state colleges of agriculture and technology, and features an extensive agricultural complex including a butchering school, dairy farm, and equestrian center. The campus is 782 acres in size. While serving as a tremendous resource for agriculture in the region the college also exerts significant development pressure on the area for faculty and student housing.

Because of slim profit margins traditionally associated with agriculture many farmers are unable to save money for retirement and instead must rely on the equity in their land. In addition, non-farmers who own agricultural land in the Town may choose to develop their land. As the Town's population grows it is likely that some farmland will be developed. This plan provides recommendations for ways in which Town residents can work together to minimize any negative impacts potential development may have on working farms and ensure the strongest future possible for active farming in the Town.

Land Use Regulation & Land Use Plans

The Town of Seward Land Use Code is comprised of zoning regulations, subdivision regulations and regulations governing the siting of mobile homes and the development of mobile home parks and trailer camps. The Land Use Code was originally adopted in 1997 and amended in 2006 and then 2007. The Land Use Code is relatively simple and reflective of the rural and agricultural character of the community.

According to the Town of Seward Land Use Code agriculture is a permitted use within the town's Residential Agricultural (RA) and Open Space (OS) zoning districts. These two zoning districts appear to cover 90 to 95 percent of land in the town.

Seward does not have a comprehensive land use in place but has conducted a land use survey to find out how town residents would like to see their town grow. The results of this survey are in the appendix (Appendix F).

A review of Seward's land use regulations by AFT found Seward's Land Use Code to be relatively simple and reflective of the rural and agricultural character of the community. AFT's Review of Regulations for Seward focused on four areas of the Town of Seward Land Use Code zoning regulations as they related to agriculture in the Town of Seward: conformance with New York State Agriculture and Markets Law; permitted (and not permitted) land uses; zoning dimensional requirements; and zoning definitions. The Review made several recommendations of how the zoning regulations can be improved to be more farm friendly. The complete Review is found in the appendix (Appendix G) of this plan.

The Town of Seward's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Committee has chosen to include the following two recommendations from the AFT's Review of Regulations in the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan:

- Establish business classification categories of "agribusiness" and "agritourism" to accommodate side businesses operated by farmers to support active farm operations such as farm equipment and agricultural supply dealerships as well as on-farm activities for the public such as corn mazes and hayrides. (See pages 7 & 8 of the AFT Review of Regulations located in the appendix - Appendix G)
- Modify definition of "Farm Structure/Use" to eliminate references to minimum size and minimum income. (See page 13 of the AFT Review of Regulations located in the appendix – Appendix G)

A recommendation is also included in the plan for the Town of Seward to review the substantial lot size, lot width and yard setback requirements in the town's RA Residential Agricultural and OS Open Space zoning districts.

According to AFT's Review of Regulations "The practice of utilizing very large lots as a means of protecting rural character and open space resources is common throughout the country. The practice does have some merit when applied toward the protection of rural character and open space resources, particularly in communities with little growth pressure. The practice when applied to agricultural lands and agricultural uses however may have the undesirable effect of 1)

removing excessive amounts of land from agricultural production; 2) unnecessarily restricting the operation of farms; and 3) adding unnecessarily to the cost of running and agricultural operation without substantially advancing the public policy interest or protecting valuable agricultural land resources.”

Unless combined with other restrictions, minimum lot size zoning as a means of stabilizing the agricultural land base, often does little to protect land for farming. In fact, larger lots may end up consuming available land resources quickly, accelerating the conversion of farmland.

Comprehensive Plan

In cooperation with the Schoharie County Planning and Development Agency (SCPDA), the Town of Seward conducted a survey of town residents on the topic of land use (Appendix F). The primary purpose of the survey was to provide the town with information that could be used in the drafting of a comprehensive land use plan, Seward is now seriously considering the possibility of developing a comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive plans serve as the foundation of local land use planning. A comprehensive plan represents a community’s vision for its future as well as a road map for how it wants to get there. Comprehensive plans often include:

- A vision statement describing the community’s long-term goals;
- Maps identifying different natural and community resources, infrastructure and land uses;
- Research regarding a town’s citizens, land uses, businesses and natural resources;
- Feedback from citizens via surveys, public meetings, focus groups and other public participation vehicles;
- Recommendations to achieve a community’s stated objectives.

The development of a comprehensive plan is an important opportunity to engage community residents in thinking about the future. Farmers and rural landowners should be involved early in the process, so that the final plan represents the interests and concerns of farmers.



The Future of Farming

The Town of Seward needs to find ways to sustain its established farms and at the same time, promote alternative and value-added agricultural enterprises. Seward's contiguous tracts of agricultural land enable commodity farmers to produce their crops without significantly impacting residential areas. However, scattered residential development is beginning to fragment agricultural lands, making it more difficult for farmers to work the land. An increase in traffic has also made it difficult for farmers to move agricultural equipment along the roads.

The community is extremely supportive of farming and most believe that the best way to protect farmland is to keep farms profitable, however this is difficult under current economic conditions. There is no doubt that serious challenges lie ahead for farmers in the Town of Seward. Such challenges, which are documented in the interview summary found in the appendix (Appendix C) of this plan, include: lack of a support infrastructure and farm labor force; difficulty moving farm equipment on roads; narrow profit margins; high input costs; depressed milk prices; and property taxes.

Fortunately, by coming together to plan for the future of agriculture in the town, the community has accomplished several important things. The process of developing an agricultural and farmland protection plan has helped the community understand the scope of agricultural activity occurring in the Town. In addition, the community has identified the problems it faces in retaining its farm businesses and agricultural land such as property taxes, road safety and a lack of public



understanding of agriculture. Lastly, through developing this plan, Seward has created strategies for thoughtful land use planning that will minimize development's impact on agriculture. The town has also devised ways of supporting existing agricultural businesses at the town level while working towards creating new economic opportunities for farmers. Examples of such strategies include: the development of a town agricultural committee; support for direct marketing; improving broadband access; and developing an educational brochure about local agriculture for town residents.

Goals & Recommendations

Goal I

Support Agriculture at the Town Level

Encourage town governments to be proactive in identifying and resolving issues impacting agriculture. Strengthen the business of agriculture in the town with farm friendly town policies and land use regulations. Retain the critical mass of agricultural land necessary for agriculture to remain the primary land use in the towns by providing incentives for landowners to continue agricultural activities and to keep land available for agriculture use.

A. Agricultural Land Use Planning

Recommendation 1

Form Agricultural Advisory Committee

Although it could be challenging due to lack of farmer participation in town government the town board should establish an agricultural advisory committee to address issues affecting agriculture. This committee would be responsible for working with the town board to implement the recommendations of the town's agriculture and farmland protection plan and address any issues impacting agriculture that may arise in the future. See sample town resolution adopting an agriculture and farmland protection plan and forming an agricultural advisory committee in appendix (Appendix H).

Recommendation 2

Represent Agricultural Interests on Appointed Boards & Committees

Encourage the presence of individuals from the agricultural community on the town's appointed boards and committees whenever possible.

Recommendation 3

Provide Training in Agricultural Land Use Planning

Provide quality training in agricultural land use planning, New York State agricultural district law and the state's farmland protection program for members of the town board, planning board zoning board of appeals, town attorney and code enforcement officer. Such training is available from organizations such as the New York Planning Federation, American Farmland Trust, New York State Department of State's Office of Local Government Services, New York State Office of Real Property Services and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. Contact information for these organizations is provided in the Resources section of this plan (Appendix T). See appendix (Appendix I) for NYS brochure on its Land Use Training Program.

Recommendation 4

Develop a Comprehensive Plan that Supports Agriculture

Develop a comprehensive land use plan that strongly supports agriculture. A comprehensive plan represents a community's vision for the future and a road map of how to get there.

Comprehensive plans serve as the foundation of town planning and zoning efforts and can form the basis of a local land use strategy by identifying areas best suited for farming and forestry as well as areas where development should be encouraged. The Town of Seward has already taken the first step towards this goal by conducting a land use plan survey in 2009.

Recommendation 5

Educate Realtors and Home Builders About the Benefits of Retaining Agricultural Land

Educate homebuilders, developers and realtors on the benefits of retaining agricultural land and how they can develop their land in a way that will minimize negative impact on farming activities. Produce a brochure that offers examples of how an individual landowner can design their lot in way in which preserves farmland.

Recommendation 6

Consider Conservation Subdivisions

Review the concept of conservation subdivision and how it differs from cluster development. Cluster development is currently part of Seward’s land use regulations. Residential cluster development groups houses on a portion of the available land while reserving a significant amount of the land as protected open space. A higher density allowance often acts as an incentive for the developer to opt for cluster design. In cluster design generally the housing sites are designated first and the open space tends to be the land unsuitable for development that is left over.

Conservation subdivision takes the cluster design concept one step further requiring the agricultural land to be set aside for conservation be designated first. The houses are then located in a way that allows the housing sites to take the most advantage of their proximity to the farmland. This undeveloped land is not an afterthought or what is “leftover” but instead the organizing principal of the development. This is not a new concept but instead is an old tradition with its roots in agriculture where houses in a community were grouped near what were considered “common lands” for the growing of crops and pasturing of livestock.



Town officials need to be educated about conservation subdivisions. Town regulations should be updated to encourage conservation subdivisions as a means to protecting high quality agricultural land and specify that land set aside as part of a subdivision should not just be considered as open space but be available for agriculture (See Appendix E for a *Rural Design Workbook* chapter on Conservation Subdivision Design.).

Recommendation 7

Consider Cooperative Farm Subdivisions

Research the viability for cooperative farm subdivisions (see Town of Charlton plan, www.townofcharlton.org). Cooperative farm subdivisions are similar to cluster housing or conservation subdivisions in which a piece of land is subdivided for homes, leaving a section of undeveloped land. However in a cooperative farm subdivision this is done with the specific intention of retaining the open piece of land for agricultural use. The land can be preserved jointly by the homeowners and used for agricultural purposes such as small crops, or horse pasture.

Recommendation 8

Consider Housing Placement on Land Composed of Prime Soil

The Town of Seward's agriculture and farmland protection plan asserts that all active farmland in the town constitutes a critical mass of agricultural land and is a priority for protection including prime soils that occur in the Residential and Residential Agricultural Zone. This plan recommends the town consider requiring that newly constructed houses on lots composed prime soil in the Residential and Residential Agricultural Zone not be sited in the middle of the field of prime soil but instead be sited along the edges of the field to allow for continued agricultural production.

Recommendation 9

Promote Agriculture-Based Side Businesses that Support Working Farms

The town board should consider amending the Land Use Code to establish business classification categories of "agribusiness" and "agritourism" to accommodate side businesses operated by farmers to support active farm operations such as farm equipment and agricultural supply dealerships as well as on-farm activities for the public such as corn mazes and hayrides. (See pages 7 & 8 of the AFT Review of Regulations located in the appendix – Appendix G)

Recommendation 10

Provide Flexibility for Farm Structures

The Town Board should consider modifying the Land Use Code's definition of "Farm Structure/Use" to eliminate references to minimum size and minimum income. (See page 13 of the AFT Review of Regulations located in the appendix – Appendix G)

Recommendation 11

Review Impact of Lot Size, Width and Setback Requirements on Farmland

The Town Board and the Agriculture Advisory Committee should Review the substantial lot size, lot width and yard setback requirements in the town's RA Residential Agricultural and OS Open Space zoning districts, analyzing existing research to determine if the current requirements have any negative impact on the maintaining the agricultural land base.

B. Agricultural Districts

Recommendation 1

Ensure Agricultural District Law is Followed

Make sure that the requirements of the state's agricultural district law are being adhered to during the subdivision and site plan review process and clarify which town officials such as the planning board and in certain cases the zoning board of appeals are responsible for making sure the requirements are met. Examples of these requirements include: disclosure notices advising future property owners that the property is in an agricultural district and features of modern agricultural practices that will be ongoing prior to signing of purchase agreement; filing of agricultural data statements for certain land use determinations within 500 feet of a farm operation located in an agricultural district; filing of a notice of intent and detailed agricultural impact statement prior to the expenditure of public funds on certain non-farm projects proposed in an agricultural district. A sample agricultural disclosure notice is included in the appendix (Appendix J) of this plan.

Recommendation 2

Educate Town Officials, Staff & Assessors

Hold a meeting of all town officials, committee members, staff and the assessor. Distribute copies of the state agricultural district law, the town's right to farm law and agriculture and farmland protection plan. Discuss the importance of agriculture to the community. The purpose of this meeting would be to build awareness among all town representatives of the priority the town places on retaining agricultural land and supporting farm operations as well as the requirements and recommendations regarding agriculture at both the state and local level.

C. Property Taxes

Recommendation 1

Ensure All Eligible and Interested Landowners Receive Agricultural Assessment

Property taxes are often cited as a major obstacle to retaining ownership of farmland. Ensure that all eligible farmers and owners of agriculture land are receiving all the tax relief through various existing programs that they are eligible for and opt to take advantage of. Such programs include: agricultural assessment; farm building exemptions; farmers' school tax credit; forestland exemption; historic barns rehabilitation tax credit; orchard and vineyard exemption; sales tax exemptions; NYS conservation easement tax credit. Information and contact details are provided in the *New York Agricultural Landowner Guide* provided in the appendix (Appendix K) of this plan.

Consider having the assessor periodically send out a letter to owners of agricultural land informing them about agricultural assessment and the required record keeping.

Recommendation 2

Consider Adopting Agricultural Assessment for Service Districts

Research the viability of basing taxes for service districts on agricultural assessments. The governing body of a fire protection or ambulance district may adopt a resolution stating that agricultural assessment values should be used to determine the taxes levied by that district. Such a measure ensures that farmland is taxed at its current, non-speculative value, recognizing that farmland generally requires fewer public services and should be taxed accordingly.

Recommendation 3

Train Assessor on Assessing Agricultural Land & Structures

Ensure regular training for assessor on assessing agricultural land and buildings. Courses are available through the New York State Office of Real Property Services and Cornell University. Training sessions are offered in classroom settings, online and through self-study programs. All assessors are required to receive training and certification by the Office of Real Property Services. However the "Introduction to Farm Appraisal" training session is not required to be taken by the assessor until their third year in office. If the assessor has not yet received training specific to assessing agricultural land the towns could encourage the assessor to put a priority on taking this course up front.

Recommendation 4

Ensure Accuracy of Property Type Classification Codes

During review of agricultural parcels in the towns conducted during the background research for the town's agricultural and farmland protection plan, it became apparent that a large number of

parcels of agricultural land are coded with an incorrect property type classification code. During a recent update these incorrect codes have largely been corrected. It is important that this accurate coding be maintained. Property type classification codes, developed by the New York State Office of Real Property Services, form a uniform property classification system to be used by municipalities in assessment administration. The towns need to ensure that all land, particularly farmland receives the appropriate property type classification code. See agricultural property classification codes and map in appendix (Appendix L).

Recommendation 5

Protect Farms From Negative Impacts of Commercial and Industrial Development

Encourage the location of light industry and retail operations in the town that will not have a negative impact on agriculture. Such commercial development can contribute to the town's tax base and help alleviate tax pressure on agriculture.

D. Working Lands

Recommendation 1

Make Roads Safe for Farmers Operating Agricultural Equipment

Work with the county and the state to make sure that appropriate speed limits are established and enforced on routes frequently traveled by farm vehicles. Make sure the appropriate signage appears in areas where there is limited visibility or other risks involving farm traffic.

Rural roads should be suitable for rural traffic and farm equipment. When roads are overbuilt, the speed of traffic increases. In addition bridges need to be constructed to accommodate farm equipment. Provide ample posting of speed limits on town roads and work with other agencies to post sufficient speed limit signage on roads they oversee. Make arrangements with Schoharie County Sheriff Services to enforce speed limits. Offer training to farmers on how to safely navigate farm equipment along town roads. Educate town residents on sharing the road with farm equipment. Distribute brochures and other safety information regarding slow moving vehicles provided by SafeNY, a state traffic safety program. Contact information is provided in the Resource section of this plan. See appendix (Appendix M) for SafeNY materials.



Recommendation 2

Develop Farmland Rental Network

Maximize the use of agricultural lands by developing a network of farmers and landowners to facilitate farmland rental. Educate non-farming owners of agricultural land about how rental agreements can work, how to become eligible for agricultural assessment and the paperwork necessary to qualify. Reach out to landowners who are not currently renting land to farmers, educate them, and invite them to join the network.

Recommendation 3

Maintain Agricultural Data at Town Level

Maintain accurate records of farmland acreage and agricultural activities and production in the town. Agriculture at the town level is not generally tracked and data is hard to come by. By

maintaining its own database the town will be better positioned when it comes time to update this plan and for future land use planning.

E. Land in Transition

Recommendation 1

Market Town to Farmers

Develop a brochure and/or website that markets the Town of Seward as a good place to farm. If a farmer decides to sell his or her land, the best way to keep it in agriculture is to have another farmer buy it. A good example of a community that has done this is Jefferson County in northern New York and their *Come Farm With Us* website, www.comefarmwithus.com.

Recommendation 2

Provide Assistance to Farmers in Transition to Keep Land in Agriculture

Part of a traditionally strong dairy region, Seward has felt the impact of the latest crisis in milk prices. A significant amount of the farmland in Seward has been and continues to be in dairy production. The tenuous economic situation for dairy farms puts the town's farmland base at risk. Some dairy farmers may find it necessary to diversify or transition out of dairy entirely and the town needs to be prepared to support them during these transitions.

Some transitions may involve a change in ownership or management. The town should work closely with support networks such as Cornell University's FarmLink/FarmNet program to help farmers in need of special assistance and to match farmers interested in selling their land with farmers that are looking for land to purchase. See Resources page (Appendix V) for contact information.

Recommendation 3

Encourage Beginning Farmers

Create a mentoring program where experienced farmers can assist and guide new farmers. Collaborate with SUNY/Cobleskill and MADE in Schoharie County's livestock internship program (grassfedinterns.com) to match recent graduates of the University's School of Agriculture and Natural Resources with farmers in the town who are interested in mentoring an individual and perhaps transferring ownership over time. The New York Beginning Farmers Project, part of Cornell University is another resource to help new farmers. Contact information is provided on the Resource page.

F. Farmland Protection

Recommendation 1

Educate Landowners About Conservation Easements

Educate landowners about voluntarily placing conservation easements on their land. A conservation easement is a deed restriction landowners voluntarily place on their property to protect resources, natural areas or productive agricultural land (Appendix L). An easement on agricultural land is called an agricultural conservation easement. In general agricultural conservation easements limit non-farm development and activity. Most agricultural conservation easements are permanent and the restrictions travel with the deed to the land when it changes ownership. Landowners can sell or donate an easement to a qualified conservation organization or government body. The value of the easement is generally the monetary difference between the

land's value for development and its value for agricultural use. Landowners who place easements on their land can receive various tax advantages.

Currently the federal government and NYSDAM's Farmland Protection Program offer funding on an application basis for purchase of development rights. Easements can also be donated to land conservation organizations such as the Schoharie Land Trust (Appendix O). More information on purchase of development rights is available in the appendix (Appendix P, Appendix Q).

Recommendation 2

Research Viability of Lease of Development Rights Program

Conduct a review of other communities offering lease of development rights programs. Estimate how many landowners in town would be willing to participate in such a program. Analyze what the impact would be on the tax base and project how such a program would positively and negatively affect the Town of Seward.

Lease of development rights programs (LDR), also known as term conservation easement programs, provide incentives to landowners who voluntarily commit to keeping their land undeveloped for an agreed upon number of years. LDR programs are similar in concept to purchase of development rights programs but the incentives they offer are more modest because the commitment is not permanent.

In an LDR program a town can reduce property tax assessments for landowners willing to sign a temporary deed restriction that will be in place for a set number of years. LDR programs can help farmers maintain their land while stabilizing areas within the town, allowing the community time to develop longer-term farmland protection strategies. More information on LDR programs is available in the appendix (Appendix R).

Recommendation 3

Review Plan Every Five Years

The town board should require a review of the agricultural and farmland protection plan every five years and update as needed.

Recommendation 4

Participate in Update of Schoharie County Plan

Participate in the updating of the Schoharie County agricultural and farmland protection plan.

Goal II

Foster Economic Opportunities for Agriculture

The best way to keep land in agriculture is to keep farms profitable. If people can make money from farming the incentive to sell land for development will be reduced.

Recommendation 1

Disseminate Information About Economic Opportunity

Collaborate with farmers and state and local agencies to share information and resources and provide support to farmers in the town. Develop a system to update farmers on developing markets for new products that can be produced in the town's region. Establish an information

center at the town hall where materials on agricultural programs, issues and opportunities can be distributed.

Recommendation 2

Support Government Initiatives to Stabilize Milk Prices

Support efforts at the state and federal level to resolve issues concerning the pricing of fluid milk and other dairy commodities and support initiatives to provide economic support to dairy farmers.

Recommendation 3

Collaborate to Develop Regional Cooperative

Participate in the development of a regional cooperative of local farmers to market their products. Hire a centralized person to coordinate the sale of local agricultural products to urban markets as well as to institutions and other large volume purchasers. Collaborate with Schoharie County to research the availability of grant funding to finance market development for local agricultural products.



A. Livestock

Action i

Raise and Market Grassfed and Pastured Meats

Collaborate with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), Schoharie County Planning Department Agency (SCPD), MADE in Schoharie County and SUNY/Cobleskill to utilize the land base for production of crops to which it best suited and are most profitable as markets change. For example, enhance the developing grass-fed and/or pastured livestock initiative in Seward and Schoharie County as a whole. Dairy has long been the predominant form of agriculture in Seward because the land is well suited to producing hay and forage. These pastures and hayfields also lend themselves to raising livestock for meat.

The market for both grass-fed and pastured meat has been growing over the past several years and concerns regarding food safety appear to be accelerating the expansion of this market. Seward is well situated geographically to service this market, which exists primarily in urban and suburban areas such as the Greater Capital Region and the New York Metropolitan Area.

The development of this initiative should include a locally based USDA inspected livestock processing facility that can handle the anticipated volume. Currently a lack of slaughterhouses as well as limited of refrigeration capacity for hanging and storing meat is restricting the growth of pastured/grass fed meat production. Many farmers must transport their animals considerable distances for processing and must schedule their time slots as much as a year in advance. Until it becomes economically feasible for local facilities to be developed farmers could consider cooperating to truck livestock to processing facilities outside of the region.

Local slaughter initiatives have been undertaken in the past by SUNY/Cobleskill, which runs a meat lab for slaughtering and butchery instruction. A mobile slaughter unit has also been developed by a farmer in Carlisle and is used by several area livestock farmers.

Action ii

Take Advantage of Ethnic Markets

Cater to the ethnic market for live animals and on-farm butchering by the customer. Seward is within a relatively short driving distance of the Capital Region with excellent roads and direct routes making access easy for potential customers.

Live animal markets, such as Broadway Live Poultry Market in Schenectady, represent another potential outlet for livestock raised in Seward. There are approximately 90 live poultry markets in the New York Metropolitan Region with additional markets existing in New Jersey and New England. Many of these markets also sell goats, lamb and beef. Currently the Broadway Live Poultry Market buys its animals from a farm in Queens. These animals could be bought from local farms.

Farmers could cater to the food ways of diverse populations. One example of a growing market is the Guyanese population currently being cultivated by the City of Schenectady. Guyanese have been relocating to Schenectady from Queens. Several thousand Guyanese now reside in Schenectady. Growers could make connections with this community and grow the types of agricultural products they desire. The Guyanese diet includes a substantial amount of chicken as well as beef and pork. Sweet potatoes, pumpkins, garlic and sorrel are also agricultural products that can be grown in the region that are staples of the Guyanese diet. The Schenectady Greenmarket, located in downtown Schenectady is a good venue to trade with these customers.

Action iii

Offer Horse Boarding

Develop a support network for farmers that either want to start up or convert part or all of their existing operation to horse boarding. Between second homeowners, students at SUNY/Cobleskill and horse enthusiasts in the Greater Capital/Saratoga Region, there is a market for farms that board horses. The recession has limited the ability of some horse owners to maintain their own barns and riding facilities and they are finding it more economical to board their horses and ride at the boarding facility. Horse care is a specialized skill that can be developed through education and experience. The town could establish an ad hoc equine committee to advise newcomers to this business about facilities, management and horse care standards.



B. Crops

Action i

Develop Local Value-Added Processing Infrastructure

Support the development of a value added processing facility in Schoharie County. Such a facility could enable farmers to produce value-added products to sell at area farm stands, and farmers markets as well as other regional retail outlets. Freezing or canning could provide locally produced foods outside of the growing season to retail outlets, restaurants, schools and other institutions. For example Farm 2 Table Co-Packers, located in Kingston, NY is a 20,000 square

foot kitchen with a dedicated processing line, bakery and test kitchen with 8,000 feet of storage space for refrigerated, frozen and dry goods. Winter Sun, an associated farm, is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation that freezes locally grown produce, which it makes available to its members outside of the growing season.

Action ii

Produce Custom Hay

Collaborate with the CCE and the county's agricultural marketing specialist to identify markets and pricing for hay customized to available high-end markets and recruit growers to produce it. Identify farmland that, if untreated with chemicals for a period of three years, could be converted into organic hay production.

C. Direct Marketing

Recommendation 1

Support Dairy Farmers Converting to Direct Marketing

Support the development of an initiative at the county and/or state level to assist dairy farmers in direct marketing. Some dairy farms in the region have begun to process their own milk and sell it directly to the consumer. Meadowbrook Farms in Albany County and Kings Brothers Dairy in Saratoga County are two examples. In addition to direct marketing milk some dairy farms are also making and selling other dairy products such as yogurt, cheese and ice cream.

Farmers who had transitioned into direct marketing before the fluid milk price dropped have been able to keep their price constant. Commodity dairy farmers suffering from the drop in milk prices are eyeing direct marketing as a means stabilizing their revenue. However, processing and direct marketing milk and dairy products is a complex undertaking that will require special assistance, training and ongoing support for the farmers involved.

Recommendation 2

Expand Area Farmers Markets

Expand area farmers markets. Collaborate with SCPDA to expand the Cobleskill farmers market so that it can attract a larger customer base and move more goods, providing revenue for a broader pool of farmers.

Recommendation 3

Sell Local Farm Products to Tourists

Collaborate with SCPDA to promote and market locally grown farm products through a farmers market and other farm oriented events at local tourist destinations such as Howe Caverns and the Iroquois Indian Museum. Some non-perishable farm products such as preserves, maple syrup and candy as well as beeswax items could also be sold in these destinations' gift shops. Foster the development of roadside stands along Route 20 to take advantage of tourist traffic to Cooperstown. People who travel this route regularly, as many do, will become repeat customers.

Recommendation 4

Encourage Farmers to Work Together to Participate in Urban Farmers Markets

Encourage farmers to participate in Greater Capital Region farmers markets as well as the Greenmarket in New York Metropolitan Area. Identify farmers who sell their products at farmers

markets and wholesale to urban-based businesses such as restaurants and develop a transportation cooperative that would save on time and wear and tear on delivery vehicles.

Recommendation 5

Increase Rural Access to High Speed Internet

Town officials need to work with county, state and federal officials to make high-speed internet access available to farmers and individuals in rural settings. Farmers need high-speed internet access for many reasons. Farmers need to research farming techniques as well as shop online for competitively priced supplies. Farmers need to maintain contact with agricultural groups and associations that share knowledge and develop initiatives. Farmers need to be able to promote and market their products online and be able to interact online with their customers.

Recommendation 6

Support the Development of Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has grown tremendously in popularity over the last 20 years. A farmer operating a CSA offers a certain number of shares of the produce the farm will produce in a given year for a fee. In exchange the shareholder will regularly receive quantities of seasonal goods produced on the farm. The CSA model allows the farmer, who receives the money at the beginning of the year, to make the capital investment necessary to produce the crops.



CSAs contain an element of shared-risk which means that both the farmer and the consumer lose out in the case of the failure of a certain crop. However, the vast majority of CSAs produce a diverse number of crops throughout the growing season so the likelihood of total loss is remote. The town should support the development of CSAs in the region.

Goal III

Educate People About Agriculture

In the past an understanding of the basic concepts of agriculture was ingrained in the general public's outlook because the majority of people had some kind of background in farming. Today this is not the case. Non-farming members of the community may have little or no understanding of common agricultural practices. In order for farmers to continue normal operations and live in harmony with non-farming neighbors, residents must be educated about the types of agriculture occurring in their communities and the kinds of activities that they can expect to encounter.

Recommendation 1

Produce Brochure About Agriculture for Town Residents

Develop a brochure for non-farming residents explaining what types of agriculture exist in the town and what kinds of agricultural activities they may expect to encounter. Explain the benefits of agriculture to the community. Describe state and local regulations relating to agriculture such as the state's agricultural districts law and the town's right to farm law. Distribute this brochure

to new and existing residents. A sample brochure from Saratoga County “*Are You Thinking About Moving To The Country*” appears in the appendix (Appendix S).

Recommendation 2

Educate Children in the Community About Agriculture

Collaborate with local school districts, 4H clubs and the Future Farmers of American (FFA) to educate children about agriculture in their community. Work with the Cobleskill Richmondville and Sharon Springs Central School Districts to create farm to school lunch programs paired with educational field trips to local farms. Children need to have a basic understanding of where their food comes from and how an agricultural community works. If children do not develop an interest in agriculture there will be no next generation capable of caring for the town’s farmland.

Recommendation 3

Support Development of Social Network for Farmers

As farming has declined throughout the town the social fabric of the farming community has eroded. Create or revive a social group for farmers in the town such as the Grange. This social group can function as a support group for farmers facing challenges and can also aid in public education efforts. Such a community group could be bolstered by an online network or social media venue such as Facebook allowing farm families to stay connected.

Goal IV

Protect Natural Resources and Open Space

Recommendation 1

Work Together to Protect Water Quality

Water quality and availability are critical to the success of agriculture. The town should work with naturalists and geologists to identify, inventory, map and monitor the quality and quantity of water and other natural resources in the town. Maps should be generated that depict the soils, slopes, creeks, wetlands and karst areas in the towns.

Recommendation 2

Help Farmers Take Advantage of Natural Resources Conservation Programs

Educate farmers about federal and state natural resource conservation programs they are eligible to participate in that offer financial aid and/or tax incentives to help farmers protect the environment. Some examples of such programs are: Conservation Reserve Program; Federal Wetlands Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Debt for Nature; Grassland Reserve Program; Landowner incentive program; Wetlands Reserve Program; Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. These programs are described in the *New York Agricultural Landowner Guide* included in the appendix (Appendix K).

Recommendation 3

Research Opportunities For On Farm Production of Renewable Energy

Explore possibilities for farm production of renewable energy both for on-farm use and for environmental markets.

Recommendation 4

Produce Biofuel

Collaborate with CCE and SCPDA to research how Seward could best meet the needs of the market for biofuels. Local biofuel businesses exist (Albany Renewable Energy, Empire State Ethanol and Energy, new business at former Blue Seal feed mill) and are planning expansions. Find out what products they need in what quantities. Make this information available to farmers.

An increasing number of farmers and agricultural landowners are interested in opportunities to generate renewable energy as a means of reducing business costs, diversifying their income sources and enhancing the environmental sustainability of their businesses. Other farmers are interested in reducing energy consumption or participating in emerging environmental markets such as carbon trading. There are many financial incentives and state and federal programs designed to help farmers tap into new environmental market and energy opportunities.



First Year/Ongoing	Implementation	Responsibility
Goal I: Support Agriculture at the Town Level		
Land Use Planning		
Form an Agricultural Advisory Committee	immediately	Town Board
Represent Agricultural Interests on Appointed Boards	first year	Town Board
Consider Conservation Subdivisions	first year	Town Board; Planning Board; SCPDA; Schoharie Land Trust
Agricultural Districts		
Ensure Agricultural District Law is Followed	immediately / ongoing	Town Board; Planning Board; ZBA; SCPDA; Agricultural Advisory Committee
Property Taxes		
Ensure All Interested and Eligible Landowners Receive Agricultural Assessment	first year / ongoing	Assessor; Agricultural Advisory Committee
Train Assessors on Assessing Agricultural Land / Structures	first year	SCPDA; Assessor; Assessor's Committee; Town Board
Ensure Accuracy of Property Type Classification Codes	first year	Town Board; Assessor; Assessor's Committee
Protect Farms from Negative Impacts of Commercial and Industrial Development	first year / ongoing	Town Board; Planning Board; SCPDA; Agricultural Advisory Committee
Working Lands		
Make Roads Safe for Agricultural Equipment	first year / ongoing	Town Board; Agricultural Advisory Committee; Town Highway Superintendent; Schoharie County Sherriff Services; NYS Police
Maintain Agricultural Data at the Town Level	first year / ongoing	Town Board; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Land in Transition		
Provide Assistance to Farmers in Transition to Keep Land in Agriculture	first year / ongoing	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Encourage Beginning Farmers	first year / ongoing	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Farmland Protection		
Educate Landowners About Conservation Easements	first year	Town Board; SLT; SCPDA; NYSDAM
Research Viability of Lease of Development Rights	ongoing	Town Board; SCPDA; CCE

	Implementation	Responsibility
Goal II: Foster Economic Opportunities for Agriculture		
Disseminate Information About Economic Opportunity	ongoing	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Support Government Initiatives to Stabilize Milk Prices	ongoing	Agricultural Advisory Committee; Town Board; SCPDA;
		NYSDAM
Goal IV: Protect Natural Resources and Open Space		
Work Together to Protect Water Quality	ongoing	Town Board; Planning Board; Agricultural
		Advisory Committee; SCPDA; NRCS; SCSWCD
Help Farmers Take Advantage of Natural Resource	first year / ongoing	Town Board; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA;
Conservatoion Programs		NRCS; SCSWCD; CCE
First Three Years		
Goal I: Support Agriculture at the Town Level		
<i>Land Use Planning</i>		
Provide Training in Agricultural Land Use Planning	first three years	Town Board; Planning Board; Agricultural
		Advisory Committee; SCPDA
Develop a Comprehensive Plan That Supports Agriculture	first three years	Town Board
Educate Realtors and Home Builders About Benefits of	first two years	Agricultural Advisory Committee; Town Board;
Retaining Agricultural Land		SCPDA; CCE
Consider Cooperative Farm Subdivisions	first two years	Town Board; Planning Board; SCPDA
<i>Agricultural Districts</i>		
Educate Town Officials, Staff and Assessors	within three years	Town Board; SCPDA; Planning Board; ZBA;
		Agricultural Advisory Committee; Assessor
<i>Property Taxes</i>		
Consider Agricultural Assessment for Service Districts	first three years	Town Board; Fire & Ambulance Districts
<i>Working Lands</i>		
Develop Farm Rental Program	first three years	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE

	Implementation	Responsibility
<i>Land in Transition</i>		
Market Town to Farmers	first three years	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Goal II: Foster Economic Opportunities for Agriculture		
<i>Livestock</i>		
Raise and Market Grassfed and Pastured Meats	first three years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; SUNY Cobleskill
Take Advantage of Ethnic Market	first three years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; SUNY Cobleskill
Offer Horse Boarding	first three years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; SUNY Cobleskill
<i>Crops</i>		
Develop Local Value-Added Processing Infrastructure	first three years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; SUNY Cobleskill
Produce and Market Custom Hay	first three years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; SUNY Cobleskill
Goal III: Educate People About Agriculture		
Produce Brochure About Agriculture for Town Residents	first two years	Town Board; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Educate Children in Community About Agriculture	first two years	Agricultural Advisory Committee; CCE; School District(s); 4H; FFA; SUNY Cobleskill
Support Development of Social Network for Farmers	first three years	Agricultural Advisory Committee
First Five Years		
Goal I: Support Agriculture at the Town Level		
<i>Farmland Protection</i>		
Review Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Every Five Years	first five years	Town Board; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA

	Implementation	Responsibility
Participate in Updating Schoharie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan	first five years	Town Board; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Goal II: Foster Economic Opportunities for Agriculture		
<i>Direct Marketing</i>		
Support Dairy Farmers Converting to Direct Marketing	first five years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Expand Area Farmers Markets	first five years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Sell Local Farm Products to Tourists	first five years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Encourage Farmers to Work Together to Participate in Urban Markets	first five years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Increase Rural Access to High Speed Internet	first five years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Support Development of Community Supported Agriculture	first five years	Farmers; Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE
Goal IV: Protect Natural Resources and Open Space		
Research Opportunities for On-Farm Production of Renewable Energy	first five years	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; NYSERDA; NYSDAM
Produce and Market Biofuels	first five years	Agricultural Advisory Committee; SCPDA; CCE; NYSERDA; NYSDAM

APPENDIX

- A. NYSDAM Agriculture Definitions**
- B. SWOT Analysis**
- C. Interview Summary**
- D. Soil Definitions**
- E. Rural Design Workbook Chapter 2, Conservation Design Method**
- F. Town of Seward Land Use Survey Summary/Schoharie County**
- G. AFT Review of Regulations**
- H. Sample Town Resolution Adopting Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan and Establishing Town Agricultural Advisory Committee**
- I. NYS Division of Government Services Land Use Training Program Brochure**
- J. Sample Disclosure Notice – NYS DAM**
- K. AFT's *New York Agricultural Landowner Guide***
- L. Property Class Codes/Agriculture**
- M. SafeNY Materials on Slow Moving Vehicle Road Safety**
- N. AFT Fact Sheet on Conservation Easements**
- O. Schoharie Land Trust Brochure**
- P. Excerpt on Purchase of Development Rights from AFT's *Planning for Agriculture in New York***
- Q. AFT Fact Sheet on Federal Farm & Ranchland Protection Program**
- R. Excerpt on Lease of Development Rights from AFT's *Planning for Agriculture in New York***
- S. Saratoga County Brochure "Are You Thinking About Moving to the Country?"**
- T. Map: Aerial View Showing Property Parcels**
- U. Map: Parcels & Ag Exemptions**
- V. Resources**