

The one resource that will determine the fate of all the others is Connecticut's land, and it remains the one in most need of attention. Agricultural vistas and large forests are broken up, traffic spreads, small streams get polluted, and many species of wildlife diminish as land is consumed to serve Connecticut's fast sprawling (but slow growing) population. How Connecticut can meet its demand for land development while conserving the water, air, and wildlife that derive their quality from the land will be the Council's focus over the coming year.

-- State of Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality 2003 Annual Report



Platt Farm, Southbury

The Role of Agriculture In the Preservation of Open Space and the Protection of Water Resources A Case Study of the Pomperaug River Watershed

Introduction

The Council of Governments of the Central Naugatuck Valley (COGCNV) and the Land Use Committee of the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition are seeking long-term strategies to protect and preserve the water resources of the Pomperaug Watershed which can be widely useful in the Central Naugatuck Valley Region and elsewhere. The 1998 *Regional Plan of Conservation and Development* adopted by the COGCNV recommends the identification and preservation of important open space areas before they are threatened by development. In 1999, the COGCNV began working with the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition to ensure the water supply to the fast-developing western portion of the Region.

The 90-square mile Pomperaug Watershed lies primarily within the towns of Bethlehem, Southbury, and Woodbury in the Central Naugatuck Valley. The Watershed also includes small sections of the Central Naugatuck Valley Region municipalities of Middlebury and Watertown, as well as portions of the towns of Morris, Washington and Roxbury. The Land Use Committee's interest in protecting the local water resources led to the conclusion that the most effective way to protect these local resources is to manage what goes into them, which in turn involves managing the land adjacent to the river, its tributaries, and over its aquifer recharge areas.

Clearly the Pomperaug River Valley municipalities cannot afford to purchase all the available acreage in their communities for open space and watershed protection. The Committee decided to research and analyze the various methods and criteria used for conserving lands of "critical value," which it defined as those lands playing a direct role in the protection of the health of the watershed. It decided to focus first on agricultural lands because many of the largest remaining tracts of open land in the watershed are farmland; and, since much of the farmland in the watershed is located in flood plain areas, activities on those lands, and the loss of those lands to development, have the potential for significant impacts on local water resources.

In the spring of 2003, COGCNV hired a researcher, Marion Griswold of Woodbury, to compile a working paper on the issues of agricultural land preservation. In the context of the Pomperaug Watershed, this paper provides an overview of the issues relating to farmland preservation, benefits of protection, and next steps which any municipality or organization may consider. To help identify these critical lands, the COGCNV used parcel data to develop maps of land in agricultural use in 2000 (base map is from 2000 aerials but it is updated to 2003 by towns), the prime and important agricultural soils available for development, and land assessed under PA 490.



Boer Goat Ranch, Bethlehem

Resource Threats and Committee Strategy

Threats to the preservation of farmland and farming activities include the high cost of land and the attractiveness of farmland for residential development; the dwindling of infrastructure that supports farming; federal policies which support agribusiness and undermine the profitability of small and mid-sized family farms; and the acceleration of development pressure on outlying areas caused by urban sprawl.¹

In Connecticut and in the Pomperaug Watershed there is strong public support for the preservation of “rural character” and rural lands. In a survey of attitudes about the preservation of farmland conducted by the University of Connecticut in 2000, 91% of CT residents agreed that preserving rural areas in Connecticut is important and 90% agreed that maintaining farmland for future generations is important.² Local examples of these attitudes include a public opinion survey conducted as the first step toward Woodbury’s 1999 Plan of Conservation and Development which reflects the high value residents place on the preservation of the town’s “rural and scenic character” and expresses strong support for town acquisition of open space as a means of protecting that character.³

Similarly, Southbury’s 2002 Plan of Conservation and Development set an explicit goal of conserving “remaining working farms as productive and economic farm units,”⁴ and Bethlehem’s

¹ Connecticut loses 9000 acres of farmland per year to non-agricultural uses, and only 12% of the state’s land base remains in farmland. The Connecticut Farmland Trust, 2002.

² “Attitudes Toward Farmland Preservation: A Survey of Connecticut Residents,” Center for Survey Research and Analysis, 2000

³ Woodbury Plan of Conservation and Development, 1999

⁴ Southbury 2002 Plan of Conservation and Development, p. 7-7

1999 Plan states that “a strong central theme throughout this Plan is the development of policies and objectives formulated to assist in the preservation of farmland and the business of farming.”⁵

While these plans make explicit reference to the value of “rural character” and acknowledge open space and farmland as necessary to that value, concrete strategies to protect the *activity* of agriculture -- the primary component and sole guarantor of rural character and the presence of farmland -- is often overlooked. “Rural character” depends in fact on the maintenance of “rural” activities, but the connection between protecting *farmland* and protecting *farming* is not always made. For example, Woodbury’s Plan of Conservation and Development’s Land Use Diversification section refers to the following non-residential land uses: commercial, industrial, mining, home-based businesses; but makes no reference to the activity/business of farming.⁶ The Policies and Program Steps of Southbury’s Plan which follow the expressed goal of retaining working farms do not support this laudable goal with any specific recommendations; nor does the Business and Economic Development Program section of the Plan make any mention of agriculture as a part of the town’s commercial economy needing the town’s support through planning policies or strategies.⁷ Bethlehem’s 1999 Plan calls for the formation of a “business facilitator group” in order to encourage retention of agricultural lands through providing support to farmers and farming operations, but as of 2003, this group had not yet been formed.⁸

Thus, one of the important roles for the Land Use Committee is to help the watershed communities make the link between the concept of “open space preservation” and the necessary and essential role of working agriculture in that preservation. The Committee can support the efforts of the watershed planning community to preserve its farmland by guiding it to develop policies that more actively and directly support the farms that remain in the watershed. **Supporting the economic viability of local agriculture through policy and practice is ultimately the most effective strategy for preserving farmland.**



**Flanders Nature Center,
Woodbury**

⁵ Plan of Conservation and Development, Town of Bethlehem, CT, 1999, p. 9

⁶ Before concluding that we shouldn’t bother to protect farming in Connecticut because it is an already moribund industry, we should be aware of the actual economics and activity of farming in the state: Connecticut is first in New England in, among other things, net farm income, bedding and garden plant income, peach and pear income; second in New England in farms per square mile, egg production, sweet corn production, and cattle per square mile as cited in the paper “Agriculture in Connecticut 2001” by Dr. W.A. Cowan, Emeritus Professor, Department of Animal Science, University of Connecticut

⁷ Southbury 2002 Plan of Conservation and Development, pp 7-7, 7-8, 10-1 to 10-14

⁸ Personal communication with Jean Donegan, Bethlehem Land Use Coordinator, 7/03.

This working paper presents an overview of farmland preservation, and outlines the following:

benefits of farmland preservation in the areas of

environment

quality of life / cultural values

economics

criteria for the evaluation of land being considered for preservation

strategies for preservation in the areas of

outreach / education

local policy

local planning and regulatory

state political advocacy

land preservation **mechanisms and tools** available to land trusts and towns

some **recommendations for next steps** for the Land Use Committee

Benefits of farmland preservation

*Assuming good farming practices, the environmental benefits of preserving farms and farmland are numerous and significant, especially when compared with the environmental impacts of development.*⁹ Good agricultural soils with lots of organic matter retain their water-holding capacity and serve to recharge groundwater, filter pollutants, and mitigate flooding. Agricultural land can provide habitat and conserve biodiversity in a way which the paving and lawns of subdivisions cannot do, particularly if that agricultural land is “characterized by moderate, ecologically-sustainable uses and a mosaic of different habitat types.”¹⁰

While these are the benefits that are most pertinent to watershed protection, additional environmental benefits include those that accrue from the availability of locally-grown food, such as the reduction in fossil fuel consumption and air pollution from long-distance transportation of food.



Swendsen Farm, Bethlehem

⁹ “Converting a farm or forest to a housing project, a mall, or a highway has devastated thousands of streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands and waterways....The mud washed from a typical construction site can damage three miles of downstream waters with recovery taking up to a century....Converting a forest to homes on one-acre lots can result in a 12-fold increase in nutrient loads....Significant decline in stream quality occurred when 10% or more of a watershed was rendered impervious.” Community and Environmental Defense Services paper: “How Much Development is Too Much for Streams, Rivers, Lakes, Tidal Waters and Wetlands?”

¹⁰ “The Value of Agriculture and Agricultural Land in Maintaining Biodiversity,” McDougal and Klemens

Benefits include:

- maintaining and improving soil and water quality through preservation of prime agricultural soils with good water-holding capacity
- protection of aquifer and groundwater re-charge capacity
- streambank protection
- filtering of pollutants before water enters water bodies
- prevention of soil erosion
- absorption of runoff and flood prevention
- air quality: reduction of inputs through limits on residential growth
- aquatic and terrestrial habitat protection and preservation of species diversity
- reduction in fossil fuel use and by-products due to reduced distance between food producer and consumer of locally-produced food

While the **quality of life/cultural benefits** that accrue from the existence of farm and other non-commercial and non-residential lands don't lend themselves to the kind of analysis or quantifying that environmental and economic benefits do, their importance is clearly acknowledged through their inclusion in public opinion surveys and town plans, and the many references to "rural character" in the watershed towns' documents, regulations, and dialogues. For example, Woodbury's Plan of Conservation and Development defines its open space -- forest, field, farmland, watercourses and floodplain -- as the town's "character-defining landscape" and recommends the preservation of land "containing character-defining features and playing key roles in contributing to the Town's rural character."¹¹ Distinguishing characteristics such as open spaces and the scenic vistas they allow, farmland, and farm-related activities contribute greatly to the perceived quality of life which is one of the reasons people choose to live in such places.

Benefits include:

- preservation of community character, community cohesiveness, and continuity of way of life
- preservation of historic features of our towns, such as the rural working past and agricultural heritage
- connection to local history, tradition, and our historical dependence on the land
- protection of archeological sites
- opportunities for recreation
- scenic/aesthetic values
- relief from high-density land use
- availability of fresh, locally-produced food



Platt Farm, Southbury

Farming in the Pomperaug Watershed clearly is less of an economic force than in the past. Nevertheless the **economic benefits** that accrue from the preservation of farming and farmland should not be overlooked. Probably the most important of these considerations for the purposes of the PRWC Land Use Committee is the differential between the community services required by residences as compared to farmland and other open space. For example, in Woodbury, the Council of Governments' Fiscal Impact Study determined that in 1998/99 residences required nearly

¹¹ Town of Woodbury Plan of Conservation and Development, 1999, pp. 27, 28

\$1,000,000 more in services than they provided in tax revenue. It should be emphasized that this is an annual cost to the town. By contrast, Woodbury farms, forests, wetlands and open space provided a net income to the town in 1998/99 of over \$63,000.¹² Figures like these have been developed all over the country with similar results. The American Farmland Trust has done studies which compare the future annual costs to towns of residential development as compared to the one-time cost of acquiring or placing permanent protections on land to keep it in farming or other open space. Such studies make a very compelling case for the long-term fiscal benefits of the latter.

Economic and social benefits also result from the presence of locally-owned businesses such as farms. Rural sociologist Tom Lyson has researched Census Bureau data files and concluded that “communities dependent on big business interests are less well off economically and in every other way than those built on small, locally owned businesses.” Small business owners are committed to the economic and social well-being of their communities “over the long haul,” and their profits circulate back through the local community and help to sustain it.¹³

Benefits include:

- controlling costs of public services by limiting residential development
- increase in property values near preserved open lands
- production of income and tax revenue through the continued economic viability of agriculture and the food-producing capacity of farmland (farming contributes \$2.2 billion/year to Connecticut’s economy)
- agricultural jobs
- availability of high-quality locally-produced food
- reduction in costs of transporting food from producer to consumer
- secure and reliable access to food and water¹⁴
- bringing recreation and tourism dollars to communities



Locally-grown tomatoes and sunflowers

Criteria for evaluation of important agricultural lands

These criteria are drawn from a number of sources including the American Farmland Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Connecticut Farmland Trust, and the plans of conservation and development and open space plans from a number of Connecticut towns. The criteria are more or less applicable, depending on the goal (e.g., whether the goal is the preservation of viable farming or the preservation of scenic or recreational open space). The “co-occurrence” of resources can help identify and prioritize lands for preservation and also help in securing support and involvement from multiple groups.

- the suitability and productivity of the land for agricultural use
 - soils, physical features and location
 - amount of available crop land/food production capacity of the land

¹² Council of Governments – Central Naugatuck Valley Municipal Fiscal Impact Study, Woodbury, CT, 2001

¹³ “Small Businesses are Backbone of Communities,” Center for Sustainable Agricultural Systems, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, January-February 2002 Newsletter.

¹⁴ “A New Vision for New England Farming,” Mark Winne, Boston Globe Op-Ed, 6/1/03

- degree to which the land is of a size and composition to be economically viable for agricultural purposes and the likelihood that it will remain in agricultural use for the foreseeable future
 - importance of the parcel to the integrity of the local or regional agriculture industry
 - farm viability
 - protection of lands that will be needed in the future to produce food
- the degree of threat to the continuation of agriculture on the land due to circumstances such as development pressure, the landowner's death, retirement, financial difficulties, or insecurity due to rental agreements
 - the area's importance to protection of wetlands, water quality, habitat and biodiversity: how intact and well-functioning the wetlands in the parcel are; how supportive of/important to aquifer protection/groundwater re-charge
 - contiguity with and linkages to other farmland, open space, other protected land or parks
 - proximity of surrounding farms and compatibility of uses on properties close by
 - other resources on the land worthy of conservation; e.g., structures with historical/cultural value, archeological sites
 - degree to which protection or acquisition of specific piece is consistent with local land use policy
 - balance of costs & benefits of acquiring/protecting the parcel
 - how intact the area is and the extent to which the area will enhance the conservation values of adjoining areas
 - the extent to which preserving the area will enhance the ability of adjoining areas to continue to remain open/working
 - landscape/scenic value of parcel
 - recreation potential

Strategies for Farmland Protection

The best way to keep farmland preserved is to maintain the productivity of the land and the profitability of farming.¹⁵ The *activity* on the land needs protection as well as the land itself. Farm viability needs to be an integral part of the discussion of farmland preservation, and strategies should include that discussion. Clearly the involvement of farmers in the discussion is critical. Their experience, professional expertise, insights, guidance, knowledge of the land, and ability to persuade other farmers to join farmland preservation efforts are essential to the success of farm and farmland preservation efforts.¹⁶

OUTREACH/EDUCATION

A critical first step in the protection of farmland is to understand the views of the community toward farmland protection and its role in the community's long term planning efforts. If the preservation of open space is a priority, as the Pomperaug Watershed towns' documents indicate it is, then education about what is required for preservation, through such things as presentations to the public

¹⁵ Michael Keilty, owner of Maple Bank Farm, Washington, CT, personal communication; New Hampshire Office of State Planning Revised Technical Bulletin, Winter 2000

¹⁶ Karen Huber, Executive Director, Southbury Land Trust; personal communication

and news releases, is necessary. Target audiences would be the public, developers, the farm community, and municipal officials and commissioners. Topics might include:

- the benefits of agriculture to the local economy (jobs, tax revenue, fresh farm products)
- agricultural activities and their importance to what we value about where we live
- the patterns of development in Connecticut that cause consumption of farmland for residential development (the acceleration of suburban development (sprawl) in recent years is *not* the result of population growth)¹⁷
- the success of land preservation efforts in nearby or similar towns and the fiscal benefits to the towns of those efforts
- preserved land as an economic asset (not only through reducing the burden of services on municipalities but also through attracting tourism and employers); cost of community services studies; COG's fiscal impact studies
- farmland preservation tools (PA 490, PDR, easement donation, etc.) and regional resources to help farmers and aspiring farmers
- the impact on farmland preservation of supporting local food producers/local markets

Other outreach/education strategies might include:

- developing events to promote use and appreciation of public open space
- sponsoring or supporting focus groups or public forums to get buy-in of public (e.g., Woodstock, CT)
- making use of local vocational agriculture program for local education and awareness; involving vo-ag community in preservation efforts
- recognizing citizens and groups who work successfully to achieve land preservation goals
- supporting NRCS' efforts to educate about good farming practices and environmental assistance programs
- bringing developers into the conversation (the Capitol Region Council of Governments recommends talking to developers about "the potential business opportunities associated with farmland preservation techniques and higher density housing development."¹⁸)
- using the local resources – land trusts, Audubon etc. – to develop collaborative education programs
- developing a database of property owners to be used to educate and cultivate
- starting a community garden program on town-owned land under auspices of Park & Recreation Departments to build awareness of agriculture and the value of our flood-plain agricultural soils (e.g., at Three Rivers Park in Woodbury) and supporting local CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) such as Clark Farm at Flanders Nature Center



Gardens at Flanders Nature Center

¹⁷ Connecticut Metropatterns: A Regional Agenda for Community and Prosperity in Connecticut, Orfield & Luce, March 2003

¹⁸ Agricultural Land Preservation: Capitol Region Council of Governments Best Practices Manual, Chapter 2, p. 4

LOCAL POLICY

Local land use officials play a critical role in agricultural land protection through their regulatory and planning functions. Coordination of local and state officials on a variety of policies affecting farmland and farming is very important. Suggestions include:

- assist municipalities in identifying the most threatened and most valuable lands (local groups working on this include Southbury's Rural Preservation Advisory Committee and Woodbury's Open Space Implementation Committee)
- work with landowners with land in PA 490 to obtain rights of first refusal (in some states right of first refusal is part of the 490 program – it's mandatory that 490 landowners to offer land to town and the town has 120 days to come up with the funds for purchase)
- support good farming practices by contributing to costs of conservation programs and rewarding farmers for protecting natural resources
- support farm profitability and viability by discussing such tactics as zoning provisions that permit farm stands, farm markets, temporary farm workers housing; promote policies that bolster the local agriculture industry; explore other strategies for keeping people farming
- provide farmers with technical and financial assistance re: land preservation, estate planning, funding sources, marketing (good role for the land trusts)
- consider implementing local tax assessment programs and local PDR programs to promote continued ownership of agricultural lands in addition to the ones offered by the state
- promote active productive uses on existing, undeveloped large parcels of land, especially preserved lands held by land trusts, towns, large landowners; and consider making public town-owned lands available for lease for production agriculture (e.g., vegetable, fruit, flowers)
- consider local subsidizing of farming; e.g. establish a property tax credit for landowners who lease land to farmers for agricultural use; exempt PDR land from paying property taxes
- promote links between schools and farms
- require donation to open space fund for every acre of farmland taken out of farming
- support local land trusts
- promote and support the establishment of a farmers' market in a commercially attractive location (e.g., Hollow Park in Woodbury – central location in watershed, high usage by



Woodbury residents, on land that was historically farmed) to help create new markets for locally grown agricultural products and to educate people about agriculture in general and local agriculture in particular

- put financial resources into farm viability as well as farmland preservation
- educate the land use community about the benefits of directing development away from most productive land and how that can be accomplished

LOCAL PLANNING/REGULATORY:

The town plan as the foundation of the regulatory framework and expression of a town's goals is extremely important. The local planning commission, as the body responsible for the town plan has an opportunity to assist in farmland preservation. Many plans do not clearly articulate farmland preservation objectives such that strategies toward that end can be justified. Explicit reference to farmland preservation as the basis for land use decisions helps defend decisions in the event of legal challenges to local regulations. Town Plans can state farming and farmland preservation as an explicit and legitimate goal and can include very specific farm-friendly objectives. Local Commissions can adopt the Land Use Committee's ag map as a first step toward this planning effort. The New Hampshire Office of State Planning notes that "the master plan should clearly state the community's desire to encourage and protect the town's agricultural heritage and resources as a viable and necessary aspect of the community's present and future existence: as a basis for its rural scenic and aesthetic character; for its contributions to maintaining and conserving open space and natural resources; and its impact on the town's cultural, economic and environmental stability."¹⁹



Bethlehem Goat Ranch

The Land Use Committee should work with the towns to develop and implement strategies to maintain agricultural enterprises as part of the community's economy; to protect the land base for agriculture in the community; and to create a farm-friendly regulatory agriculture community environment. Zoning, subdivision and site plan review regulations can then be revised to enforce the planning efforts. Strategies include farm-friendly zoning and subdivision and site plan review regulations designed to preserve large, useable parcels (as opposed to the fragmentation caused by large-lot residential subdivisions) identified in the Committee's mapping effort. Some suggestions include:

- institutionalize agricultural land preservation by explicit reference in town plans. The American Farmland Trust recommends that towns "devote a chapter in the town plan to agriculture, including an inventory of farm businesses and farmland, and specific zoning and land use strategies to address farm retention" and that they "establish town agricultural advisory commissions to represent farming issues at the local level."
- recognize prime agricultural lands that are undeveloped (including those not currently in active agriculture) as an important natural resource worthy of conserving for future farming activity as well as its present aesthetic and economic benefits to the community. The Land Use Committee is preparing a map that considers farmland a natural resource every bit as valuable, finite, non-renewable and threatened as water, fisheries, clean air, species, and habitat
- encourage use of existing developed and abandoned areas in order to keep development from spreading into outlying, undeveloped areas
- promote mixed uses of residential, commercial and retail use
- consider farmland conservation overlay zoning regulations (e.g., Berlin, CT "farming zone" proposal²⁰; Amherst, MA zoning regs)

¹⁹ New Hampshire Office of State Planning winter 2000 Bulletin

²⁰ "Measures to Protect Farms Considered," Ken Byron, Hartford Courant

- remove impediments to farming activities in zoning regulations; e.g., allow accessory structures (worker housing, barns, farm stands) that support agricultural businesses; permit farm-based enterprises by removing impediments to home-based businesses or other accessory farm activity; provide flexibility in zoning, subdivision and site plan review regulations for agricultural uses and related activities
- establish right-to-farm ordinance in regulations
- promote vegetated buffers on land adjacent to farmland to decrease visual and environmental impacts to abutting properties (some communities *require* this of the developer)
- develop management plans for existing and projected preserved/protected farmlands
- promote “options review” for developers: This tool requires developers “to consult with public agencies and local non-profits before coming forward with subdivision or site plan applications. This creates the opportunity to explore ways to protect portions of the site for preservation for the purpose of farmland use and/or natural resource conservation.”²¹
- require developers to make conservation-based site plans that will preserve open space and buffer existing farmlands²²
- promote mitigation ordinances and policies (these make developers pay for farmland protection through, for example, requiring them to permanently protect one acre of farmland for every acre of agricultural land converted to another use – this tool places restrictions on the property rights of the developer rather than the land owner)
- promote incentives for infill and compact development as well as disincentives in the form of regulations against sprawl development
- promote and support the establishment of a farmers’ market in a commercially attractive location to help create new markets for locally grown agricultural products and educate people about agriculture in general and local agriculture in particular (e.g., Suffield, CT)
- support local land trusts



Blueberry picking at March Farms, Bethlehem

POLITICAL/ADVOCACY (state level)

Those interested in farmland preservation can work to educate and support state regulators and legislators in farmland preservation efforts. Some suggestions to help them promote agricultural land protection include:

- support funding for state land preservation programs (as of 1999, CT ranked next to last among N.E. states in per capita spending on farmland preservation)
- support the continuance of the CT Department of Agriculture as an independent agency
- promote and support statewide smart growth plan and urban revitalization (to take pressure off suburbs), channeling development back to the cities
- support enabling legislation that permits charging impact fees to developer (CRCOG) and conveyance taxes on real estate transactions

²¹ Capitol Region Council of Governments, Best Practices Manual, Agricultural Land Preservation Fact Sheet, p. 3

²² Ibid, p. 1

- support state policy that would compensate towns for maintaining their rural character – “An Act Concerning the Protection of Rural Conditions in CT” - proposed legislation (Woodstock plan)
- support enabling of agricultural districts

Mechanisms/tools for land protection and for helping farmers remain in business:

There are a variety of organizations that can assist a landholder interested in protecting his or her farmland: The American Farmland Trust, the Connecticut Farmland Trust, The Land Trust Service Bureau, The Nature Conservancy, Connecticut Fund for the Environment, the CT Department of Environmental Protection, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), local land trusts, and others. Some of the tools for land protection and/or for helping farmers remain in business which these organizations suggest include:

- outright conveyance of land to a land trust or municipality by sale or donation
- transfer of property in trust to a non-profit
- gift with life interest
- purchase, donation, or transfer of conservation easement
- testamentary devise
- right of first refusal agreement to town, land trust or other non-profit
- open space set-asides and fees in lieu of open space
- long-term lease to town or non-profit
- purchase of development rights
- transfer of development rights
- state DEP grant program
- differential tax assessment programs (PA 490) (does *not* provide permanent protection)



Next steps/recommendations:

The Land Use Committee will continue to map agriculturally important lands (farm and forest – criteria will be provided) in the watershed and will share that information with the towns. One goal will be to continue efforts to complete a watershed conservation and development plan. Watershed maps that we will complete and share will include:

- a soils map which delineates agricultural soils and those areas uniquely suited to agriculture
- agricultural parcels which are permanently protected and those that are at risk of development
- a map and database of farmland showing owners, acreage, whether or not land is in active farming, whether it’s being farmed under lease, whether it has permanent protection

The Council of Governments can use the Land Use Committee maps to get started on protecting agricultural lands by including a section specific to farm and farmland preservation in the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development²³. Local land use officials can update their towns’ open space plans to include the Land Use Committee’s map series. The Committee will assist with this.

²³ as of July 1, 2005, Regional Planning Agencies must include a section on agriculture in their plans of development, per Connecticut state statute

The Land Use Committee will consider:

- preparing a watershed-wide agricultural profile which inventories current farming activities, active and inactive farmlands, and assesses attitudes toward farming enterprises (include agricultural buildings and historic farms)
- working with the towns to develop and implement strategies to maintain agricultural enterprises as part of the community's economy; to protect the land base for agriculture in the community; and to create a farm-friendly regulatory agriculture community environment
- bringing our local farmers into this conversation -- their input and investment is critical to success
- including a section specific to farm and farmland preservation in the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development and recommend same to the towns
- providing assistance to the towns in implementing the many excellent recommendations and action items in their existing town plans
- developing a watershed open space plan



Haying in Southbury

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