

FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 22nd, 2021
9:00-10:50am
Held remotely through Cisco WebEx

Attendance:

Board Member	Affiliation	Present
Robin Chesmer (Chair)	Graywall Farms	Yes
Jiff Martin (Vice-Chair)	UConn Extension	Yes
Benjamin Freund	Freund's Family Farm	Yes
Elizabeth Moore	Connecticut Farmland Trust	Yes
Ellie Angerame	Green Village Initiative	Yes
John Hall	Maple Breeze Farm, Westbrook Board of Selectman	Yes
Jason White	UConn Ag Experiment Station	Yes
Joan Nichols	CT Farm Bureau	Yes
Robert Chang	Echo Farm	Yes
Terry Jones	Jones Family Farm	Yes
Public Attendee		
Will O'Meara	Hungry Reaper Farm	Yes
Cam Weimar	CT Department of Agriculture	Yes
Chelsea Gazillo	Working Lands Alliance	Yes
Holly Lalime	CT Department of Agriculture	Yes
Jaime Smith	CT Department of Agriculture	Yes
Andrew Paterna	Mayor, South Windsor, CT	Yes

Robin Chesmer called for a motion to start the meeting. Joan Nichols motioned, and Elizabeth Moore seconded the motion.

Robin Chesmer called for a revision to the Special OPAV Meeting Minutes to reflect that Robert Chang posed a question to Tyler Miller about Vermont farmers and not Robin Chesmer.

Robin Chesmer noted that Andrew Paterna made motions at the February and April meetings and is not an official member of the board. He noted that Andrew Paterna made the motion to vote him in as chair.

A new motion was made by Ellie Angerame to elect Robin Chesmer as chair. Jason White seconded that motion and the board voted in favor of electing Robin Chesmer as chair.

Ellie Angerame made a motion to elect Jiff Martin as co-chair. Robert Chang seconded that motion. The board voted in favor of electing Jiff Martin as vice-chair.

Jiff Martin motioned to approve the meeting minutes from the Special OPAV meeting on April 16th and the kick-off meeting on February 25th. Elizabeth Moore seconded that motion and the board voted to approve the meeting minutes.

Robin Chesmer called for a quick introduction of all the board members.

Robin Chesmer moved the meeting to an update on Farmland Preservation Programs.

Cam Weimar provided the board with an update on the Farmland Preservation Program by reviewing the April 2021 Farmland Preservation Programs Report. To date, the program has protected 386 farms totaling 46,412 acres. This includes the Savin Ag. Preserve and the Southbury Training School which are owned by the department. There are currently 24 farms under agreement totaling 2,000 acres. These 24 farms have executed offer agreements and are at the surveying and closing stage. They are due to close this year into next year. There are an additional 38 eligible and active applications totaling 62 active farms. There are typically 55-70 open PDR applications at any one time. This shows that there is a steady interest of farmers who are interested in protecting their land. An average of 15 farms are protected per year covering an average of 1,500 acres. These farm applications are getting smaller over time. There have been 30 PDR project preserved with the USDA since 2016. CT DoAg and the USDA have a very good relationship. CT DoAg has cooperative agreements with the USDA, CFT, and NCLC. CT DoAg has an average 52% cots-share with the USDA. There are 6.4 million dollars in the bond fund to date and 4.1 million in our CIA account totaling 10.5 million in total funds for the program. CT DoAg submitted 15 new applications to the USDA on April 1st for the 2021 fiscal year. There are more PDRs going through the Community Farms Preservation Program. The first CFPP farm was protected in 2014.

Cam Weimar also provided an update on the Farmland Restoration Grant Program. He noted that the Department is working with remaining funds and has shifted from rolling applications to a once a year competitive round. Award letters for the 2021 round should be going out within a couple weeks. There were 68 applications received.

Cam Weimar noted that the Department is also working with project partners on the CT FarmLink program. CFT recently hired Maddie Dres who will help manage the CT FarmLink web page.

The meeting was then opened up for discussion. The use of CIA funds for staffing was discussed as well as the current staffing levels of the PDR program. Jaime Smith noted that at this time, the resource conservation side of the agency is fully staffed.

Robin Chesmer asked how long it takes to complete a PDR project from start to finish. Cam Weimar noted that the timeline for PDR completion is highly variable depending on the project. The ideal timeline is 24 months. Securing USDA funding lengthens the process. Other things that delay the process are title issues and the USDA's once a year application deadline.

CFPP guidelines were discussed including, match funding requirements, food producing requirements, and the State Properties Review Board's role in the increase of CFPP projects.

Jiff Martin asked what is remaining for funds in the Farmland Restoration Grant Program.

Cam Weimar answered saying that with 2021 projects accounted for, there are \$651,000 remaining.

Elizabeth Moore asked whether the only farms being considered for CFPP are farms that are food producing.

Cam Weimar answered that the statute requires the agency to prioritize CFPP farms that are food and/or fiber producing. He noted that if a farm is growing hay and corn for dairy cows, it is considered food producing.

Elizabeth Moore noted that there is such a deep pipeline of projects for the FPP and CFPP programs. She asked if new projects should be put on hold until the backlog is addressed.

Ellie Angerame noted that for CFPP, there is a match issue for municipalities. She noted that some towns may not have sufficient funds set aside or accessible to provide a 15% match. She also noted that farmland requirements, like farmland soils, make it impossible for urban farmers to apply to the program.

Cam Weimar stated that in many cases, DoAg is not asking for a 15% cash match but rather help with due diligence.

Jiff Martin commented that it would be nice to have the Farmland Access Report from the agency. She noted that to bring this advisory board back to life, there is a need to build an orientation package to get folks up to speed and avoid duplicating efforts.

Robin Chesmer moved the meeting to old business which included a review of action items for OPAV.

Jiff Martin asked if Will O'Meara and Chelsea Gazillo could put together another special meeting on the NY and MA OPAV programs.

Elizabeth Moore volunteered to talk with Tom Morgart about how OPAV is being implemented with NRCS in different states. The board agreed that Cam Weimar, Elizabeth Moore, and Jiff Martin should meet with Time Morgart and report their findings to the board.

The board then discussed OPAV in more detail including the statutory authority to do OPAV with the NRCS on new PDR projects, the need for better and more consistent contact with OPAV landowners, the option for land trust partners to use OPAV, and the need to look at financial and resource sustainability with OPAV.

Cam Weimar reminded the board that the State has statutory authority to do OPAV with NRCS on new PDRs.

Will O'Meara noted that many protected farms have no return on investment when they are taken out of agricultural production. He urged the board to think of protected farms as a community investment tool.

Cam – don't forget that OPAV is perpetual. It is not just a onetime option but runs with the easement.

Chelsea Gazillo mentioned the subdivision of PDR's as a tool to get beginning farmers on land.

Cam Weimar noted that the Vermont Land Trust runs the OPAV program in the State of Vermont. OPAV is an option for CT's land trust partners too. He noted that DoAg now co-holds almost all of its easements with land trust partners.

Robin Chesmer motioned a vote to hold another meeting on OPAV with MA and NY. The board voted in favor.

Jiff Martin made a motion to have Elizabeth Moore, Cam Weimar, Tom Morgart, and herself meet to discuss OPAV. Terry Jones seconded, and the board voted in favor.

Robin Chesmer moved to new business.

Joan Nichols asked if someone could provide a brief highlight on each proposed new business item?

PDR Stewardship: Cam Weimar briefed the board on the amount of public comments DoAg is receiving regarding stewardship of PDR farms.

Community Farms Preservation Program Regulations: Cam Weimar noted that he will have more to report back to the board about Community Farms Preservation Program regulations at the next FPAB in June.

Buy-protect-sell: Cam Weimar explained that the statute (CGS Section 22-26jj) was changed to allow the state to do BPS projects. He noted that the 2018 farm bill allows ALE funding for this. He mentioned that there is a project with TPL to "pilot" a BPS project with the NRCS.

Licensed Appraisers: Cam Weimar noted that finding licensed appraisers is increasingly difficult. He noted that there are many appraisers retiring and no new ones are coming on board. He explained that currently, appraisers are not able to meet 8-week deadlines which are holding up PDR projects.

Robin Chesmer noted that he would like more information about the proposal to subdivide PDR easements and that he would like to see something in writing.

Jiff Martin said that UConn would like to help with this appraiser gap but needs to learn more information about the training requirements for these appraisers.

Terry Jones noted that farm credit east could also be a great partner for this as well.

Joan Nichols motioned to adjourn the meeting. Jiff Martin seconded that motion, and the board voted in favor to adjourn.