



## CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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*Bureau of Agricultural Development & Resource Conservation*

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## FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

### MEETING MINUTES

**Thursday, April 20, 2023**

**9:00 – 10:30am**

#### BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

- Will O'Meara (Chairperson), Jiff Martin (Chairperson), Benjamin Freund, Joan Nichols, Ellie Angerame, Robin Chesmer, Terry Jones, Elisabeth Moore, Jason White

#### DOAG STAFF PRESENT:

- Holly Lalime, Cam Weimar

#### PUBLIC PRESENT:

- Chelsea Gazillo

Meeting Called to Order at 9:02AM by Chairperson Will O'Meara

#### Approve March Meeting Minutes:

- Ben Freund made a motion to approve the March meeting minutes, Ellie Angerame seconded the motion. Board voted to approve the meeting minutes.

## OLD BUSINESS

#### PDR Programs Report:

- Two easements were recorded in April 2022. A 98 acre farm in Lebanon and a fourth easement of Oakridge Dairy Farm.
- Jesse Raymond was officially hired as a full time NRCS ALE staff member.
- There is an SPRB board meeting this morning where a PDR project which will hopefully be approved.
- The 2023 Farmland Restoration Program grant contracts have been fully executed. Soil scientist visits are currently being scheduled.
- The Department has a new Administrative Assistant, Lindsay Booth, who is helping our Department move purchase requests and invoice payments more efficiently.

- The Farmland Preservation Unit is currently in the process of hiring a Secretary 1 position, a position that the unit hasn't had filled in quite some time.

### **Discuss PDR Stewardship Staffing Needs:**

- There has been a fifty percent increase in the number of preserved farms over the last 10 years. Approximately fifty percent of the 410 easements have a USDA ALE interest. ALE funded projects require at a minimum, an annual remote stewardship report.
- Since the Department has not had adequate staffing for stewardship in the past, we do not have landowner contact information for a number of our preserved farms which may cause stewardship conflicts.
- DoAg co-holds a number of easements with Connecticut Farmland Trust. CFT visits their preserved farms in person every year.
- DoAg also co-holds easements with smaller community land trusts. Those entities typically do not participate in stewardship.
- For violations and applications to construct, DoAg is responsible for handling these matters.
- Millions of State tax dollars have been invested into this program and it's important that the Department can meet its stewardship goals.
- Big Ideas
  - Digitizing stewardship records for landowner access
  - Caution needs to be taken so as not to overload a stewardship staff member and expect them to have knowledge of every potential resource.
- Landscape is a program available to conservation entities and it acts as a digital database for easement holders.
- Encroachments are also a major stewardship issue.
- Successful stewardship is about more than preventing potential violations but also connecting landowners with resources and support.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **OPAV – Discuss the requirements to be considered a qualified farmer:**

- Each State with OPAV develops its own set of eligibility requirements. Will O'Meara presented a summary table of qualified farmer requirements of various New England states.
- Fifty percent gross income versus 75% gross income from farming. There needs to be flexibility in gross income for farm members who may be working off the farm (for example a spouse). Is 50% flexible enough?
- How do we develop OPAV or other tools to actually keep farmers on the land?

- Is the desire for OPAV actually the desire for a stronger PDR easement?
- Can a landowner who accepted a bargain sale for development rights sell an OPAV? What are the IRS implications?

**DOAG PDR topics for FPAB feedback:**

- Stewardship staffing needs
- Appraiser shortage
- Surveyor shortage

**Public Comment:**

- No public comment

Robin Chesmer made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Jiff Martin seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 10:35am.