



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, November 16, 2023

9:00 – 10:30am

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

- Will O'Meara (Chairperson), Jiff Martin (Chairperson), John Hall, Jason White, Elisabeth Moore, Benjamin Freund, Joan Nichols, Robin Chesmer

DOAG STAFF PRESENT:

- Holly Lalime, Cam Weimar, Jaime Smith, Lindsay Booth

PUBLIC PRESENT:

- None

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

Approve Meeting Minutes:

- Benjamin Freund made a motion to approve the June 2023 meeting minutes, with the inclusion of the letter to Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt, and the September 2023 meeting minutes. Jiff Martin seconded, board voted to approve the June 2023 (with inclusion of letter) and September 2023 meeting minutes.

OLD BUSINESS

Board Vacancies and Term Update:

- The list of recommendations for the current vacant seat was previously sent back in March 2023, with the information to be forwarded to individuals who make the appointment. Ideally, 2024 will begin with a full slate. Jaime Smith will follow-up with Kayleigh Royston regarding an update on status.
- Green Village Initiative (GVI) is changing its status. Ellie Angerame has been a wonderful addition. Discussion ensued regarding the seat held by this position, impacts these changes may bring, and conversations that will be needed going forward. Will O'Meara proposed discussion of a survey that would be sent in-between meetings regarding whether individuals stay on the board for an additional year or vacate their seat. Ideally this would happen before the January 2024 meeting.

- Benjamin Freund highlighted a report sent to the CT Department of Agriculture one year ago regarding current terms and reappointment. The focus of these appointments and who they represent effectively comes from legislators. Examples of filling roles, such as from a Financial Lending Organization, was to consider three candidates that match the description in statute and bring forward to those making choices for vacant seats.
- Jaime Smith shared the DoAG Boards and Commission Memberships spreadsheet, appointments and who they represent. Two vacant seats for consideration are from Financial Lending Organization (appointed by the Governor) and, in 2024, from an organization whose mission includes Food Security. To formally continue an additional year, all those appointed would need to receive a letter from whomever appointed their seat. Will O'Meara asked if the DoAg keeps documents, and if the board can contribute, to reminders to those making appointments for letters as expiration dates approach. (Example: if an appointment expires in June, send a letter in March to reappoint or appointment someone new).
- A Farmland Preservation Advisory Board Bootcamp for potential seat vacancies was proposed.
- Jaime Smith requested recommendations and preferences post-survey to forward to appointing authorities.

Vice-Chairperson Nomination Process:

- Jiff Martin has graciously fulfilled the role of Vice Chair for one year alongside Will O'Meara; however, she will be stepping down from this role effective January 2024. In the same survey regarding holding/vacating seats, Will O'Meara proposed that it contain the eligibility for individuals to self-nominate or nominate another member of the board. The Vice-Chairperson can be any other member of the board. The Chairperson has to be a farmer. Discussion ensued regarding qualities the Vice-Chairperson should possess.

Community Farms Program Update:

- Regulations need to occur in a tighter timeline. One farm has been told they would be made an offer and the target date has changed multiple times. The Board supports forward movement of items like these through the DoAg and the updating of regulations. Will O'Meara highlighted that the regulations were on the August 2023 meeting agenda for the Legislative Review Committee but was taken off seemingly due to minor grammatical issues. The next meeting for regulation review is in November 2023. The consideration of independent letters to law makers with compelling reasons for a favorable vote was discussed.

Farmland Preservation Program Year End Review:

- The DoAg Farmland Preservation Programs Report (Nov. 2023) and summary were shared by Cam Weimar. Twenty easements are projected to close before the end of 2023 (approximately 1,340 acres). Seventeen projects took place with ALE funds totaling over \$4,000,000.00. Relations have been positive with the State Property Review Board (SPRB), with the average approval taking six weeks. The average size PDR farm has decreased in size to approximately

67 acres per farm. In 2013, the average was 122 acres per farm. The NRCS invited the DoAg to be a certified entity for ALE, which is a savings of 4-5 months for closing. NRCS is still involved via post-closing audits.

- Jaime Smith shared SPRB Chairman Ed Greenberg has stepped down and the new Chairman is Bruce Josephy, who has previously served on the SPRB as Vice-Chair. Jaime Smith and Commissioner Hurlburt will meet with the new Chairman next week.

NEW BUSINESS

Options to Purchase at Agricultural Value Capacity Discussion:

Appraisals

- In Mid-October, Will O'Meara met with Jeremy of the South Eastern Land Trust of New Hampshire (SELT). They have begun using the OPAV tool for all of their conservation efforts in NH. Feedback has been positive. Continuing education opportunities for new conservation appraisers was discussed. Elisabeth Moore shared an update regarding no-cost appraiser trainer for individuals located in New England, including Connecticut. It is not known how many appraisers in CT have taken the training/exam. There is an appraiser's association local to Connecticut with outreach, which would be a wonderful conduit in getting information to seasoned appraisers. Will O'Meara asked Elisabeth Moore to follow-up if more information is received.
- Discussion ensued regarding OPAV and retroactive OPAV on lands currently in processing, which segued into Farmer Education.

Farmer Education

- Farmers will need education regarding OPAV going forward, especially for the current and next generation of farmers. The funding sources for OPAV retroactively and going forward will vary greatly, especially due to SPRB.
- Will O'Meara shared that during the infancy of OPAV introduction in VT, there was fearmongering amongst seasoned farmers. The supporters were initially young farmers and it is now widely accepted and appears on nearly all applications.
- Will O'Meara indicated he can ask Tyler Miller from the Vermont and Trust to return and provide more insight regarding how operations occur between the state agency and the Land Trust.

State Properties Review Board

- SPRB views PDRs as purchasing development rights, and not necessarily protecting the lands. SPRB is not approving who holds the deed, but rather approving the development rights. Additional discussion regarding Office of Policy and Management (OPM) involvement when funds are issued from the state to a third party to purchase and hold the OPAV, as the SPRB is not engaged.

Other

- Further discussion regarding restrictions on easements took place, such as not allowing vast homes on properties as part of OPAV. Easements cannot be made less restrictive. Additional easements can be placed upon a property.
- As a follow-up from a previous conversation, Will O’Meara asked Cam Weimar for a brief e-mail outlining challenges the DoAg is facing in keeping up with stewardship so it can be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Department Updates/Topics of Interest:

- The Land, Capital and Market Access Grant Program is currently on hold. A response is pending.
- The Revised Restoration, now Restoration Resiliency and Preparedness Program is pending.
- PURA released findings of dual-use in agrivoltaics within their Statewide Shared Clean Energy Facility (SCEF) Program. They will be looking to the DoAg to develop guidance and they are requiring energy companies to defer to the DoAg in their SCEF program, and/or for evolving projects happening within prime farmland soils. This is public record and all are encouraged to review. Will O’Meara asked Jaime Smith to e-mail the link for this.
- Cam Weimar shared the DoAg is closing in on its 50,000-acre milestone. This could occur as soon as next spring/summer 2024.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- No public comment

Benjamin Freund made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Joan Nichols seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 am.

CONNECTICUT DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Farmland Preservation Programs Report

Cam Weimar, as of Nov. 2023

Preserved Farmland (in Fee & PDR):	428 Farms	49,336 acres <i>(incl. Savin & Southbury)</i>	
Farmlands Under Agreement	11 Farms	655 acres	\$ 3,867,745
Total Farms Preserved or w/ Agrmt:	439 Farms	49,991 acres	
Additional, active applics:	34 Farms	2,577 acres	\$ 15,880,000
Total active PDR applics:	45 Farms	3,232 acres	\$ 19,747,745

Current Funding Balances: PDR Comm. Invest. Act, as of Nov. '23: \$ 3,887,200
PDR Alloted Bond Funds, as of Nov. '23: \$ 4,984,394

PDR & ACE Farms Preserved			<u>total funds</u>	<u>State funds</u>	<u>USDA-ALE (& #s)</u>	<u>Local</u>
CY 2020	13 farms	1,015 acres	\$ 5,736,029	\$ 3,020,963	\$ 2,227,167 10	\$ 487,899
CY 2021	13 farms	1,204 acres	\$ 8,723,320	\$ 3,652,500	\$ 3,573,918 9	\$ 1,496,902
CY 2022	9 farms	652 acres	\$ 2,737,646	\$ 1,587,289	\$ 1,129,650 5	\$ 20,707
CY 2023	20 farms	1,338 acres	\$ 8,788,342	\$ 4,555,734	\$ 4,111,170 17	\$ 121,438
CY 2024 proj. -	18 farms	1,200 acres	\$ 7,600,000	\$ 4,100,000	\$ 3,240,000 14	\$ 260,000
 CY 2023 cost-share contribution %:				52%	47%	1%
CY 2023 avg. per acre cost:			\$ 6,568	\$ 3,405	\$ 3,073	

**-Farms recently preserved in the towns of Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Scotland, Sharon, Suffield, and Washington-
average size PDR farm has decreased to approx. 67 acres (in 2013 avg. was 122 acres)**

Prioritizing preparation of 14+ new applications to USDA-NRCS for ALE FY 2024 funding consideration

USDA Headquarters allocated \$2.75 million to Connecticut - with 12/15 batching deadline

PDR Stewardship - Outreach, Farm Visits, & Enforcement

All PDRs with USDA FRPP/ALE interest annual reports submitted to USDA-NRCS (for 145 PDR farms)

Ongoing stewardship issues on several PDRs, especially w/ older easements- ensuring compliance with conveyance deed terms

Farmland Restoration Grant Program (FLRP)

362 applications	est. total costs: \$ 12,361,121	est. grant costs: \$ 5,620,710
Averages/estimates: \$ 38,870 /project	\$ 3,599 /cost/acre	3,272 ac. total to be restored
\$ 15,553 /grant	\$ 1,440 /grant cost/acre	10.8 ac./grant to be restored

--for 2023 competitive round approx. \$365,000 requested for up to 25 projects--

Farmland Use Permits and Leases

Savin Agric. Preserve; Southbury Farms Presv.- 5 Agric. Permits w/ 10 year terms (2017-2027)

Connecticut Farmlink Program

balance as of nov '23: \$255,624

Connecticut Farmland Trust & Land for Good partnerships with ctfarmlink.org website, farmer consultations, outreach