

Concord Agriculture Committee
Wednesday, September 19, 2018 7:00 pm
Assessor's Office, 24 Court Lane

Present:

Happy Goethert, chair
Brian Cramer, member
Steve Verrill, member
Emily Wheeler, member
Jo-Ann Lovejoy, associate member

Melissa Maxwell, Barretts Mill Farm, visitor

Meeting called to order at 7:10pm

News about Concord farms and farming

The new Concord Marketplace looks as if it's stocking. Steve said he was approached about supplying produce, and that he heard that Hutchins Farm would be supplying apples. Neither Verrill nor Hutchins will be selling to the store. Brian noted that Hutchins, for example, can't provide a smooth supply chain to a store that has to stock everything all the time.

Ag Day market feedback

Brian said that Liza Bemis crunched Hutchins's numbers from the Ag Day market from 2015 to 2018. Hutchins's Ag Day take fluctuates based on the apple crop. This year the biennial crop was terrible. Everything else was flat, actually a little down because they raised prices. The market is just once a year, and so people aren't thinking of doing grocery shopping right there. Apples would have been good to have.

Brian said he knows Kyle Bonenfant, who brought his Carlisle goats to the Main Library lawn during the market, and liked that they were part of the day's activities. Sunday's farm tour at Hutchins drew about 10 people, a little lower than previously.

Jo-Ann noted that the newness of the market has worn off – the Ag Committee has done a good job of educating people about it.

Happy said that Scimone Farm's figures were the same as last year. They got a lot of people who've never been to the market or to the farm stand before. About one-third of people who stopped by were familiar customers from the farm stand.

Melissa Maxwell reported that the actual market was good for Barretts Mill. The double spaces felt less cramped. But the date is hard for them because it's the busiest of the whole season for the CSA and the farmstand what with people back from vacation. Any later date would be better. Brian noted that the first weekend in September is the "last hurrah" for tomatoes – a huge draw, especially for one market a year. Melissa agreed that tomatoes are nice, but said this is also a critical week in the fields.

Steve said he empathizes with Lise Holdorf (who was not present at meeting but had written to members expressing wish to move the market to a later date). He observed that the whole month of September is busy with a crunch after Labor Day. Verrill Farm didn't bring tomatoes to the market. Or a scale—instead they priced by the piece or a pack. Verrill also didn't have any

high-priced items or baked goods. Steve said their sales were down, perhaps because they had the last stall in market.

Brian noted that Hutchins was different because it does a Saturday market, which makes driving to Concord center effortless. He said that changing the Ag Day market day might not be good. The market should highlight the best features of local agriculture—which includes tomatoes.

Emily reported that Marshall Farm liked the exposure the market gave the farm to residents of other parts of Concord and beyond.

She added that Bill Kenney's bean picking machine and display were terrific. Ditto the games that Lise's mother-in-law loaned for the day: lots of families played with the bean bag toss and giant Jenga blocks. At the Ag Committee table we handed out the new Farm Passport and talked up the farm tours and Stone Soup Dinner. Select Board members and the Town's Information Officer had a table, as did some other Town committees—Pollinator Study group and Comprehensive Sustainable Energy Committee. The Garden Club had a kids' activity plus free tickets to their home kitchen garden tours in the afternoon. Other nonprofits on the street included Gaining Ground, ConcordCAN!, and the Boston Area Gleaners.

The Concord Museum / Wright Tavern had a table for the first time, displaying some historical artifacts and offering kids a coloring activity around the theme of 18th century farm animals.

Reasons to Be Cheerful sold ice cream again at this year's market. Jo-Ann suggested expanding the market to include prepared food.

A Main Street business, The Craft.ed Studio, had a table on the street for stone painting, and it looked busy. The owner also had painted cloth shopping bags that she has offered to customize for the market next year.

Emily noted the good policing by the Town's police department – they kept bicyclists off their bikes. Happy talked with one of the officers about the mounted police at Walden Pond. Perhaps we could invite them next year.

In terms of publicity, Happy said she was grateful for Instagram since she had no luck getting the Concord Journal to publish her submissions.

Farm tours / Farm Passport

Steve reported that 75 people came to pick corn at the Verrill Farm tour early Sunday morning.

Melissa suggested running the farm tours on a different weekend so that they can be on a Saturday. (Sunday is Barretts Mill's day off.) Perhaps the tours could be spread out over the summer.

Steve said the Passport program is a good idea and needs to be more spacious—giving participants more time to visit farms and get stamps. Jo-Ann said the Passport could start the season. It could also include restaurants during the Fair. Steve suggested more coordination with the Garden Club and Stone Soup. Could the garden tours happen in the spring? Jo-Ann said that the Garden Club hold its last meeting in May and starts up again in September.

Food Farm Garden Fair

Happy said that committee members seemed to be thinking about different venues besides just the market.

Jo-Ann said that she came in to help with fundraising and wasn't clear how the Ag Committee was working with the Food Collaborative. There was lots of urgency to get information. In the end, it seems as if it all just had to do with getting the word out, using the Collaborative portal as the central point. The Ag Committee could have put out all the information via other means. For example, as a Town committee, Ag has access to the Town's communications person, Erin Stevens. (Jo-Ann would also like Town to be the central repository of Ag committee documents to ensure continuity via a shared drive.) Jo-Ann said that Fair planning proved challenging, when the event could be so readily streamlined.

Brian was the Ag Comm's representative to the Fair planning team. He said that there didn't seem to be a shared, agreed-upon understanding about the Fair. Fundraising seemed especially stressful. Brian said that organizing the Fair can't depend on one person, as it did in the beginning with Debbie Barr. There should be a template and flexibility to add an idea.

Jo-Ann said it was important to restate the goals and objectives of Ag Day and consider whether to continue partnership. She added that Stone Soup won't fund the Fair indefinitely. She will be revising the budget we submitted to Stone Soup on behalf of the Fair to include Brooke Redmond's invoice. The cost of printing and musicians came to \$758. Because there was no food truck, we will return the unspent portion of Stone Soup's grant. At our next meeting we should determine what the Ag Day budget is.

Brian asked why Stone Soup wouldn't continue to fund the Fair. Steve explained that the money Stone Soup raises is allocated one third to ag land acquisition, one-third to grants, and one-third to promote Concord agriculture. He noted that whatever money is returned will be spent on Concord agriculture.

Emily asked whether the Town web site is adequate for publicizing the Ag Day farmers market, passport, and farm tours if the Ag Committee steps away from the Collaborative. Lise had offered last year to do a simple web site. Perhaps she would still be willing to do one?

Jo-Ann proposed opening an Instagram account. She said people want to know about and follow a year in the lives of all Concord farmers. The account would be a photo essay and a teaching tool, and it would create an archive. Emily nominated Jo-Ann to create a Concord farms Instagram account.

Happy proposed experimenting with Instagram for the next three months and to assess in December whether it would allow us to be independent of the Collaborative and fund-raising for publicity. With eight active farms there's not enough time to raise money. The committee is ready to simplify and to re-position itself with respect to the Fair. Other things to consider are including Carlisle at the market and finding ways to work with the Ag Comms of other towns.

Spring event

Jo-Ann proposed a spring panel with 4-5 restaurants using local food. A recent Gourmet magazine article focused on eating only local and seasonal for a year.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned 9:15pm.

Next meeting October 10, 2018.

Minutes submitted by Emily Wheeler.

Approved: November 8, 2018.