

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE



From left: John Bemis, Dan Giurleo, Jen Hashley, Jenn Verrill, Jim Catterton, Chip Poutasse

Since our formation as a Town Committee, the Agricultural Committee has worked to promote agriculture in Concord.

This year's growing season was hot and dry following a wet spring. We went for six weeks without significant rain, a drought. With irrigation, this was a good year. There was no recurrence of the disastrous tomato "late blight." Retail sales were strong. Concord's two new CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture), Kenney Farm and Bare Root Farm, were successful.

Ag Day

The Committee sponsored a fifth farmer's market festival in September on the Milldam, with a good turnout and good sales on a beautiful Labor Day Weekend. "Ag Day" remains popular with townspeople and visitors and worthwhile for growers. We do not plan to host a regular, weekly, market because so many growers in Town have farm stands. We note that there is interest in a more regular and expanded market, but we remain concerned that this could cannibalize the existing stands. There was a proposal for a "Concord Community Market" but the proponents have shelved their idea.

Guide to the Farm Stands of Concord

We are continuing to distribute this informative brochure. It is a useful guide for residents and visitors alike.

The Stone Soup Dinner

The third Stone Soup Dinner featured Concord grown produce prepared by Concord chefs. This was a huge success. The event was held in September on the grounds of the Buttrick Mansion at Minuteman National Historical Park. Many hands were involved in food preparation and service for 340 folks who ate very well.

The Stone Soup Dinner was started as a project of the Agriculture Committee by Committee member Jim Wayman but, because we are a Town committee, it will not be possible for it to continue under our sponsorship. The Dinner has its own Board and will operate on its own. The Stone Soup Dinner has announced plans to make "Plant a Farmer" grants in 2011 to help new farmers in Town.

Ammendolia Property

This agricultural parcel was purchased by the Town in 2004. In the past, the land produced excellent strawberries (reported by Frank Rotondo), and good crops of sweet corn. Active use had declined prior to the Town's purchase, and the soil was not well managed. Exercising its right of first refusal under Chapter 61A, the Town purchased the property with the intention of constructing playing fields, a sewage pumping station, and affordable housing. Subsequent study determined that much of the land was too wet, and contained too much wetland, to site the playing fields.

A portion of the upland along Bedford Street has been used for a sewage pumping station and affordable housing. The Town Manager asked the Agriculture Committee to find a farmer who would be interested in renting the remaining land, but we were not successful. Use of a portion of this land as a community garden site had been discussed since the land was purchased. Over a period of several years, the land had begun to grow up to brush and small trees.

A group of local citizens, with help from the Agriculture Committee, the Department of Natural Resources and local farmer Bill Kenney began the "East Quarter Farm Community Gardens." The Hugh Cargill Community Gardens funded lime application and water exploration. Mr. Kenney plowed the garden and the rest of the tillable portion of the property, turning under the brush and small trees. He has used the tillable land not occupied by the community gardens for the past two years. He

had a difficult time in the first year, but with a specially formulated fertilizer had a good corn crop this year.

The East Quarter Farm Community Gardens are a great success, with 90 gardeners working 52 organic plots. The gardeners have worked out their water problems and had a great season in 2010. If space is available, Community Garden plots are available to any resident of Concord.

At Town Meeting, the Town Manager proposed this property as a potential site for a solar array. The Committee did not oppose this at Town Meeting, but later wrote the Selectmen and Solar Committee that we hoped “that a more suitable site can be found that is neither good farm land nor the site of an active community garden.” There was opposition to using this site for a solar array and the proposal has been dropped. The ultimate fate of this agricultural parcel has not been determined, but we believe it is currently at its best use.

Agricultural Drainage Ditches

The Committee made little real progress in addressing the various problems associated with Concord’s ancient and inconsistently maintained system of agricultural drainage ditches. We will invite the Director of Public Works to one of our meetings in 2011 to discuss ditches.

“What’s Growing in Concord”

Concord resident Dan Latham filmed and produced a 45 minute video about farming in Concord in the summer of 2008, featuring Concord farms, greenhouses and farmers. The video, narrated by R. D. Sahl, presents an overview of agriculture’s role in Concord’s past, present and future and the importance of supporting local agriculture today. The video is shown periodically on CCTV, and copies of the DVD are available at the Concord libraries. DVDs are also available at the Concord Town Clerk’s office for a donation of \$20 to the Concord Agricultural Committee.

Right to Farm Bylaw

The Committee intended to bring a “Right to Farm Bylaw” to Town Meeting in April but concluded that we needed additional time to educate both ourselves and the Town about its purpose. RTF Bylaws have been adopted by 97 Massachusetts towns. We will bring a “Farming Bylaw” to the April 2011 meeting.

A Farming Bylaw will highlight the importance of farming to the Town of Concord and will remind non-farm residents that generally accepted agricultural practices are reasonable activities that they should expect here. It will reiterate that farming is a valued and accepted activity in Concord. It is intended to help promote understanding between farmers and their neighbors. The Bylaw will provide a Town-level procedure for resolution of disputes.

New Committee members

The Board of Selectmen approved three Alternate Members: Jen Hashley, Bill Kenney, and Chip Poutasse. The Alternate Members are all actively farming and bring new perspectives to the Committee. The current Committee members will rotate off in a gradual way, not all at once. We hope that the Alternative members will become full members as this happens.

375th Birthday Celebration

Concord was founded in 1635 as a farming town, and there was an agricultural presence in the parade.

In the Coming Year

Inventory of Farms, Agricultural Parcels and Farmers - We will complete this work.

Clearing House – The Committee would like to establish a procedure to match up farmers and underutilized agricultural parcels -- Town, State, federal, non-profit and private.

Aging Farmers /Young Farmers - The Committee would like to assist aging farmers with estate planning issues (perhaps with the Land Trust), and would like to identify ways to foster young farmers. We have talked about these matters, but not taken any concrete steps.

Other Issues

The Committee has discussed and will consider further: Ag in the schools, New farmers, Buy local, Playing fields, agriculture worker housing, the Farm at Concord MCI.

Concord has an ample base of good farm land. Active agriculture will succeed in Concord if there are people who want to work the land and if there are markets for our products. Concord produces high quality vegetables, fruit, flowers and meat, and there are good opportunities to expand production and sell what we grow.