

**Agricultural Commission
March 17, 2009**



Meeting in room 104, 2 Jabish St., Lawrence Memorial Hall

Member present: Grace Adzima, Jon Clements, Judy Gillan, Hope Guardenier,
Associate Members: Daniel Beaudette, Susan Gay, Alan Page

Absent Members: R. Reidy, W. Shattuck

Visitor: Sandy Brougham

The Right to Farm (R-t-F) bylaw was reviewed. Dan Beaudette has been changing the contents to meet the needs of the agricultural community. He added "composting" and deleted the word "seasonal", suggested by the AgComm at the last meeting. Dan noted that this is a supplement to the version of the Right to Farm, adopted by the Town of Belchertown in 1988. It was never written into a section of the code of Belchertown.

Dan noted the next step will be to present the bylaw to the Board of Selectmen, and he will try to make an appointment with them March 30 or a meeting in April 2009. Grace noted this bylaw will be a useful benefit for the development in town. Dan will check 310 CMR, 7.07 to check on farming and burning permits. Discussed how burning on a farm does not include silviculture or burning of forestry products.

Discussed the 1988 version of the "model right to farm bylaw" and how as we develop a bylaw for this town, it needs to have a dispute section. Perhaps when a person goes to a Realtor, the buyer may be informed that this is a farming community. If a dispute goes to the Town Administrator, it could be forwarded to the AgComm for a recommendation, and any direction or resolution go back to the Town Administrator.

Grace noted that the AgComm will come up with a brochure for Real Estate people in town, to help with right to farm items. Considerations are still forthcoming on this brochure.

Sandy Brougham was introduced to everyone. She will be part of the workshop series the AgComm will hold. Sandy will speak about back yard poultry. Sandy said she is part of Four H and will come to the town hall on April 4th with a couple of her Four H helpers. They will bring a chicken to the demonstration as well. This discussion will be about raising chickens, selling eggs and using poultry for meat as well. Poultry slaughter will be discussed as well.

Sandy asked if anyone was performing logging with horses? Alan said it wouldn't be affordable, but that Muddy Brook in Amherst does some logging in that fashion. Perhaps Mike Austin does some of the same, as he has had a team of horses for many years now.

Sandy noted that an individual is organizing a chicken swap to be held at Tractor Supply. Sandy said this will be unique opportunity to meet and connect with other chicken breeders. She has 35 years experience, and personally has a variety of back yard fowl.

Other:

Grace and Hope will have a garden plot at the New England Small Farm Institute on Jackson Street, to grow a "kids" garden. They said it will be put together for ease of maintenance, and something that children will enjoy picking and eating. Sandy suggested pictures of the kids garden for Town Fair would be a good way to share the venture.

Judy said Sunshine Village and a church in town have garden plots for their pantry kitchen this year. She would like to see the Department of Public Works, which is directly across the street from the gardens, grow some fruit trees on the grass they mow all summer long.

Grace said the lecture series will include a Master Gardener, perhaps Jared from Stone Soup; pest management in July; and canning demonstration in the Fall of 2009. Discussed where AgComm could hold a canning demo. Perhaps in the kitchen of the Mason Building on Main Street.

Grace said there is some cash left in our AgComm budget, and asked if there were any ideas for its use? She may have additional farm brochures printed. She asked if it would be okay to have a couple of "horse signs" printed to help riders, making travelers aware of the riders to help make riding a bit safer. An area of need for a horse sign is North Washington Street. She asked if there were any publications that could be of use?

Judy said that she wants to make everyone aware of the library at New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI). She said people come to relax and read. They can bring lunch or cook hot dogs on the grill while they use the library. The library has some old organic garden magazines from the 70's, and copies of articles are posted for browsing. She said some garden people are making food storage areas in their basement.

Grace brought up an article about excise tax relief to farmers with milking cows. This legislation can be brought to town meeting to ask townspeople for a break for farmers paying for their livestock and machinery. She said this economy may not be the best time to go to town meeting, but she wanted members to know of its availability for a future thought.

Members discussed a Kopelman and Paige letter regarding agricultural exemptions update on regulations. Discussed Mass. General Laws and personal property. Dan mentioned how the exemptions are handled at town level, but if challenged by a court, the State Laws would be the deciding factor in a case.

Jon mentioned a new trench law, and how any open area needs to be covered. The town hall has information regarding the trench permit. This will prevent falling into a trench, as well as trench collapse while people are working. Paul Adzima, Building Commissioner is the permitting person.

Jon said that one of the people who examine the most to date Chapter changes has the opinion that allowance for horses is only for those raising horses for sale, not for pets, as it must be a commercial enterprise as required to be considered under Chapter.

Grace noted that the Dept. of Public Works has discarded sweeper brooms that can be used as a livestock scratch post. The brooms weigh about 200 lbs., and can be placed on a 4 X 4 in the ground.

There is another agricultural conference this week end, which will discuss the global warming issues.

minutes submitted by S. Gay