

**Agricultural Commission
June 15, 2010**



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

Member present: Grace Adzima, Judy Gillan, Hope Guardenier
Associate Members: Dan Beaudette, Sue Gay, Matt Kotowski
Absent Members: Alan Page, Will Shattuck, Mike Austin

Minutes: Motion G. Adzima to approve May 18, 2010 minutes, Second H. Guardenier,
Vote 3-0.

The committee went over definitions of what the terms such as regulations, laws and bylaws mean to citizens. Dan explained how the courts handle various items, and how the court statutes develop.

The committee discussed farming and how the word "principally" is interpreted at various levels of government. The definition used by towns will be of interest, as some farmers in town are being told they are not principally farming. Brought up a question: what if someone retires, and then tries their hand at farming? Although not their total income, who is to say that they are not principally farming their parcel of land?

A member went to the look for a Mass General Law book in the Board of Selectmen meeting room to see if case law could be reviewed, but the 58A book was unavailable. It had been borrowed and not returned.

Hope spoke with farmers regarding the farm guide and asked if they are dealing with any issues from town boards. There were two farmers working with Assessor's, which may have been resolved. The AgComm would like to work as a buffer for farmers who may get various notices from the town. If a farmer knew they could come and discuss a farm issue with the AgComm, we could work to help find a resolution, or point someone toward how to work the issue through with town boards and commissions. Went over some ideas to get information to the public. Grace spoke with the town information technology office, and they stated they would work something out to update the AgComm website.

It was mentioned that issues for farmers in town are not unique to this town. It is happening to other towns as well in various levels.

Noted:

The AgComm has a \$500 budget for copies, supplies, etc.

The Thursday Farmer Market on the town common set up of the farm booths has been changed into a smaller shaped horseshoe layout.

Huge corporations are registering any and all uses of the words "local" or "small", in an attempt to squash small farmers in every direction. Spoke of a large corporation that was trying to buy out travelling slaughter houses, but the case did not go through as the corporation hoped for.

Brought up the Town of Sunderland Assessor office, who state they are going to use their own chart for their Chapter properties. They say their land is more valuable than what the D.O.R. chart shows. That case will be of interest, as other towns will take a lead to tax the small farms as well.

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Discussed that Belchertown is one of a few communities to achieve self reliance, as it doesn't have as many constraints as some towns located on waterways, etc.

This committee would like to discover how to market opportunities for farmers. Northampton has tremendous momentum around growing food. They are buying a 120 acre farm in Florence, MA and soliciting farmers to grow food. The farmers need to get support from somewhere, but we don't know what the answer is.

Belchertown C.A.N. has the interest of towns and food pantries. They are having a gathering or showcase of various town businesses and groups on the common next Saturday.

The committee discussed the regulations for winter markets. There is a Food Policy Council agency that can strangle small groups, as well as governmental agencies at a State level.

The next meeting will be July 20, 2010 at 7 pm.

Adjourned at 8:50 pm.

Minutes submitted by S. Gay