Appendix E
Agricultural Advisory Board: Farmer Survey Results

Town of Warwick

Agricultural Producer Survey

Survey Results

Survey conducted in cooperation with Town of Warwick,
Orange County Cooperative Extension
and
Department of Communication,
Cornell University

TOWN OF WARWICK COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMMITTEE

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The 1997 *Town of Warwick Comprehensive Plan* calls for a farmer survey. The reasons for this survey are to, first, to get farmer involvement, since the farm producers are the most important stakeholders of the land. Farmers may not be aware of the efforts being put forth by the town, and this survey can serve as a forum to better inform them, as well as to get input information from them.

Second, the survey can help the town in collecting demographic information on each farmer and farming operation. In addition, the survey can and should help the town to better understand farmers as individuals and as a group, as producers of commodities, and as users of the land.

From this better understanding, the town will be able to make better decisions in regards to policies that effect farming, such as the formation of a successful farmland preservation program, or other programs to help sustain agriculture in the town. In other words, we will establish better linkage between the farmers and the efforts of the town.

We want to give farmers the message that we like what they are doing, and we want them and others to continue here in Warwick. The question is, what can we do to make their job more productive and rewarding? We have the questions, perhaps the farm producers have the answers which can help us.

Summary
Town of Warwick Farmer Survey

The following presents the results of the farmer survey. When the Comprehensive Plan Board requested the Town's Agricultural Advisory Board to develop a survey of active farmers in the Town of Warwick, it did so to get: a) an accurate profile of farmers; b) their plans for the future; c) their outlook on population changes in the Town; d) their reaction to farmland preservation proposals, and e) their attitudes toward operating a farm in Warwick.

In this undertaking, the Agricultural Advisory Board received tremendous help and guidance from Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Cornell University Department of Communications. Under the overall direction of Cornell Professor Clifford W. Scherer, hundreds of man-hours were spent constructing the survey and training a corps of volunteer interviewers from Warwick.

Individual interviews with farmers followed a 15-page questionnaire and were conducted in complete confidentiality. The average interview took somewhat over one hour. The entire survey process went on for about six weeks at the end of which all the data and statistics were tabulated at Cornell University using Microsoft Excel software.

All told, face to face interviews were conducted with 94 farmers. Only a small minority of those contacted chose not to participate in the survey. A brief profile of those interviewed revealed the following:

- Of the 94 farmers surveyed, 63 operate "upland" farms and 31 operate "black dirt" or "muckland" farms.

- The average upland farmer is 54 years old, operates 175 acres (about one-third rented from other landowners), and reports that farming accounts for about 67 percent of the family's total household income.

- The average black dirt farmer is 50 years old, operates 134 acres (again about one-third rented from other landowners), and reports that farming accounts for about 81 percent of the family's total household income.

- Of all 94 farmers interviewed, 73 classify themselves as "full time" farmers, and 21 as "part time". The average farm operation has been in the same family for slightly more than two generations.

There were a number of significant findings of the survey that could be incorporated into the Town's efforts to preserve and protect farmland. They are as follows:

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There were a number of significant findings of the survey that could be incorporated into the Town's efforts to preserve and protect farmland. They are as follows:

- *Taxes on farmland* is the single issue of greatest concern to farmers. This was rated "very important" or "important" by 96 percent of respondents.

- *Transfer of land to the next generation* is the second most important issue, rated "very important" or "important" by 83 percent of respondents.

- *Loss of agricultural land to development* was rated "very important" or "important" to 80 percent of the respondents.

- When asked *what the Town of Warwick local government can do to help agriculture*, a great many suggestions were made. Some of the more significant suggestions, under the control of the Town government, include the following:

    1. Use conservation techniques, including but not limited to cluster subdivision, to protect farms.

    2. Create a Purchase of Development Rights program.

    3. Restrict over-development in the Town.

    4. Review zoning to remove restrictions on farming.

    5. Advertise local produce and encourage local grocers to buy local produce.

    6. Educate the public on the value of farming.

    7. Buffer farms from residential development.

    8. Zone more land for farming.

    9. Provide better road signage to warn drivers of farmers as well as advising drivers where farms are located.

    10. Enforce traffic laws better to protect farmers.

    11. Permit local farm stands.

    12. More carefully plan road detours, especially around harvest time.

    13. Talk with farmers regularly and have local officials visit farms more often.

    14. Discourage land use conflicts.

- Asked how they rate the Town of Warwick as a place to be farming, 38 percent rate the Town "better than most places," 43 percent rate it "about average," and 19 percent rate it "worst than most places" or have no opinion.

- Asked if they favor new residential developments in the Warwick countryside, 64 percent say "definitely not" or "probably not."

- Asked if they think the Town can control the migration of metropolitan population into the Town of Warwick, 59 percent say "definitely yes" or "probably yes."

- Asked if they think tourism can help Warwick's agricultural economy, 64 percent say "definitely yes" or "probably yes."

- Asked about the expected size of their farm businesses five years from now, 29 percent say "larger," 50 percent say "the same" and 3 percent say "smaller." (12 percent say they expect to be out of business for one reason or another.)

- Asked what will happen to their farm businesses upon their retirement, 55 percent say "family member or partner will continue," 18 percent "will sell, rent or lease to someone to continue the business," and 15 percent "will sell for development."

- Asked if they would expand their operations if land were available at farm value prices, 39 percent say "yes" and 57 percent say "no."

- Asked if they would consider accepting the development value of their farms in money while still retaining ownership, but foregoing all future development options, 42 percent would "definitely consider," 26 percent would "probably consider" and 21 percent would "probably not or definitely not consider."

- Asked if they believe there must be a "critical mass" for agriculture to survive in Warwick, 79 percent say "definitely yes" or "probably yes."

The Town of Warwick Farmer Survey provides important information on the status of farming in the community. However, farming is affected by forces both within and outside of the Town of Warwick and cannot be viewed in isolation. To gain a wider perspective on the status of farming around the nation and to contrast the Survey results with other assessments of farming, the American Planning Association (APA) was queried. The APA has studied agricultural land preservation extensively and has developed a policy guide. The APA maintains an Internet Web site that contains the agricultural land preservation policy guide as well as further information on how the guide was developed. The guide can be found at "http://www.planning.org/govt/farmland.htm". The following is a listing of the APA's key findings, as they pertain to agricultural land preservation, from the policy guide:

- America's farmers own the majority of the nation's privately held land;

- The average age of America's farmers is over 50 years old;

- About half of the nation's food supply comes from metro and metro-adjacent counties. These counties are where most of the projected population growth will occur;

- The population of the United States is projected to increase to as much as 393 million people by the year 2050, up from 262 million in 1995;

- Recent land use trends have shown a rate of increase in land development that far exceeds the rate of population growth. The result has been sprawling residential, commercial, and industrial development that has often occurred on agricultural land;

- Farming is a business that also provides many public benefits, including open space, wildlife habitat, and ground water recharge;

- Those states and local governments that have achieved a measure of success in agricultural land preservation employ a coordinated package of techniques, including: agricultural zoning, preferential taxation of agricultural land, right-to-farm laws, purchase or transfer of development rights, and urban growth boundaries or urban service areas;

- There are about 240 million acres of prime agricultural land in America. Roughly one-quarter of this land is located within metropolitan areas;

- The United States loses anywhere from several hundred thousand acres to a million acres of agricultural land to other uses each year;

- Although the United States currently has an abundance of agricultural land and an abundant supply of food, this could change over the next 50 years, given national and global population and development trends;

- Agricultural land loss is especially important at the local and regional levels in many parts of the United States;

- Agricultural land should be protected and preserved in large contiguous blocks in order to maintain a "critical mass" of farms and agricultural land. The critical mass will enable farm support businesses to remain profitable and sustain local and regional agricultural economies;

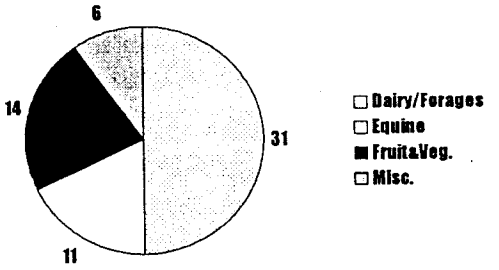
- Agricultural land preservation must be distinguished from open space protection. The purpose of protecting agricultural land should be to protect commercially viable farms and agricultural land which incidentally provide open space; and

- The preservation of agricultural land and farming is dependent on the strength of the local agricultural economy. A critical mass of agricultural support activity must be preserved to help make farming a viable business enterprise.

The following two pages graphically represent aspects of the survey responses to the questions that were asked of the farmers. A significant amount of raw data was collected and is referenced herein. It can be found in the offices of the Town Clerk and Town Building Department.

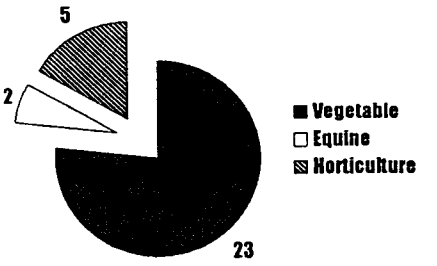
Farmer Demographics: What They Grow (based on upland vs. muckland)

Upland Commodities

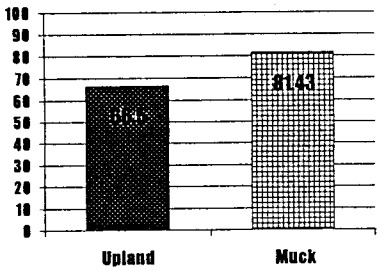


Farmer Demographics: What They Grow (based on upland vs. muckland)

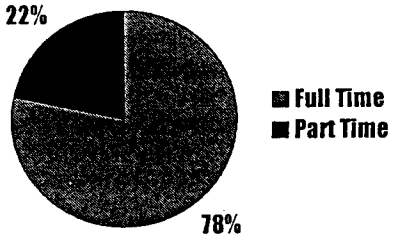
Muckland Commodities



Percent Household Income



Time Devoted to Farming



Farmer Demographics

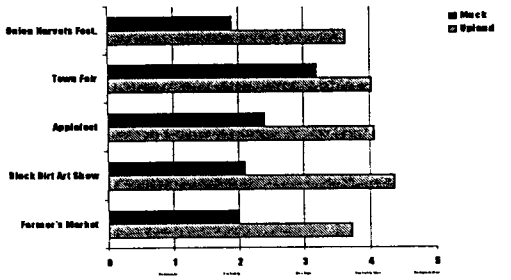
- Average Age: 53
- Education Levels:
  - 3 Grade School
  - 8 Attended High School
  - 35 Completed High School
  - 16 Attended College
  - 15 Graduated College
  - 17 Graduate Work

How Many Generations have You /Your Family Farmed Here?

Average: 2.1 Generations
(muck=2.8, upland=1.9)

44% are 1 generation or less

Activities That Help



What will Happen When You Decide to Leave Your Current Business?

Family Member will Continue It	48
Partner will Continue	4
Sell to Continue Business	13
Sell to Development	14
Rent or Lease	4
Other	10
Total Responses	93

Do You Have Children Who Would Like to Farm?

Upland: 64 Respondents avg. age = 54	29 Sons ~ Average Age: 27 17 Daughters ~ Average Age: 26
Muck: 31 Respondents avg. age = 50	14 Sons ~ Average Age: 25 10 Daughters ~ Average Age: 20