



**Jefferson County**



# **AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN**

**Part 1 of 3 – Main Document**

**April 2016**





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# 2016 JEFFERSON COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AND FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN

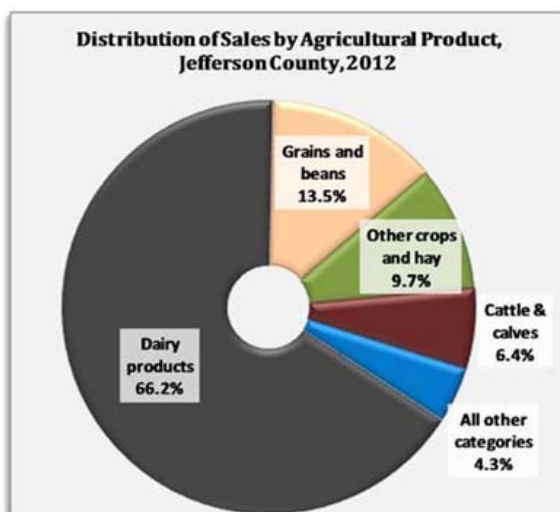
## Agriculture in the County

### Role of Agriculture in the County

The importance of agriculture to Jefferson County cannot be understated. Agriculture has an important economic role and is also a critical feature of the landscape, contributor to tourism, and is valued as a land use contributing to the quality of life in the County.

More specifically, agriculture:

- Significantly contributes to jobs and income, and supports economic activity in other sectors;
- Contributes to the County's visual landscape, scenic, and rural character;
- Provides access to fresh, healthy, local food products including eggs, meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables;
- Preserves open space and helps to maintain the quality of life that residents value;
- Contributes to recreation and tourism attractions including hunting, fishing, motorized vehicle use, and farm tours.



### Why a New Plan?

- Current Ag Plan is 14 years old
- Strategies needed updating
- Updated data, maps and other information needed to target and support new programs
- A cohesive framework for farmers, farm groups and agencies is needed to guide collaboration on programs

## State of Agriculture

- The 2012 Census of Agriculture reported 876 farms in Jefferson County, with an average farm size of 332 acres.
- Land in farms in the County totaled 290,811 acres in the 2012 Census—an 11% increase from that in 2007. There are three NYS Agricultural Districts having 3,428 parcels and 205,135 acres in them.
- Jefferson County ranks #2 in New York State for sales of crops and hay, #4 in the State for dairy products sold, and #9 in the State for total sales of agricultural products. Farms generated \$283.6 million in sales in 2012.
- In 2012, there was \$183.6 million in total sales of agricultural products in the County.
- The livestock sector (including dairy) accounts for about 75% of total sales. Dairy had \$121.5 million in total sales.
- Sales of livestock and their products is increasing as is sales of crops, especially grains. Although still a small part of the overall farm economy, there are increasing sales of fruits and vegetables, organic products, direct sales, and crops related to beverages.



## Our Vision for Agriculture in the Future ...

- A dynamic and growing industry.
- An integral part of our landscape and economy.
- Enjoys significant support among County residents and policy makers.
- Farmland is preserved.
- County is an agricultural commerce center for local, regional, State, national and international markets.
- Provides jobs, local food and beverages, and brings outside revenue into our communities.
- Includes a robust dairy industry; a growing grass-based livestock industry; vibrant craft beverage operations; agri-tourism businesses; and other related agri-business enterprises.
- Many farms diversify and market a variety of high quality products locally and globally.
- Has a strong agri-business infrastructure that supports the local farming industry.
- Our youth are interested in farming as a desirable career choice.



# Accomplishments since the 2002 Plan

Where many counties have experienced loss of their farm economies, Jefferson County has seen increases with more land used for farming and increased market values of products sold. The 2002 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan established a series of objectives and strategies to protect and conserve viable agricultural land and promote farming in the County. Since that time, the County, along with the agencies and organizations that support agriculture, have made great strides toward reaching goals called for in the 2002 Plan. These projects have been guided by the agricultural and farmland planning done by the agricultural agencies in the County and include:

- Establishment of the Jefferson County Agricultural Development Corporation (now a Council).
- Over 80,000 acres added to the NYS Agricultural Districts through Annual Inclusions and Eight-year Reviews.
- Dairy Profit Team initiative designed to increase milk production/profitability
- Promotion of County farming through the Come Farm With Us project
- Home Grown radio show developed by the Jefferson County Agricultural Coordinator
- Sandy Creek Watershed Cow Comfort Grant Initiative
- Willow Biomass Research
- Farmers markets initiated
- Capital financing projects
- Tile drainage loan program

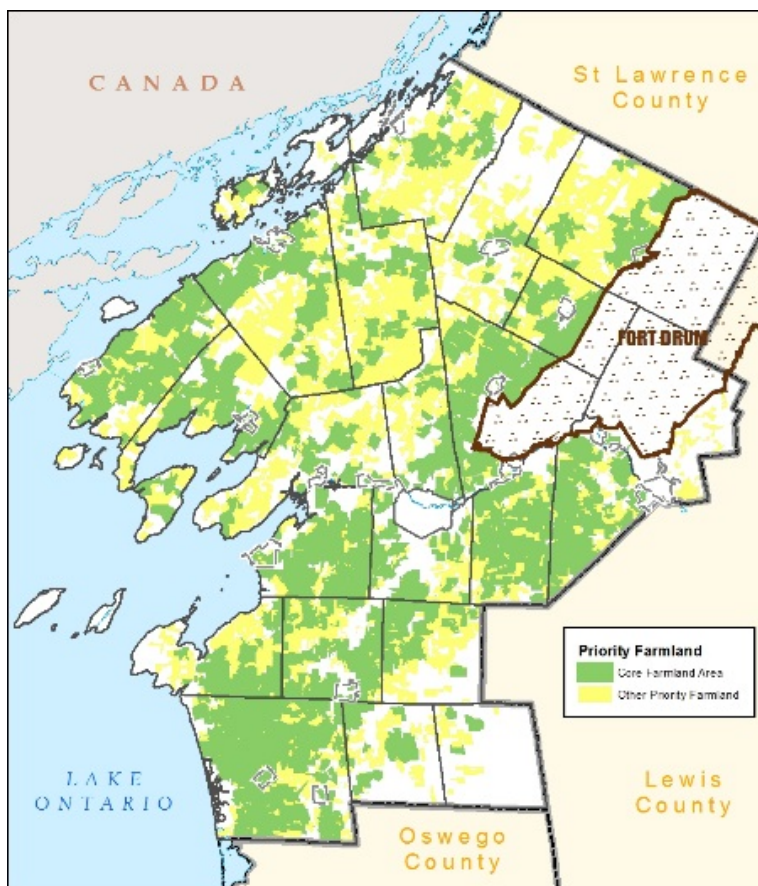
Over 24 different agencies or organizations have been identified that can partner with Jefferson County to make the Plan recommendations a reality. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, together with the Agricultural Agency Round Table, will take lead roles in prioritizing, detailing, and implementing the recommendations made in this Plan. Each partnering agency should use this Plan as a template and guide for their projects so that there is coordination to meet the needs identified in this Plan.



# Planning for Agriculture in Jefferson County

## 6 Goals to be Accomplished

- Keep farms economically viable and preserve farmland.
- Increase educational programming targeted to farmers, policy makers, and residents.
- Support the local dairy sector, production agriculture and the agricultural industry as a whole.
- Develop and promote new agricultural products, new markets, and marketing efforts.
- Address regulatory policies and programs that may negatively impact farming.
- Strengthen the next generation of farmers.



Priority Farmland Area Map (Core areas in green and other farmland areas in yellow)

## Strengths, Issues, and Opportunities

The Plan will help Jefferson County maintain features that make agriculture strong, address weaknesses that challenge farms, and take advantage of new opportunities. Some of these include:

### Strengths to Maintain:

- Relatively affordable land
- Increased milk production
- Value-added dairy processing facilities
- Excellent farm services and infrastructure support
- Growing diversity of farms
- Low development pressure

### Issues to Address:

- Regulations
- Competition for farmland
- Lack of processing and distribution facilities
- Lack of a cohesive brand
- Poor attitudes about farming as a career choice
- Lack of understanding among non-farmers
- Lack of transition planning
- High costs
- Manure management

### Opportunities:

- Attract new markets
- Attract new value-added processing
- Increase local food distribution
- Cheese Trail
- Start internship program
- More tech, business and estate planning
- Promote year-round vegetable farming
- Expand maple syrup



## Recommended Actions

There are 56 strategies listed in the Plan to be considered for implementation by the Ag Agencies in the County. The AFPB agreed that the following projects should be implemented as soon as feasible.

### Priority Projects Include

- Develop Agricultural Friendly Local Land Use Laws. The Jefferson County Department of Planning will develop guidelines and options for local municipalities to consider when updating their zoning and subdivision laws. These guidelines will show potential negative impact on agriculture that certain regulations can have and offer language options that encourage agricultural activities and make it clear how agricultural activities are defined.
- Reduce Energy Costs Through On-Farm Energy Conservation. Reduction of production costs is a priority in the County to increase farm profits. This project seeks to reduce on-farm energy costs. The project will expand energy conservation through installation of more energy efficient equipment, new efficient lighting, and the use of solar, wind, and manure digesters as energy sources. The County will work with New York State and others to seek additional funding for programs such as NYSERDA's Ag Energy Efficiency program as well as new, local energy conservation initiatives.



- Ensure Public Access to this Plan and the Implementation Strategies. On-going involvement of the farm community in implementing actions outlined in this Plan is essential to success. Farmers must be able to review the strategies, find appropriate information from the plan, and interact with implementing agencies. This project will develop a fully interactive and searchable Plan to be made available on the County's webpage with links to other agencies.
- On-farm Water Development, Protection and Conservation. As the number of dairy cows has increased in the County, the need for water has also increased, and this has placed more of a burden on farm water resources. Farms are in need of assistance to protect their existing water sources, initiate on-farm water conservation, and develop new water sources. There is a need to maintain and enhance existing programs and to develop new programs that will assist farmers develop, maintain and protect on-farm water resources.
- College Intern Assistance. Attracting a new generation of farmers and farm employees is a critical need in Jefferson County. A lack of quality and affordable housing for interns is an impediment to attracting them here. In addition to lack of housing, students that do intern in Jefferson feel isolated from others their own age and limits opportunities for both the farm and interns to have time away. This project will be to continue and expand efforts to house interns working on farms in the residential halls at Jefferson Community College. Jefferson County Local Development Corporation, Jefferson Community College, and the Jefferson County Workforce Investment Board will continue working together to find a solution.
- Jefferson County Come Farm With Us Website. This website has been a key part Jefferson County's success in attracting new farmers and ag-businesses. The website needs to be further developed and enhanced to meet new needs - especially those identified in this Plan. This project will help enhance the site with an interactive map that allows consumers to find local food producers, with marketing tools to attract new manufacturers using local products, and to provide better information to the farm community.

## Other Important Recommended Actions:

- Attract new markets
- Continue Jefferson County Agricultural Development Council and support for other agencies that provide technical, educational, and capital support for farmers.
- Recruit businesses and identify locations for food processing facilities to increase infrastructure for processing and that add value to farm products. Work with the North Country Regional Economic Development Council to fund this initiative.
- Expand programs that concentrate on dairy cow profitability.
- Expand the Meat to Market program through Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Create a farmer/farmland owner match program.
- Work with local schools to integrate agricultural system education programs into curriculums. Establish a mentor/internship program.
- Continue to develop the Wine Trail to boost all ag sectors and promote agritourism.



# Putting the Updated Plan to Work

The strategies outlined in this updated Plan concentrate on ensuring that resources and assistance supports the significant agricultural sectors existing in Jefferson County. The County's goal is to use this updated plan to provide the economic data, maps, farmer input, and identified trends and opportunities to support ongoing, and guide new programs to be implemented by the partner agencies and organizations.

With ongoing support by the Agricultural Coordinator, the County and its partners will:

- Develop an annual work plan for implementation using the priorities from this Plan
- Coordinate programs through the Agricultural Agency Round Table to collaborate and prevent duplication of services
- Research the potential of multi-county meetings to identify and implement regional projects that will benefit agriculture
- Prepare NYS grant applications for funding of priority projects through the North Country Regional Economic Development Council.



Jefferson County Fair



## Introduction

In 2002, the Jefferson County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board prepared an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan for Jefferson County. That Plan has been used over the years as the basis for implementing many programs and projects that have benefited and enhanced agriculture in the County. Since that time though, the County has seen many demographic, economic, technologic and land use changes that have, and will continue to influence agriculture.

In recognition of these changes and of the important role agriculture plays in Jefferson County, the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board and County Legislature recognized



the need to update the County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan.

To aid in preparation of this Plan update, the County applied for and received funds from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets through their Farmland Protection Program. Together with additional county funding and support, the Jefferson County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board embarked on the planning process to update the 2002 Plan.

The objectives of the Plan's update are similar to those expressed in the 2002 Plan and include:

- Involving the agricultural industry, municipalities, local, state, and federal agricultural agencies in developing an agricultural and farmland protection plan and empowering them to help in implementing the results;
- Prioritizing what agricultural lands in Jefferson County are in the need of protection from development, abandonment, societal pressure and other causes;
- Examining what agricultural economic development opportunities should be explored to increase agricultural profitability and the retention of farmland in Jefferson County; and
- Determining what national, state and regional financial resources are available that can be used in implementing an agricultural and farmland protection plan.

This new, updated plan will give the County:

- A long-term vision and direction to guide policies and programs that can enhance agriculture;
- Strategies to maintain agriculture as a critical land use and economic driver;
- A framework for organization and collaboration to promote existing and new farm operations;
- Identification of potential project partners and sources of funding; and
- Data, maps, and other information that can be used to support agricultural economic development, public relations, marketing, grant writing, and other programs related to agriculture.



## The Planning Process

The process used in developing this Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan update was based on guidelines specified by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (Circular 1500). Under these guidelines, the Jefferson County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board worked with a planning consultant in 2014-2015 to assist in carrying out a planning process that included:

- Mapping and analysis of farms, farmland, and other land uses and land use patterns that may influence farming;
- Public input in the form of farm visits, focus groups, and meetings with farmers;
- Collection of data that helps characterize current agricultural operations and the agricultural economy;
- Identification of the strengths that support farming in the County as well as issues that need to be addressed, and opportunities that should be taken advantage of in the future to enhance agricultural profitability and sustainability;
- Development of long-term vision and goals for the County to work towards;
- Identification and prioritization of projects and actions that the County and its partners can implement over time to address the needs of agriculture; and
- Development of a time frame and action plan to help the County follow through and implement these priority actions.

## Description of Public Input

A variety of approaches were used to learn about what farmers, agri-businesses, and agencies involved with supporting agriculture think are issues and opportunities to be addressed in this Plan. Public outreach and farmer input was gathered through a comprehensive process that included:

- Workshop for Farmers;
- Roundtable discussion with the Jefferson County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board;
- Discussion with the Jefferson County Agricultural Agency Round Table;
- A farmer's survey;
- Focus group meetings to learn about CAFO Farms, dairy processing, land trusts and farmland protection in the County, agri-businesses, ag-tourism, and ag-economic development; and
- Interviews with several specific farms.

The public input received from these efforts was organized into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to agriculture. From this, the vision and goals for this plan were developed along with a list of issues to be addressed and new strategies to implement.



## Vision

The 2002 plan did not explicitly present a vision statement. However, it did set an overall goal to “protect and conserve viable agricultural land and improve the overall profitability of the agriculture industry in Jefferson County.” This statement certainly remains relevant today. However, it may not offer the clarity and sense of purpose needed to fully implement this new Plan. To incorporate these vision elements and to build on the 2002 direction, the following vision statement is established.

In the future...

*Agriculture in Jefferson County is a dynamic and growing industry. It is an integral part of our landscape and economy, and enjoys significant support among County residents and policy makers. Farmland is preserved and available for the production of a wide variety of farm products. Jefferson County is an agricultural commerce center serving New York State, national, and international markets.*

*The agricultural industry provides jobs, local food and beverages, and brings outside revenue into our communities. Our County includes a robust dairy industry; a growing grass-based livestock industry; vibrant craft beverage operations; agri-tourism businesses; and other related agri-business enterprises. Many of our farms are diverse businesses with vegetable, fruit and cash crops, other agricultural products, and value-added processing facilities marketing high quality products locally and globally. There is a strong agri-business infrastructure that supports the local farming industry. Our youth are interested in farming as a desirable career choice.*

This vision is important because it expresses the big picture idea of what Jefferson County wants to achieve. The vision statement provides a focus for the remainder of this Plan. It also can serve to “keep everyone on the same page” so everyone is “pulling in the same direction.” More specifically, the vision statement serves to:

- communicate a sense of purpose;
- express what is important and why;
- places the focus on the future; and
- reflects the shared values in Jefferson County.

## Role of Agriculture in Jefferson County

The importance of agriculture to Jefferson County cannot be understated. This Plan offers much data that illustrates the important economic role the agricultural industry plays. However, agriculture has important roles other than economic. Agriculture is an important feature of the landscape, contributes to tourism, and is valued as a land use that contributes to the quality of life in the County. The many important roles agriculture plays include:

- ✓ Significantly contributes to jobs and income, and supports economic activity in other sectors;
- ✓ Contributes to the County's visual landscape, scenic, and rural character;
- ✓ Provides access to fresh, healthy, local food products including eggs, meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables;
- ✓ Preserves open space and helps to maintain the quality of life that residents value;
- ✓ Contributes to recreation and tourism attractions including hunting, fishing, motorized vehicle uses and farm tours.





## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Identification of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing agriculture is an important part of the planning process. It helps the County understand the issues that place barriers and challenges on farms and farmers, and identifies opportunities that can be used to address them.

- **Strengths** are internal resources and capabilities that affect agriculture in Jefferson County.
- **Weaknesses** are internal deficiencies in resources or capabilities that negatively impact agriculture.
- **Opportunities** are potential projects or programs that could be taken advantage of to improve agriculture.
- **Threats** are external influences on agriculture coming from outside the county.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing farming in Jefferson County were identified through public input and analysis of the data collected. See Appendix E for full details on these features.

### Summary

Table 1 - Strengths

Important Agricultural Strengths in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.	
Productive soils, affordable farmland, good water supplies	There are large areas of productive soils, generally stable and affordable farmland resources, good water supplies, and lands that could be brought back into farm production.
Agribusinesses	Agribusinesses such as feed, seed, and machinery dealers, and technical and economic services exist and are strongly supported in the County.
Technical and economic services	Cornell Cooperative Extension, Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Jefferson County Agricultural Development Council, and others provide significant technical, educational, and economic services and programs to area farmers.
Value-added businesses and dairy processing facilities	There are value-added businesses and dairy processing facilities to support agriculture in the County.
Development pressures	Development pressures are still lower compared to farmed areas in the Hudson Valley and other suburbanizing counties. However, some programs such as ACUB have preserved some lands.

<b>Important Agricultural Strengths in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.</b>	
Good location	The County is in a good location with market access and nearby population density that could support local farm products, especially around Fort Drum.
Growing diversity of other types of farms	There is a growing diversity of other types of farms including cash crops, livestock, grapes, vegetables, and agritourism.
Milk production and productivity is increasing.	The quality of milk is high.
Farms are supported	Farms are supported by most communities in the County. There is still strong support for ag-education programs in the schools. The County strongly supports agriculture as an important industry.
Come Farm With Us	The Come Farm With Us program has created a large presence beyond the region for Jefferson County agriculture.
Beverage industry	Development of the beverage industry has expanded the ag economy and promoted agri-tourism.
Good at adopting technology	Area farmers are very good at adopting technology.
Farmlands have been preserved.	The ACUB program through Fort Drum has conserved farmland.

Table 2 - Weaknesses

<b>Important Agricultural Weaknesses in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.</b>	
Labor issues	Some farms have difficulty finding and keeping quality employees. Labor issues have been identified as a challenge for small and large farmers.
Regulations	Local, State and federal regulations make it harder and more expensive to farm. Environmental, CAFO, OSHA, Food Security Act, and Canadian tariffs can negatively impact Jefferson County farms. Farmers are especially concerned about regulations that are not 'set' or enforced evenly so that farmers have difficulty planning for them. Future tracking requirements for ag products are also of concern to farmers. These regulations stemming from societal pressures can limit farm viability.
Growing competition for farmland	There is growing competition for farmland, both between farmers, and with those seeking to convert and develop the land. This raises land prices and forces some farmers to use lands far away from their center of operations. This has implications for production costs, road maintenance, traffic, and farmer/non- farmer relations.
Lack of processing and distribution facilities	A lack of processing and distribution facilities limits farm expansion and diversification.
Not found or taken advantage of potential new markets.	Jefferson County farmers have not found or taken advantage of potential new markets.
Lack of a local, cohesive and recognizable brand	A lack of a local, cohesive and recognizable brand for county agricultural products make it harder to market locally.
Difficult for new or small farmers to start-up.	It is difficult for new or small farmers to start-up. This is exacerbated by a lack of capital, increasing land prices, and insufficient ag business planning (especially for small farms).
Poor attitudes about farming	Poor attitudes about farming as a good career choice and lack of understanding of agriculture as a profession limits young people from entering agriculture. Lack of understanding about farm operations creates conflicts.
Lack of understanding about farm operations	There is a general lack of understanding about farm operations among the public and that can lead to conflicts, nuisance complaints, and difficulties for farmers. There are many societal pressures being put on the farming community that make farming even harder and less profitable.
Lack farm friendly regulations.	Some communities in the County lack farm friendly regulations.
Few plans for transition or succession.	Long-term continuation of family farms is uncertain as farmers' age with few plans for transition or succession.

<b>Important Agricultural Weaknesses in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.</b>	
Some secondary growth resulting from expansion at Fort Drum has impacted farming	Growth of Fort Drum has spurred additional residential and commercial development which increases development pressure on farmlands. Farmland conversion along with increased traffic, and expansion of water infrastructure into farming areas also impacts farm operations.
Funding to provide needed programs.	Agencies and organizations that provide farm and farmer technical support need ongoing and increased funding to provide needed programs. There is also a lack of funding that aligns with some of the programming goals of this plan, such as programs that support production agriculture.
Obstacles for farmers to expand into agritourism	There are obstacles for farmers to expand into agritourism due in part to insurance costs, and the lack of other family-oriented tourism in the County.
Farmers markets are not robust	In the lake and river area, farmers' markets are not robust and may be too spread out to effectively support local farmers.
Dairy and commodity price volatility	Dairy and commodity price volatility is an ongoing issue for farmers. High production costs and lack of access to low-cost electric power also contribute to uncertainty and economic difficulty.
High production costs	Farm production costs are high and returns can be low.
Manure management	As competition for land resources along with increasing sizes of dairy farm continue, manure management could become an issue for dairy farmers.
Taxes and assessments are perceived as being high.	Taxes and assessments are perceived as being high and a major business expense that impacts farms, especially smaller ones.
Addition of housing into farmed areas	A dispersed pattern of new housing development fragments farmlands and can result in more conflicts between farmers and non-farmers.
Expansion of public infrastructure	New water and sewer infrastructures can result in more growth, which ultimately puts more pressure on all farmlands nearby.

Table 3 - Opportunities

<b>Important Agricultural Opportunities in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.</b>	
Attract new markets, food processing and value-added operations	Attract new markets, more food processing and value-added operations, especially in the areas of cheese, butter and beef.
Increase local food distribution	Increase local food distribution, cooperative marketing and packing, and aggregation of products.
Take advantage of railroads	Take advantage of railroads for transporting agricultural commodities.
Take advantage of other crops and products	Take advantage of other crops and products including grain-fed and grass-fed beef farm opportunities as well as crops such as malt barley, cereal rye, and red spring wheat.
Create a cheese trail	Create a ‘cheese trail’ to compliment the wine trail and grow the ag-tourism sector.
Enhance education and awareness	Enhance education and awareness programs so the general population can understand and appreciate agriculture more. Work to educate elected officials and assessors about agriculture and its importance in the County. Initiate public outreach to develop positive attitudes about agriculture and promote the important role ag plays in the County.
Internship and mentorship programs	Initiate internship and mentorship programs to promote the next generation of farmers.
Farmer/farmland owner match programs	Use farmer/farmland owner match programs to help farmers start or expand farm operations.
Provide technical and business planning	Continue to provide technical and business planning education and services in the County. Continue support of the agricultural staff at IDA.
Help dairy farmers increase milk production per cow.	Continue to help dairy farmers increase milk production per cow.
Promote beer and distillery	Promote beer and distillery operations to expand the beverage industry, take advantage of NYS incentives, diversify agricultural operations in the County, and take advantage of smaller parcels of land suitable for growing hops or grains.
Marketing program	Create a marketing program that concentrates on local branding and a Buy Local Program and that includes an increasing online presence of local products. Expand use of the “Pride of NY” program. Take advantage of seasonal homeowners in Jefferson County to create increased demand for local products.
Year-round vegetable farming	Promote more <b>year-round vegetable farming</b> with hoop houses.



<b>Important Agricultural Opportunities in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.</b>	
Use marginal farmlands	Help landowners and farmers <b>use marginal farmlands</b> more. Work to increase the intensity of farming in the underutilized farmable parcels north of the Black River.
Small business development center	Create a small business development center. Increase Agri-business development to support local farms. Increase farm business planning, farm succession planning, and loan/capital financing programs.
Expand maple production.	Take advantage of the large area of woodland in the County to expand maple production.
Best Management Practices.	Increase use of Best Management Practices to increase profitability and sustainability, to benefit the environment, and to show how farmers are good stewards of natural resources.
Improve land use planning limit conflicts with fort-related development.	Improve land use planning through use of PDR, helping towns limit sprawl, increasing the involvement of land trusts in protecting farmland, and helping promote farm-friendly local conditions. Work with Fort Drum officials to limit conflicts with fort-related development.
Enhance farmers' markets and create increased demand for local products.	Coordinate timing and location, enhance marketing, and promote buy local programs.

Table 4 - Threats

<b>Important Threats Facing Agriculture in Jefferson County Identified from Public Input and Data Analysis.</b>	
Development pressure and farmland conversion	Development pressure and farmland conversion can reduce farm resources and make it harder to farm in the County. Selling of land, especially road frontage areas may be needed when a farmer requires additional assets. Sale of those prime lands is a loss for farming, is growth inducing, and could elevate farmer/non-farmer issues.
Regulations	Regulations, especially possible regulation of manure spreading, is perceived as a major threat to dairy farms.
Rising land prices and increased competition for land	Rising land prices and increased competition for land resources could prevent creation of new or expansion of existing farms.
High costs, and dairy price and crop commodity price volatility	High costs, and dairy price and crop commodity price volatility threatens the financial success of farms.
Lack of education and awareness	Lack of education and awareness of the public and local officials about agriculture and creates conflicts, increases the possibility of more farm-unfriendly local regulations, and fragments the community.
Lack of farmer involvement in local government	Lack of farmer involvement in local government means that there are fewer people to advocate for agriculture.
Increasing reliance on farmland not owned by farmers	An increasing reliance on farmland not owned by farmers introduces uncertainty into farm operations.



## Goals

Goals are **specific** statements of milestones needed to achieve the stated vision. Goals should help Jefferson County understand what is to be accomplished. They should also offer a general direction and intent so actions can be implemented. Useful goals should be **measurable**, offering a benchmark that can help the County identify progress being made over time. They should be **attainable** and **relevant** to the vision statement. Finally, goals should be **time-bound**, meaning - they have a starting and ending point. Together, these elements are often referred to as "SMART" goals.



The 2002 Plan established six broad goals for agriculture. These were to:

- Promote agricultural protection programs;
- Increase educational awareness programming;
- Support the local dairy industry;
- Develop new technologies and products;
- Enhance capital financing; and
- Enhance marketing.

All the data, maps, public input, and other information describing farms, farming and agri-businesses in Jefferson County were evaluated in this Plan. Agriculture's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) were identified from that information. A review of the SWOT (outlined in Appendix E) shows that the above six broad goals established in the 2002 Plan are still relevant today. Each of those original goals remain important to attaining the County's vision, then and now.

In addition to those broad goals however, several additional topics are now recognized as needing to be addressed in the County. These include ongoing land conversion and development pressure, competition for land resources and rising land prices, labor and immigration issues, negative attitudes about agriculture and farmer/non-farmer conflicts, and increasing regulations that impact farms. This Plan further recognizes the success of existing Jefferson County agricultural programs and in addition to addressing new issues, a major emphasis should be to maintain or expand those existing programs. The 2002 goals have been updated and expanded and several new goal statements developed to address all these issues.

The following goals build from the 2002 statements, address new issues, and offer additional details that can aid the County in future implementation of projects.

**Goal 1: Enhance efforts to keep farmland in production and keep farms economically viable;**

- Protect the critical farmlands in Jefferson County.
- Increase the amount of land available for production by increasing the intensity of farming in underutilized farm parcels.
- Reduce the negative impacts non-farm development has on the critical farm areas in Jefferson County, especially related to traffic, farmland fragmentation, and conversion.
- Maintain the affordability of and access to farmland for production.
- Continue the existing programs that enhance agriculture and its profitability.
- Maintaining water quality is a key part of farm programming.



**Goal 2: Increase educational programming targeted to farmers, policy makers, and residents;**

- Maintain and continue to Increase the understanding of residents and policy makers about the critical importance of farms and farmland to Jefferson County.
- Increase understanding of residents and policy makers about farm practices to help reduce farmer and non-farmer conflicts. Continue and expand existing programs that are already successful
- Increase farmer involvement in local governments and organizations related to farming.

**Goal 3: Support the local dairy sector, production agriculture, and the remaining agricultural industry in Jefferson County;**

- Improve labor options for dairy farmers.
- Expand on-farm infrastructure that will decrease costs and improve milk production.
- Maintain existing and attract additional processing facilities.
- Increase programming to help address manure management needs.
- Expand value-added opportunities for milk products.
- Promote best management practices to protect the environment and water quality, and milk quality/production.
- Increase the availability of 3-phase power and promote methods to increase energy efficiency of dairy farms.
- Promote adoption of new technologies. Advocate for programs that educate farmers about these technologies and provide funding assistance to implement them.
- Continue existing programs that benefit dairy farms.
- Promote nutrient management efforts.

**Goal 4: Enhance the financial success of farms and develop and promote new agricultural products, new markets, and marketing efforts;**

- Increase residents' demand for and access to locally grown foods and products.
- Expand and diversify production able to be supported by Jefferson County soils and climate such as beef, vegetables, grass and alfalfa production, grains, foraging production, mulch hay, wine grapes, biomass, hops, corn and soybeans, maple syrup, and honey.
- Expand agritourism activities and the infrastructure that supports it.
- Expand food processing facilities, especially for beef processing and finishing.
- Enhance small farms by promoting food hubs, aggregation facilities and direct sales opportunities.
- Create new markets and strengthen connections between institutions, restaurants, consumers and locally grown products.
- Increase farmers' understanding of new market opportunities.
- Increase farm business planning efforts to help farmers be more efficient and take advantage of new products and markets to grow their businesses.
- Increase the amount of capital available to new and starting farmers as well as to help expand existing farm operations.
- Continue existing JCADC, CCE, SWCD and other programs as they have been major factors in the success of agriculture in the County.



**Goal 5: Address regulatory policies and programs that may negatively impact farming;**

- Maintain and administer local policies, laws, regulations and procedures in a farm friendly manner.
- Address municipal assessment procedures and programs to ensure fair assessments of farms and farmland.

**Goal 6: Strengthen the next generation of farmers.**

- Increase the number of young people interested in farming as a career.
- Enhance the ability of farmers to transition and transfer farms to a new or next generation.



- Enhance the connections between area farms and non-rural and non-traditional agricultural students. Increase outreach to students in the City of Watertown and other urban areas to help them understand career opportunities in agriculture.
- Encourage agricultural curriculums in schools.





## Recommendations

A tremendous amount of preparation, numerous studies and diligent investigation and review by the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Jefferson County Ag Agency Round Table, Cornell Cooperative Extension, County Planning, the farm community and public has gone into creating this Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. The state of agriculture has been evaluated in order to understand trends, needs and opportunities for the future. This has been used to determine the best courses of action for the County.



Many recommended actions address more than one of the six goals that are established in this Plan. Some actions will include tasks that are short-term and have low cost, while others are more complex and need more funding.

Jefferson County already has many successful programs in place that are critical to successful farming in the County. **Continuing these programs is very important and this is recognized in the action table, below.** Existing programs also provide the foundation and establish the organizational capacity for development of new or expanded programs. Successful implementation of this Plan will need to address both continuation of existing programs and expansion into new ones that meet the new and emerging needs of agriculture.

It is understood that the County will not be able to implement all aspects of these recommendations all at once, or by itself. All will require partnerships and close collaboration between the various agencies and organizations that can lend expertise. Jefferson County will continue to benefit from an active collaboration that already exists. Implementation of these recommended actions will need collaboration between the Jefferson County Agricultural Economic Development Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Ag Agency Round Table member organizations and agencies.

## Recommended Actions

This section outlines programs and projects that should be maintained or new ones that can be implemented to enhance farm viability in the County. Ongoing, short, and long-term solutions to the issues agriculture faces are offered. These recommendations are organized by topic and priority.



## Key to Table

### Goals

- Goal 1: Enhance efforts to keep farmland in production and keep farms economically viable;
- Goal 2: Increase educational programming targeted to farmers, policy makers, and residents;
- Goal 3: Support the local dairy sector, production agriculture, and the remaining agricultural industry in Jefferson County;
- Goal 4: Enhance the financial success of farms and develop and promote new agricultural products, new markets, and marketing efforts;
- Goal 5: Address regulatory policies and programs that may negatively impact farming;
- Goal 6: Strengthen the next generation of farmers.

### Time Frame

- Short: The strategy can be implemented fully right away (1 year after adoption)
- Mid: The strategy needs preparation and coordination and will take more time to implement (1 - 3 years after adoption)
- Long: The strategy will take longer to organize, fund, and coordinate (4+ years)
- Ongoing: The strategy needs to take place on a regular basis


### Implementation Level

- Easy: Little to no funding is necessary; staff or volunteers are available to implement it
- Moderate: Some additional funding and/or staff time may be necessary to implement it, but the organization structure is in place to support implementation
- Demanding: The strategy needs more funding and additional staff, and/or there is more time needed to coordinate the effort among many parties

### Priority Status

- High: A strategy that needs implementing right away as it is a foundational effort or critical to more successful and/or sustainable agriculture
- Moderate: A strategy that is important, but not the priority
- Low: A strategy that would be helpful to promote agriculture but is not an action needed for success or sustainability



The Action Matrix, below also uses the symbol:  to identify a recommended strategy that is consistent with the North Country Regional Economic Development Plan and strategies.


### Key to Agencies that Can Partner to Implement Actions

- THT - Tug Hill Tomorrow
- JC - Jefferson County
- AC - Agricultural Coordinator
- CCE - Cornell Coop Extension
- FB - Farm Bureau
- S&W - Soil and Water Conservation District





Table 5 - Recommended Strategies


Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
Overall: Continue the many initiatives already underway through JCADC, CCE, SWCD, and others. These have proven to be model programs, effective in improving farm efficiency and profitability, and critical to the ongoing success of farming in the County.		1 High	Ongoing	ALL	ALL
<b>A. Farmland Protection-Oriented Strategies</b>					
1. Align resources and assistance to appropriately support significant agriculture sectors in Jefferson County.		1 High	Ongoing	All	ALL
2. Evaluate use of AFPB's 2008 template for a PDR program and identify possible funding sources, and potential program implementers.	See Action Steps for the tasks needed to establish this program.	1 High	Mid/Demanding	1	THT JC
3. Jefferson County Highway Department should discuss the replacement of culverts and bridges as well as road repairs with famers who may be affected to be sure that farm equipment can safely use that infrastructure.	Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District may be consulted.	1 High	Short/Moderate	1	JC
4. The County Planning Board should emphasize evaluation of the impacts on farmlands and the continued operation of farmland in a NYS Agricultural District whenever a 239-m referral is before them.		1 High	Ongoing/Easy	1	JC





Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
5. Develop a method of communication and organization with area land trusts and others interested in farmland preservation similar to the Agricultural Economic Development Roundtable. This group should review projects related to farmland preservation, identify ways to partner and seek funding sources.	Foster better coordination and communication between land trusts, the county and other involved organizations.	1 High	Short/Easy	1	JC AC THT
6. Work with area land trusts to help ensure that easements placed on farmland are crafted in a way that keep those lands in active farming.	Support land trusts efforts and assist them in learning about success stories and techniques from elsewhere that could be applied in Jefferson County.	1 High	Short/Easy	1, 2, 6	JC AC THT
7. Create a farmer/farmland match program to help link people who have viable land that could be used for farming with farmers seeking land. Include a new farmer recruitment in this program. Work with local realtors to develop a list of available agricultural property that would appeal to new and existing farmers looking to start or expand a farm operation. Coordinate with the Beginner Farmer/Rancher Program at CCE.	This would involve taking an inventory of available land and making this available to farmers seeking land. This method could be used to help increase use of underutilized lands.	1 High 	Mid/Moderate	1, 6	AC CCE
8. Address costs of land by advocating to NYS to offer state income tax credit incentives to those that lease land to farmers.	Advocate to offer reduction in NY capital gains tax applied on sales to new farmers.	2 Moderate	Long/Demanding	5, 8	AC FB



Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
9. Support farmers who wish to participate in State Farmland Protection Implementation program and federal Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs.	This support could come in the form of assistance with applications, providing map or GIS data, communicating with local officials, and writing letters of support. All such applications should promote preservation of lands identified as priority in this plan.	2 Moderate	Ongoing/Easy	1	JC AC CCE S&W
10. Research the pros and cons of easement term limits.		3 Low	Mid/Moderate	1, 5	THT
11. Provide templates and model language for a lease-to-own agreement that landowners can use.		2 Moderate	ONGOING	8	THT JC
<b>B. Education and Outreach-Oriented Strategies</b>					
12. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board should host an annual farm/farm stakeholder meeting to review, discuss, and work on implementation of this plan.	This meeting will ensure the farm community is involved in the implementation of the plan, aware and involved in identifying emerging issues to be addressed. The annual meeting is seen as a catalyst for moving the plan forward.	1 High	Short/Easy and then Ongoing	All	ALL



Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
13. Work with public schools to advocate for the integration of agriculture, food and fiber systems into primary and secondary school curricula.	Future Farmers of America, 4H clubs, and an Agriculture Literacy Week program for first, second and third graders throughout the county.	1 High 	Mid/Moderate	2, 6	CCE AC
14. Establish a mentoring/internship program that matches experienced and new farmers. For high school students, work with the FFA chapter. Coordinate with the Jefferson Community College AAS program in agri-business and their internship program.	Includes one for high school and college students (internship), and the other for those wishing to enter farming (mentoring).	1 High 	Mid/Moderate	2, 4, 6	JCC AC CCE
15. Create a brochure that summarizes this plan for county-wide distribution in printed media and online.		1 High	Short/Easy	2	JC
16. Regularly discuss priority projects with the Ag Round Table and use that group at the county level to assist in assigning lead agencies to carry out specific actions. Continue to use that group to evaluate existing programs and gaps in services, prevent duplication of effort and establish annual actions as well as benchmarks for success.		1 High	Short/Easy	All	JC AC
17. Agricultural-related Boards in Jefferson County should work to promote diversity for board membership.		1 High	Short/Easy	6	ALL




Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
18. Support and promote leadership training to members of the agricultural community in order to grow participation on community boards.	LEAD NY and JLI are good examples of programs to use.	2 Moderate	Ongoing	1, 2,5	CCE AC
19. Create a commodity-targeted set of statistics and data that detail market needs and demand. This data will help new farmers understand market opportunities and is key to their business planning.		2 Moderate	Short/Moderate	2, 4	AC
20. Continue to develop a program with Jefferson County Community College to establish a student intern program to promote agriculture-based programs in local elementary schools.		3 Low 	Long/Demanding	2,8	JCC CCE AC
21. Work with Jefferson Community College to develop a STEM camp at a farm to show interaction of water, energy, science, technology, engineering, math and animals.		3 Low	Long/Demanding	2,8	JCC CCE AC
22. Tap into and promote veterans in farming programs.	Farmer Veteran Coalition - <a href="http://www.farmvetco.org">http://www.farmvetco.org</a>	3 Low	Mid/Moderate	2, 6	AC CCE
23. Create a short PowerPoint or video that can be posted on the County website as a 'commercial' to outline the important roles agriculture plays in the County.	Consider a marketing campaign that buys TV ad time for similar outreach.	3 Low	Short/Easy	2	AC

Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
24. Continue to work with the dairy profit team model and expand the program to other types of farms.		1 High 	ONGOING	4	AC JCC
25. Continue the public partnership with JCC to create labor assistance and training programs as part of their agri-business program.		1 High 	ONGOING	2	AC CCE JCC
26. Local agencies should continue to provide education to farmers and the public on critical and emerging agricultural issues, including education for new farmers.	Local agencies have an important role in identifying issues of importance to Jefferson County farmers, and then working to develop programs in response.	1 High 	Ongoing Easy	2, 4, 5	All
27. Continue to provide technical training in farming to take advantage of emerging markets. Training should also include farm business planning that covers land acquisition, leasing arrangements and securing credit. These programs should take advantage of and give one-on-one support to involve new farmers in existing grant and loan programs in the County. Another critical component is advocating for funding to aid in implementing these technologies. Jefferson County should promote regional and state-level programs that provide funding for this.		1 High 	Ongoing Moderate	2,3,4	CCE






Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
<p>28. Establish regular methods to disseminate information about this plan and progress made on implementing it to build awareness, understanding, and action. There are three major target audiences for this: farmers, elected officials, and the general public.</p>	<p>Note that different audiences will view their issues/problems differently and are likely to be working in differing contexts. Therefore, the "message" may need altering for each group. Thus, marketing and public outreach needs to be tailored for each group. Existing methods such as email lists, CCE newsletters, and the radio show should be expanded to try to reach elected officials and the general public with more ag-oriented articles and press. Use technology to increase outreach.</p>	<p>1 High</p>	<p>Ongoing/Easy</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>AC CCE JC S&amp;W</p>
<p>29. Continue to provide agriculture-related land use training sessions to fulfill the 4-hour per year requirements for planning board and ZBA members. Specifically, provide training on their responsibilities related to agriculture via AML 25-AA and SEQR.</p>		<p>1 High</p>	<p>ONGOING</p>	<p>2, 5</p>	<p>JC AC</p>





Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
30. Continue to develop an update to the 'Come Farm With Us' website.		1 High	ONGOING	2, 3, 4	AC
31. Continue to provide support and funding for training on developing agritourism enterprises and value added products. Training and business planning technical assistance should especially be provided for.	Topics should cover sources of financing for start-ups, budgeting, selling prices, demand, managerial costs, product life cycle, cash flow	1 High 	ONGOING	2, 5, 6	CCE AC
32. Continue to have an ag tour for the public to introduce them to farms and farm operations in the County.		2 Moderate	Short/Moderate	2	AC CCE
<b>C. New Products, Markets and Marketing- Oriented Strategies</b>					
33. Develop a program to help encourage farms to diversify and create new revenue streams through direct sales, agritourism, hops and malt barley, fruits and vegetables and agroforestry. Identify funding sources that can help finance these operations. This would provide additional opportunities for farmers to diversify and increase their incomes, while bringing valuable external dollars into the County.	Develop new agritourism products, experiences, and events, leverage the resources of and coordinate with existing organizations and make the county more "tourism-friendly."	1 High 	Long/Demanding	4, 6	CCE AC
34. Educate farmers on existing seed capital and continue to advertise existing state and federal funding opportunities for farmers.		1 High	Long/Moderate	4, 6	CCE

Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
<p>35. Provide technical assistance and education to help farmers market their products via accessible websites and brochures, using social media, collecting information to track purchasing history of customers, and how to maintain good customer relations.</p>	<p>Underscore the importance of even the most basic website as a web presence and how it should be attractive and user-friendly to make a difference. Develop and host a seminar that includes best practices of what to do and what not to do.</p>	<p>1 High</p> 	<p>Short Moderate</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>CCE</p>
<p>36. Work to expand existing or initiate new farm incubator programs.</p>		<p>2</p>  <p>Moderate</p>	<p>Long/Demanding</p>	<p>2, 4, 6</p>	<p>CCE AC</p>
<p>37. Continue and expand efforts to create a Farm-to-School program in Jefferson County. Identify gaps where local farmers could capitalize; Consider focusing on one or two products that are consistently and widely available locally (e.g., hamburger meat).</p>	<p>Contact school districts and other institutions to request a list of food products they use or would like to use. Use high tunnels to extend the season to meet the demand for produce for most of the year. Host a Farmer-School networking event.</p>	<p>2 Moderate</p> 	<p>Mid/Demanding</p>	<p>4, 6</p>	<p>CCE AC</p>

Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
38. Work with Fort Drum to make local farm and food products available at the base.		3 Low 	Short/Moderate	4	AC CCE
39. Where possible, expand support for ag agencies and other programs to ensure that farmers have adequate resources to start or grow their businesses.		1 High 	Ongoing	ALL	ALL
40. Continue to work regionally to determine feasibility and identify locations for food processing facilities to increase the infrastructure to process, grade, and pack and add value to farm products and services.		1 High 	ONGOING	4, 6	AC
41. Continue to advertise existing funding opportunities for farm start-up operations.		1 High	ONGOING	6	AC CCE
42. Organize a restaurant/buyer base that farmers can work with. Provide marketing materials to help restaurants highlight the local foods they serve.		2 Moderate 	ONGOING	4, 6	AC JC CCE
43. Continue to provide technical education and support to farmers to expand into providing year-round products so the buy-local effort is more than summer/fall including promoting high tunnel use.		1 High 	ONGOING	2, 4	CCE

Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
44. Expand programs on dairy cow profitability, improved business planning and management skills, greater marketing skills, workforce management, increase informational networking among dairy farmers.		1 High 	Ongoing Moderate	2, 3	CCE AC
45. Educate farmers on how to coordinate farm management efficiency programs to reduce costs.	Facilitate adoption and use of cost-reducing energy alternatives on farms.	1 High 	Ongoing Moderate	2, 4	CCE
46. Continue to further develop the wine trail for long term sustainability, evaluate opportunities for companion marketing and implement.		1 High 	ONGOING	3, 4, 6	AC CCE
47. Work with livestock producers and cooperatives to market and sell meat from the processing facility. Meat to Market program at CCE.		1 High 	ONGOING	4, 6	AC CCE
48. Encourage farmers to participate in state and regional marketing programs, for example the Taste of NY and Pride of NY programs.	The website Taste NY <a href="http://taste.ny.gov">http://taste.ny.gov</a> is an initiative of the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and lists wineries, breweries and distilleries, as well as farmers' markets and the producers of certain niche products	1 High 	Ongoing Moderate	4, 6	AC CCE

Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
49. Continue to publish the Local Food Guide, which is a map of farms and farm products to promote agri-tourism and more local sales.		1 High 	Mid/Moderate	4, 6	CCE
50. Continue to develop and implement food hub concepts.		2 Moderate 	ONGOING	4, 6	CCE
<b>D. Regulatory and Municipal Coordination Strategies</b>					
51. Create model farm-friendly zoning language ready to be applied at the town level.	Using this information, a series of model standards and procedures can be developed to address definitions, agricultural uses, farmworker housing, density, buffers, and specific land use techniques that could benefit agriculture (such as conservation subdivisions). See Action Steps for details	1 High	Mid/Moderate	2, 5	JC



Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
52. Educate and promote the existing right-to-farm law in Jefferson County.	Locally adopted right to farm laws offer additional nuisance protection to farmers and farmland owners. The County could promote adoption of these laws, provide training, offer model language, and offer assistance to local governments as they develop and adopt these local laws.	1 High	Short/Easy	2, 5	ALL
53. Efforts should be made to assist in alerting municipalities about the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant and the Municipal Agricultural and Farmland Protection Planning Grant opportunities as assistance for code updates.	State-level grants are available through the Department of Agriculture and Markets to support local implementation of this action.	2 Moderate	Short/Easy	5	JC
54. The agriculture community should work with Towns to surface candidates and help to promote appointment of farmers or people knowledgeable about farming to local town planning boards, zoning board of appeals, and planning committees.		3 Low	Ongoing Easy	2, 5	JC FARMERS
55. When a traffic impact study is required, towns should be encouraged to evaluate the impact on adjacent agriculture.		2 Moderate	Short/Easy	1, 5	JC

Recommended Strategy	Additional Information Supporting the Strategy	Priority Status	Time Frame and Implementation Level	Primary Related Goal	Primary Potential Partners
56. Promote nutrient management programs and advocate for funding these efforts. This should include educational programs to educate both farmers on issues and technologies as well as the general public about nutrient management.		1 High	Ongoing/ Demanding	1, 3	CCE AC S&W

## Action Plan



There is no one silver bullet for protecting farmland, for enhancing or diversifying existing farms, or for promoting new agricultural operations. Agriculture and the agricultural economy are complex, and influenced by a host of factors, many of which are outside the control of a local area or even a farmer. A wide variety of farms and farmlands in Jefferson County are owned by an even wider variety of families, full of individuals with differing needs and goals. Thus, the toolbox identified in this Plan is diverse in order to address as many of these complexities as possible.

The strategies outlined in this Plan concentrate on ensuring that resources and assistance supports the significant agricultural sectors existing in Jefferson County. Jefferson County's toolbox must include maintenance of the existing programs along with implementation of new ones as recommended in this Plan.

Jefferson County currently has a wide range of successful programs designed to help farmers grow their ag-business and in turn, to ensure that their land is not converted to non-farm uses. These programs have the support of energetic public- and private-sector partners to help landowners and farmers achieve their goals.

**Further, Jefferson's organizational capacity to coordinate, collaborate, and take advantage of opportunities is a huge strength that already exists in the County.**

Maintenance of that organization through Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Soil and Water Conservation District, Agricultural Economic Development Council, Agricultural Development Coordinator, Jefferson County Planning Department, and the Ag Agency Round Table is critical.

The steps outlined in this chapter are offered as an aid to further the implementation of important strategies identified in the Strategies Table above.



## 1. General Tasks for Project Implementation

- a. Jefferson County currently has excellent communication, collaboration, and cooperation among all those involved with agriculture, including farmers, farm support agencies, county leaders, and other local and regional stakeholders. This is a critical component of accomplishing all of the strategies and projects outlined in this Plan and continued attention should be paid to maintaining this.
- b. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board with input from the Agricultural Agency Round Table should create an annual work plan for priority projects and establish an implementation framework to effectively move forward. The Ag Agency Roundtable currently meets on a quarterly basis to discuss current and potential programs. This format allows for a free flow of information between agencies on potential programs. This communication assists in preventing agencies from developing overlapping duplicate programs. The Roundtable should continue and be used as the sounding board to identify Priority Projects on an annual basis. It is anticipated that the Jefferson County Agricultural Coordinator will continue to play a key role in coordinating this effort.
- c. On an annual basis, the AFPB should receive a progress report from the staff and agencies involved in implementing this plan, and prepare a similar report for the County legislators to keep them informed.
- d. The AFPB should hold annual stakeholder's meeting to allow for the farming community to comment on current programs and identify new programs that they would like to have implemented in the County. This annual effort will be an important catalyst for implementing this plan.
- e. Continue dialogue and planning with neighboring counties. Consider scheduling quarterly multi-county meetings to facilitate more coordination and implementation of regional projects and approaches.
- f. Five years after approval of this Plan, the AFPB should conduct a review of the Plan. This can be facilitated by evaluation of the annual progress reports recommended above for the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board. In this way, the plan update can use this existing information, more rapidly fill gaps in programs, and readily report progress and needs to the County and staff.

- g. Use the Resources and Programs That Support Agriculture Section of this Plan to develop a “Resource Guide for Farmers”.
- h. The box below offers a checklist of steps that could be used during implementation planning to organize efforts:

Figure 1 - Guidelines for Project Implementation

**Guidelines for Project Implementation**

- Identify goals and objectives of the project
- Identify users/beneficiaries of the project
- Identify partners to help implement
- Identify a lead agency or project coordinator
- Create a task list of items to be accomplished
- Make assignments of people or agencies for each task, or form working groups
- Establish a time frame and schedule to get specific steps done
- Outline reporting mechanisms so that working groups or people/agencies report and communicate with each other
- Estimate costs for each step
- Identify grants and other funding sources that can be tapped
- Disseminate information on the project per this plan.

## 2. Implementation Partners

The following organizations and agencies all currently have roles or could have a role in aiding implementation of this Plan. Each should receive a copy of this plan. The partners should all be aware of the plan and their potential role in implementation.

- 1000 Islands International Tourism Council
- Adirondack Harvest
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Association of Jefferson County
- Development Authority of the North Country
- Farm Credit East
- Fort Drum
- Jefferson County Agricultural Development Council (JCADC)
- Jefferson County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- Jefferson County Agricultural Agency Round Table
- Jefferson County Community College
- Jefferson County Economic Development (IDA)
- Jefferson County Farm Bureau
- Jefferson County Planning Department
- Jefferson County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Madison Barracks Shared Use Kitchen
- New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)
- NNY Agricultural Development Program
- North Country Regional Economic Development Council
- NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets
- NYS Tug Hill Commission
- Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust
- USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA Rural Development, New York Office





3. Seek Funding and Work Closely with the North Country Regional Economic Development Council to Advocate for Jefferson County Agricultural Projects that Align with this Plan.
  - a. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, which partially funded this Plan, is encouraging counties with adopted Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans to present the findings of their Plans to the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) and other funding advisors. This will strengthen opportunities to gain support for recommendations that could be funded by New York State, notably through its consolidated funding application (CFA).

The North Country Regional Economic Development Council (NCREDC) has included agriculture in their long-term economic vision. Established in their 2011 economic development plan and continuing through 2014 updates, the NCREDC recognizes the importance of agriculture through its vision: “Invest in agriculture as we help feed the region and the world”. The NCREDC continues to prioritize agricultural projects in their funding requests.

The NCREDC has identified similar issues region-wide as recognized in this Plan for Jefferson County, namely:

- Lack of value-added processing;
- Underutilized land that could be used for biomass and wood resources for renewable energy;
- Need to maximize direct marketing sales to local consumers, businesses and institutions;
- Scarcity of refrigerated warehouses;
- Few central distribution points for agricultural products;
- Limited USDA Slaughterhouses;
- Dwindling support for agricultural research - especially related to northern New York; and
- Ongoing needs for an adequate agricultural workforce.

Some of the actions recommended in the NCREDC plans include

- upgrading and modernizing farm facilities for increased milk production (quantity and quality);
- improving the productivity of agricultural lands;
- improving farm operations with technical assistance and financial incentives;
- decreasing farm costs through renewable energy conversions; and
- capitalizing on the regions local foods movement.

The NCREDC promotes three major areas to enhance agriculture:

1. Maintain, establish and expand the presence of storage, processing, and distribution to promote value-added agricultural products.
2. Increase and expand direct marketing sales.
3. Increase the quality and quantity of agricultural products grown through technical assistance, educational services, and cost-sharing incentives.

Overall the NCREDC supports agritourism, maple production, wine trail, agricultural workforce development, food export training, dairy, and apple production. 2015 Agricultural-related priority projects for the NCREDC that specifically benefit Jefferson County include the North Country Value-Added Agriculture Program Phase II project through the Development Authority of the North Country and the Robotic Farming for Organic Food (Agbotic, Inc.).

Although the 2015 funding awards from New York State did not fund these priority projects, New York State did provide funding for establishment of a regional North Country Tourism Revolving Loan Fund.

- b. This plan advocates more aggressive development of CFA applications through the NCREDC process to promote projects that benefit agriculture in the County. In preparation for future funding applications, it is recommended that a priority is to educate the agricultural agencies in the County on the process for submitting projects to the NCREDC. These agencies should take advantage of the existing NCREDC programs and procedures, and work with the NCREDC agricultural task force to put forward quality projects. This will be an opportunity to establish priority funding projects for the County to be advanced through the CFA and REDC processes.

1. To aid in this process, the Action Matrix established in this Plan identifies where a County project is consistent with specific NCREDC strategies. Use of the symbol (from the NCREDC 2015 Progress Report) identifies a proposed project in Jefferson County consistent with the NCREDC plans.



2. Use the CFA endorsement criteria (pages 52 - 55 of the NCREDC Plan as a checklist to improve chances of funding of proposed projects.
3. The AFPB and its partners should work cooperatively with Jefferson County, The Jefferson County Agricultural Economic Development Program and the NCREDC to develop applications for CFA funds based on the projects ideas and needs identified within this Plan.

#### 4. Concentrate Initial Efforts on the following Priority Projects

- **Agricultural Friendly Local Land Use Laws.**

The Jefferson County Department of Planning will develop guidelines and options for local municipalities to consider when updating their zoning and subdivision laws. These guidelines will show potential negative impact on agriculture that certain regulations can have and offer language options that encourage agricultural activities and make it clear how agricultural activities are defined.

- **On-Farm Energy Conservation**

A key strategy for Jefferson County has been, and continues to be, to help reduce production costs on farms. One way to accomplish that is through reduction of energy costs. A priority project for Jefferson County is to expand on-farm energy conservation through promotion of more energy efficient equipment, new efficient lighting, and the use of solar, wind, and manure digesters as energy sources to reduce farm energy costs. The County should significantly enhance programs that inform farmers of funding opportunities and new research on technologies that can be implemented on the farm. Further, the program can provide aid to farmers when seeking specific funding sources. The County recognizes that NYSERDA's Ag Energy Efficiency program was a highly popular and beneficial program, but is an under-capitalized source of grant funding. As part of this priority project, Jefferson County should advocate to New York State to encourage them to provide additional funding that benefits farmers.

- **Public Access to the Plan and the Implementation Strategies.**

The full Plan will be interactive, available on the County's webpage and local agricultural agencies will establish a link on their webpage. A user friendly Strategy Table will be created on-line to allow farmers to review the strategies and connect to the appropriate agencies for further information.

- **On-farm water development, protection and conservation**

While the average number of dairy cows per farm has increased from 101 in 2002 to 139 in 2012, a 38% increase, there are many larger dairy farms in Jefferson County where the herd size has more than doubled over the last decade. On-farm water is now also being utilized for soakers to provide for increased cow comfort in the summer. The increase in herd size and the addition of soakers has put more of a burden on the water resources of the farm. Farms are in need of assistance to protect their existing water sources, initiate on-farm water conservation, and develop new water sources. There is a need to maintain and enhance existing programs and to develop new programs that will assist farmers develop, maintain and protect on-farm

water resources. Farmers, agricultural professionals, engineers, agronomists, and livestock scientists will need to work together to implement viable and economically sustainable solutions.

- College Intern Assistance

Jefferson County Local Development Corporation, Jefferson Community College, and the Jefferson County Workforce Investment Board are working together to find a solution for an ongoing barrier for farms in Jefferson and Lewis Counties to attract high quality students from agricultural colleges. Farms indicate that the lack and affordability of housing for interns coming into northern New York is an impediment to attracting them here. Farms currently have to provide housing within their own homes for the students. It leaves the students somewhat isolated from others their own age and does not provide an opportunity for both the farm and interns to have time away. The organization involved are currently looking for funding to house interns working on farms in the two counties in the residential halls at Jefferson Community College.

- Jefferson County Come Farm With Us Website

Jefferson County Local Development Corporation is currently working with their webmaster to further develop and refine the [www.comefarmwithus.com](http://www.comefarmwithus.com) website. They plan to enhance their interactive map that allows consumers to find local food producers. The website will also be enhanced to provide better information to the farm community and serve as an important marketing tool to attract new manufacturers.