



**Jefferson County**



**AGRICULTURAL  
AND FARMLAND  
PROTECTION PLAN**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**April  
2016**





# JEFFERSON COUNTY AGRICULTURAL & FARMLAND PROTECTION PLAN - 2016

## Executive Summary

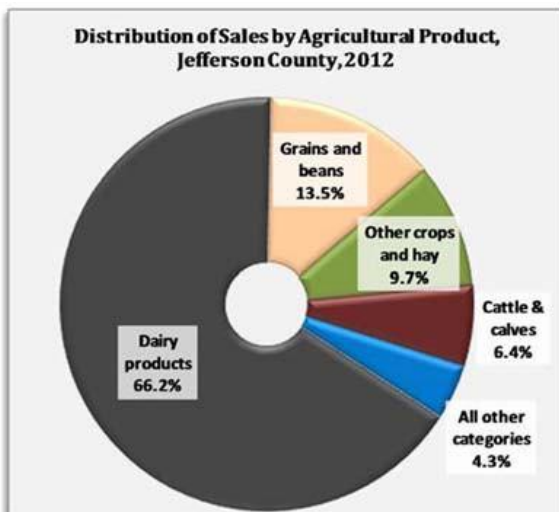
### Agriculture in the County

#### 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.

# 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

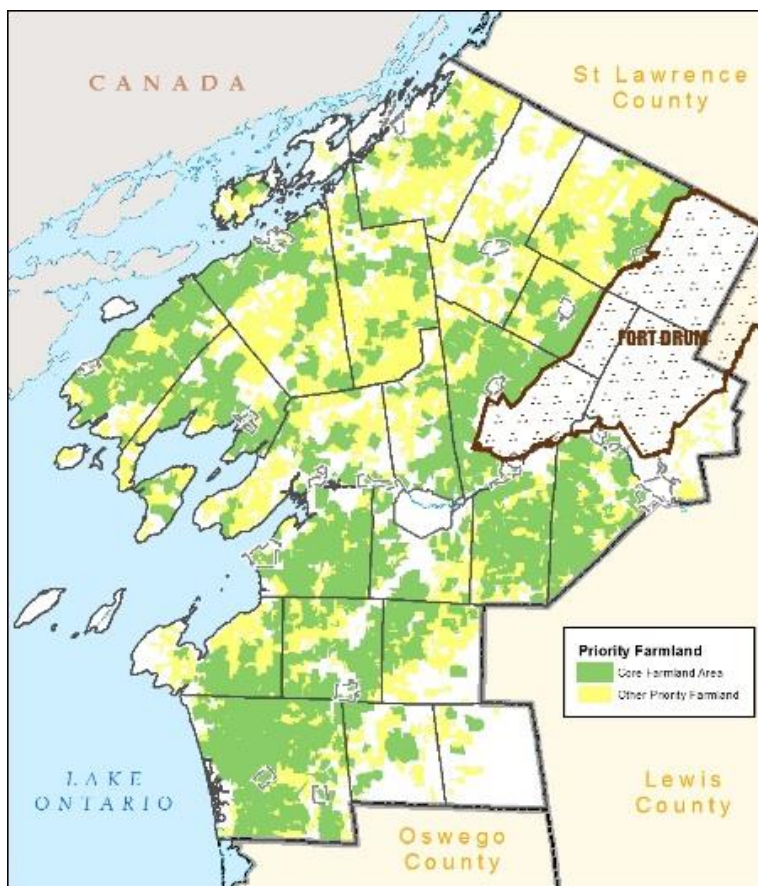
Over 24 different agencies or organizations have been identified that can partner with Jefferson County to make the Plan recommendations a reality. The Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, together with the Agricultural Agency Round Table, will take lead roles in prioritizing, detailing, and implementing 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



## Recommended Actions

The Plan outlines 56 different strategies to be implemented over time to enhance agriculture in the County. Some call for a continuation of existing, successful programs, and others call for new ones.

### 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 agri-tourism.

