



Towns of Homer, Preble & Scott Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan Executive Summary

Prepared by the Towns Homer, Preble, & Scott Agriculture and Farmland Protection
Plan Steering Committee

Vision statement

The Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott value agriculture and recognize the importance of farms in maintaining rural character and strengthening the local economy. The towns seek to proactively support agriculture by working to retain valuable farmland for current farmers to use and to provide opportunities for the next generation of farmers to be profitable. They seek to provide an economic climate to allow agricultural businesses to succeed in an evolving economy and ensure strong public support for farming in the region.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott discussed applying to New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets for funding to develop a Joint Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan (AFPP) focusing on protecting farmland in the Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott. It was discovered that only two towns could be on a single application. At that point the one application was made for Homer and Scott and a second application was made for Preble. The two applications were awarded funding in 2008.

The AFPP is a report on the state of agriculture in the Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott today and a template for the future of agriculture for the three towns. It provides a snapshot of various economic data as well as data on land and soil resources, regulatory issues and trends in agriculture and land use.

The AFPP contains a number of recommendations for action by the three towns both regionally as three towns and as individual towns when appropriate. In addition there are recommendations that others in the community can undertake to promote the long-term viability of agriculture in the three town region.

OVERVIEW

The Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott are located in the northwest section of Cortland County and have traditionally been recognized for their many small dairy farms; yet many of these farms have diversified over time to include significant cash crop production. Farmers in Homer, Preble and Scott maintain significant acres of land in agricultural fields, pasture land and woodland, which totals about two-thirds of the geographic area of the three towns. Farms contribute significantly to the scenic character, open space and the quality of life valued by all residents of the three towns. The agricultural land base remains concentrated and generally has not yet been fragmented to any large extent by low-density residential development or larger scale land subdivision. Within the valley areas of Homer and Preble however gravel mining, commercial and industrial development are viewed as possible threats to farmland along the I-81 corridor.

PROCESS

While permanently protecting farmland is a frequently sought after tool to conserve farmland, there are other tools and actions that can be implemented to help

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farms remain viable and keep quality farmland in production. To determine what tools might best compliment the three town region participation by the public throughout the planning process was important to the Towns of Homer, Preble & Scott Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan Steering Committee (Steering Committee). The Steering Committee was comprised of town farmers, residents, Cortland County Planning Department, Cortland County Soil and Water Conservation District, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cortland County and consultants from American Farmland Trust. To engage as much of the public as possible various outreach methods were engaged over the plan's development. The results of this process are a set of five regional goals (see side bar) and recommended actions to be implemented to accomplish the goals both on a regional (three town) basis and on an individual town basis.

RESULTS

During the inventory and analysis of local conditions it was determined that approximately 51% or 32,963 acres in the combined three towns are in agricultural production followed by forest and conservation and then single family homes. It was also determined a significant amount of the farmland in the three towns falls into a US Department of Agriculture classification of Prime Soil or Farmland of Statewide Importance. The location of these high quality agricultural soils is limited to particular areas of the world and even the United States. When these soils are converted to non-agricultural uses the ability of that soil to produce food and fiber is lost forever. Understanding where these soils are located will allow those making land use decisions in the future to direct development away from this limited and valuable resource.

As the largest land use in the three towns, agriculture is a critical component of the rural and scenic character so desired by residents and the thousands who pass through the area on I-81 and NYS Rte. 90. While residential, commercial and industrial development may

Regional Goals

- GOAL 1:** Ensure land use laws and local ordinances support economic opportunities
- GOAL 2:** Educate the non-farm public about agriculture
- GOAL 3:** Protect high quality agricultural lands at risk of conversion
- GOAL 4:** Ensure that local infrastructure is supportive of agriculture
- GOAL 5:** Enhance the local agricultural economy and support agricultural economic development initiatives



offer the tangible benefit of increased tax base, many communities today value the intangible benefits of the open space that agriculture provides to the community character and quality of life. There are tax advantages to maintaining farmland and keeping control on residential development according to Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies developed by American Farmland Trust which examine the difference between taxes generated by different types of land uses and the cost of services each type of land use requires. Ideally, the community, as a whole, should determine what the correct mix of residential, commercial and industrial development is correct.

IMPACT

Farmers in the Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott are fortunate to have access to a considerable number of agriculture-related business enterprises within their boundaries. In addition Cortland County provides a relatively robust array of agricultural support services to farmers in the towns. Altogether over 60 businesses including specialized consulting, direct marketing, farm service and supplies, farm equipment sales and repair, farm finance, livestock services and wholesale marketing are located within or serve farmers in the three towns. Convenient access to agricultural support businesses is critical to the viability of the agricultural sector in any community. As in any other economic sector "time is money" applies to agriculture, and farmers

need to minimize both the time on the road they have to spend accessing parts, equipment and services, and the response time of such vendors to service calls on the farm.

PAST & FUTURE

Agriculture is closely connected with the history of the Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott; yet agriculture has changed dramatically during the last 70 years. According to the Cortland County Natural Resources Inventory dated August 2006, "Once the epitome of family life, the number of small family farms has steadily declined both nationally and locally. In general, small family farms often struggle with profitability and are gradually bought-out and replaced by more competitive, large-scale operations. The cost of doing business continues to rise, thereby hampering profitability. Many family farms survive only because of supplemental income from a family member that works elsewhere." Local municipal support for agriculture has often been informal as the Town Board and other boards and committees often have farmer representation on them. The Towns of Homer, Preble and Scott Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan will now formalize each town's support of agriculture both in the town and in the three town region from this point forward.

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