

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT FARMING AND FARMLAND IN MIDDLETOWN

Based on research by the Consulting Team and meetings with the Conservation Commission, members of the public, and participants in the P.A. 490 program, twenty two recommendations were developed to protect and support farming and farmland in Middletown. The ideas represented in these recommendations support each other to create a social and economic atmosphere which is supportive of farming. The preservation of farming in Middletown will, by its nature, preserve farmland as farmland is one of two principal assets for farmers (the second asset is labor). Programs which focus solely on preservation of farmland will *not* ensure the long term viability of the rural character of Middletown. They will preserve land from development and thereby create open space, but, eventually, they will contribute to the gradual elimination of farming in Middletown. Therefore, these recommendations look to the support of the individuals and farmers who engage in farming.

Recommendation #1

Update the Plan of Conservation and Development to reflect the importance of agriculture in general, and family farming in particular.

As the Plan of Conservation and Development reflects the values of the community, this document should be updated to identify farming as a critical resource. This includes identification of the benefits of agriculture, as noted in Chapter 3, and the recognition of agriculture as an important use which benefits the community by minimizing the municipal services per acre / person compared to other uses and which contribute to the visual and aesthetic character of Middletown.

Recommendation #2

The City should develop a workshop or series of workshops for all City Departments to brainstorm how the programs and regulations these Departments oversee could be updated and modified to support farming.

The City of Middletown provides extensive municipal services and oversees a variety of programs which affect the day to day activities of a family farm. Each Department oversees a portion of these programs and can best contribute suggestions as to how they can be updated and modified to support this group of residents and landowners. They can also debate and discuss how any changes may affect the City's other programs and budgets.

Recommendation #3

The City of Middletown Planning Conservation and Development Department should review the Zoning Regulations and other land use regulations to modify those regulations to support farming and create a modern definition of farming and agriculture.

Specific recommendations to update the current Zoning Regulations are identified in Chapter 3. However, these should not be considered comprehensive. The Department should review its regulations with the Conservation Commission or other specifically formed Agriculture Committee or Commission to aggressively work to reduce nuisance complaints. The Department should also begin to identify ways to “standardize” filings required by farmers for farmstands, seasonal sales, and periodic events. Lastly, the Department should generally clarify and reduce regulations which actively reduce the viability of farming in Middletown as noted in Chapter 3.

Recommendation #4

The City of Middletown should establish an Agricultural Commission (made up of local farmers) to work with other City Land Use Commissions.

If there is interest from local farmers, an Agricultural Commission would have several tasks:

1. Work with Planning and Zoning Commission to establish guidelines for farming and other agricultural uses to ensure the protection of the environment in a manner that is acceptable to the farmers and provides realistic and substantial improvements to stormwater runoff and wetland protection
2. Identify projects resulting from those guidelines that can be funded by the City.
3. Work with the City to establish a fund for the following:
 - a. Preservation of farm land
 - b. Funding of improvements identified above
 - c. Funding of other agricultural projects.
4. Review land use projects within 500’ of existing agricultural lands to identify aspects of these projects which will have a positive or detrimental affect on the short or long term viability of existing agricultural uses.

5. Make recommendations to the City about management of City lands to expand agricultural uses on these properties. Resource Chapter B provides a number of options for the City to consider and encourage innovative farming operations.
6. Work with tax assessor and other departments to identify specific problems within the City and offer recommendations to reduce how farm properties are assessed (for example, many of the farmers were concerned about how barns were being assessed which resulted in a value for a structure higher than the value of their home).
7. Work with farming community to reduce property taxes on active agricultural land. The greater the reduction in taxes, the lower the pressure to sell off land for development.
8. The Town of Guilford has recently created an Agriculture Commission and it is recommended that members of the PCD Department, Conservation Commission, and local farmers meet with them to discuss organizational matters.

Recommendation #5

Update the current City of Middletown Economic Development Brochure to identify agricultural uses and opportunities in the City of Middletown.

The PCD Department and Economic Development Commission should work together to develop an economic development document which identifies existing agricultural uses and opportunities in the City. In addition, the EDC could work to develop programs to enhance existing farms, bring inactive farms back into production, and encourage well planned use of public lands for agricultural use be explored.

Recommendation #6

The City of Middletown should hold a referendum for a \$2,000,000 Bond Request for Open Space and Farmland Preservation

The City successfully completed this referendum on November 8, 2007.

Recommendation #7

To expand and support the monies from the November, 2007 referendum, the City of Middletown should establish a line item in the budget funded through property taxes that will be allocated to support local agriculture.

The development pressures are all too great on open space and farmland and as the business and real estate cycles experience growth and slowdowns it is important to maintain a steady, consistent and vigilant effort to encourage farming in Middletown. For some, it is helpful to view farming as part of the infrastructure, just as road improvement, schools, water and sewer system and public buildings including government buildings and libraries that require yearly capital expenditure. Similarly, the periodic or episodic funding of referendum bonds, while helpful, must be more vigorously and regularly pursued as well as additional annual funding for a variety of uses to fully ensure the viability of farming.

Recommendation #8

Establish a series of Local Farm Viability Start-Up Grants and Capital Improvement Grants for initial start up of new farms and large scale capital improvements (such as a new roof for a barn).

As farming continues to develop in the twenty first century, the concept of Urban Agriculture is worthy of attention and planning. The smaller clusters, as noted in the mapping exercise, can be small scale intensive urban agriculture/farming, seasonal and specialized products (see Chapter 5 on Farmers Markets for vendors who have successful active operations in the region), community supported agriculture (such as the model of Long Lane Farm) and greenhouses. Start up Grants and Investment Grants, from the proposed City of Middletown Farm Viability Grant may be utilized for these ventures.

Recommendation #9

Apply and assist Farmers in Applying for State of Connecticut Department of Agriculture Farm Viability Grant to provide funding to allow the City to implement these recommendations.

Additional grant monies could be used to:

- a. Establish Agricultural Commission
- b. Provide workshops for City of Middletown Departments

- c. Update computers in PCD Department to use existing GIS information and that generated by this project.
- d. Capital Improvement projects on local farms.

Recommendation #10

Track the loss of farmland and farms in Middletown every other year to be able to respond to changing economic and land use conditions.

The City of Middletown Planning Department working with the City of Middletown Planning and Zoning Commission and Agriculture Commission should prepare a report for the Common Council using GIS Mapping and current data from the Assessor's Office Database on a biennial (or if staff resources allow, annual) basis on the status of open space and farming preservation and loss, identifying opportunities and concerns.

Recommendation #11

With the Agricultural Commission, establish a rating system to rank those properties that are most at risk of loss of agricultural use to provide a systematic and equitable approach for study of various projects.

Establish a model for rating the agricultural parcels which may be eligible for funding (either grants, loans, or other programs).

Based on the Lebanon model described in Chapter 7, we have developed a first draft of a possible rating system for use by the City.

**CITY OF MIDDLETOWN
Farmland Preservation Rating System**

	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points
A. Size of Parcel(s)	5-15 acres	15-50 acres	50+ acres
Size when combined with other agricultural parcels	30 acres	50-100 acres	100+ acres
B. Percent Prime or Important Soils	30-50%	50-75%	76-100%
C. Percent Working Farm	20-50%	50-70%	70%+
D. Adjacent to Other Working Farm			Yes
E. Proposed Funding will Support Farming On-Site		Maintain Existing	Expand
F. Development Pressure	Low	Medium	High
G. Property Includes Features of Natural or Cultural Significance	Low	Medium	High
H. Adjacent to Open Space	Nearby		Adjacent
I. Part of Agricultural Corridor	Yes	View from Road	Road Frontage
J. Has Ability to Support Farmstand	Possible	Former	Existing & Active
K. Trails	In Vicinity	Suitable for Expansion	Existing
L. Preservation of Land will Protect Surrounding Agricultural Uses	Low	Medium	High

Notes for Rating System

- A. Based on information gathered by this study, the typical farm parcel is less than 15 acres.
- B. The proximity of other parcels increases the economic viability of each parcel. If the State program criteria changes, combined parcels may be eligible for grant money or matching funds.
- C. As noted from the participants in the FVG Workshops, most farms have less than 50% productivity.
- D. See Note B, above.
- E. As noted in this report, the intent is not just to protect land with agricultural soils, but also to support farming.
- F. Farmland is typically flat with easy road access. Most farmland in Middletown is on a road with City water and sewer. These elements contribute to significant development pressure.
- G. Natural Features Should Include:
 - Wetlands
 - Watershed Land
 - Aquifers

Specific Animal or Plant Habitat
Lakes
Streams, Rivers
Other Natural Features
Cultural Features Should Include:
River Access
CT Blue Trails
Historic Sites
Historic Buildings
Other Cultural Features

- H. Includes all City owned open space or those areas recommended as open space in the Plan of Conservation and Development.
- I. Agricultural corridors should be defined by the City, but could include those roads / acres with significant agricultural lands such as Ridgewood Road, Higby Road, Arbutus Street, etc.
- J. A farmstand provides the farmer with an outlet for their products.
- K. The proximity of existing trails and the ability to expand those trails, especially horse trails, was an important item for support of horse farms.
- L. See Item B, above.
- M. Eligibility for State programs may increase funds available for preservation

The Rating System should be developed with the farmers either as part of the Agricultural Commission, or before the formation of this Commission with representatives from that community. The Rating System should be evaluated regularly to ensure that the point value studies, point allocation, and weighing functions achieve the desired policy and strategic objectives.

Recommendation #12

Establish Agricultural Corridors to identify areas of the City as potential areas of agri-tourism, scenic corridors, and economic development to support agricultural uses.

The GIS Mapping Process had identified a number of agricultural corridors and sections within the City and identified a number of threats to farmland preservation. The mapping exercise selected a number of farms and various studies have shown the economic impact of development on agriculture. One area for the City to be cognizant of is to focus not only on the larger key significant parcels but also to string together a number of smaller parcels. Presently there are 7 parcels over 45 acres and 14 parcels between 15-30 acres. In addition, there are 61 parcels between 15-30 acres and 190 parcels between 0-15. This study recommends that the City develop a specific strategy to encourage smaller parcels to adopt innovative farming operations as well as identify areas where smaller parcels are in close proximity or adjacent to larger parcels. In summary, the various plans, policies and strategies must include, in a very significant way, the smaller farm parcels.

Specific recommendations include:

1. Provide appropriate significance to “smaller” parcels in rating and ranking
2. Prioritize land acquisition given the data gathered throughout this study
3. Continue to fully engage in conversation with landowners and farmers and assign appropriate staff time for such undertakings
4. Install signs to direct public to farmstands
5. Install signs identifying roads used by tractors, horse trails, cow crossings, and other agricultural uses where they may interface with roads, neighboring properties, or other public access points

Recommendation #13

The City of Middletown should support agricultural uses on City owned properties.

The City of Middletown, in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce, should support and encourage Innovative Farming Practices on lands that it owns through leases.

- Work with existing farmers to identify opportunities for growth and expansion including leasing city owned property and/or purchasing adjacent properties through the development rights program so that farming can be more viable.
- Lease municipally owned land to “unlanded” farmers such as the Deerfield Farm in Durham, CT.
- Support the Community Supported Agriculture (C.S.A.) model such as Holcomb Farms, West Granby CSA.
- Establish a Farming Educational Center.
- Encourage “farming” in all its forms throughout the city. A labor force of farmers for the local community can be developed from community gardens, 4-H youth programs, High School Vo-Ag programs, opportunities to work on farms and greenhouses in the City, Wesleyan University Long Lane High School Internship Program and University of Connecticut School of Agriculture and other college programs throughout the United States and Abroad. Working with the soil is known to increase the “human interest, skill, and capacity” to farm and help encourage and increase a future farming labor force. As more people work the soil with their hands, they are more likely to have a deeper appreciation for the challenges of farming and a positive attitude towards farming.

- Promote active Tree Farming on city owned land. Work in conjunction with Parks and Recreation, Public Works and Tree Warden and private sector businesses.
- Utilize the State of Connecticut Farmlink program to identify those interested in farming on City owned property.

Recommendation #14

Expand interest and opportunities for new innovative farming techniques.

Discuss business planning and opportunities for expanding existing ventures or beginning innovative farming options for existing and new farmers. The Chamber of Commerce Side Street to Main Street Program is a model worthy of consideration as are various opportunities available through the Farm Bureau. The Creative Juice Committee for the Chamber focusing on Art may be a model worthy of consideration for the business of farming.

Recommendation #15

To bring economic development and tourism to the City, the City of Middletown, working with the Chamber of Commerce, actively encourages the creation of a vineyard. Inclusion onto the CT Wine Trail would increase tourism and be of an economic benefit.

The City of Middletown is uniquely positioned between the Western Trail and the Eastern Trail of the CT Wine Trail. The addition of a first rate vineyard could provide a link and a resting spot for those making a two day trip. The City of Middletown has a vibrant restaurant scene, an Inn, and many Arts and Cultural Attractions that could be successfully marketed to encourage tourism.

Recommendation #16

Establish events which highlight farming in Middletown or use farmlands as a setting or backdrop.

To enhance the visibility of local farming (and related issues), the City of Middletown could take a lead with the Town of Middlefield and the Town of Portland in conjunction with the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce (specifically including the local bicycle shop Pedal Power), to support a Farm-Bike Tour in conjunction with the CT Tour Des Farms (see: <http://tourdesfarms.org>). While there may be an assumption that Middletown farms are not “significant” enough to warrant inclusion, this event could be dovetailed with the Wadsworth Mansion Open Air Market and/or other agricultural events in the City.

The City of Middletown, with the Chamber of Commerce, should develop a City of Middletown Marathon. The 26 miles 365 yard course should be designed to take into consideration the farming and agricultural landscape of the City. This event would continue to showcase the City of Middletown including its Farmland and Open Space. The Greater Hartford Marathon has a number of green initiatives including providing organic food for runners and volunteers. (see: <http://www.hartfordmarathon.com/Marathon>).

The Consultant Team recognizes that a marathon is a large undertaking and the City may wish to start smaller (5K) race in a particular corridor. However, the creation of agricultural based events such as a bike trail or foot race would focus attention on the aesthetic advantages of farming and bring needed revenue to both the farmers and other city businesses.

Recommendation #17

The City of Middletown should work with Neighborhood Groups to design and implement a City wide Community Garden Initiative.

The placement of community gardens along the river and other locations around the City will increase involvement and awareness of the benefits of agriculture and the richness of Middletown soils.

Recommendation #18

The potential role of aquaculture and other new technologies affecting farmers in the City of Middletown should be explored.

Agriculture is a constantly changing industry. As such, the City should try to plan for the future. The proximity of the City to the Connecticut River allows for the potential of small scale fish farming or other aquaculture. The present study did not address the feasibility of various new technologies. However, the Consultant Team felt it was important to recognize that more intensive commercial agriculture or technology based agriculture is feasible in Middletown. These techniques tend to be more intensive within a limited space which may require new regulations.

Recommendation #19

A Farmers Market Network should be created.

This network would cover the landscape , address the friction of distance – namely that the willingness and ability of people to travel a certain distance diminishes with an increase in distance, provide for various dates and times during the harvest season(s) and

make itself available to the various neighborhoods and communities in the City. This network would formally meet twice a year (February and October). Initially, the network would consist of the following:

- The South Green Farmers Market on Tuesday's and Thursday's 8:00am to 12:00pm July 17th-October 31. Presently two regular vendors.
- The one day Open Air Fair and Farmers Market at Long Hill Estate on August 26th with over 60 vendors,
- The second year of the Long Lane Farm Stand in the North End on selected Saturday Mornings in July, August and September and Community Supported Agriculture (C.S.A.)
- The one day Farmers Market on campus at Wesleyan University May 3rd, 11-3 with nine vendors.

Issues which should be addressed by the network include location, dates and times in operation, parking, impacts on neighborhood, products sold, and other business aspects to reduce overhead costs.

Recommendation #20

A Saturday Morning Farmers Market should be established.

The addition of a Farmers Market on Saturday Morning at a downtown location was suggested by a number of individuals as was allowing for a Farmers Market at one of the existing Farms. The first idea would be modeled on the work of City Seed in New Haven and the Northampton, Massachusetts Farmers Market and the second proposal on Ashlawn Farms in Old Lyme Farmers Market. Both of these models have merit and could be met with success if implemented correctly.

Recommendation #21

As a follow up to Wesleyan University Hunger Study, it is recommended that a nutrition survey be carried out so as to further address the concomitant problems of childhood hunger and obesity.

The role of "growing one's food and participating in local farming activities (production, distribution) coupled with healthy education" for both parents and children may have a positive effect to further food security in the City of Middletown and move toward healthier citizens. The work of the Middlesex Coalition for Children in this area is on the forefront of these issues and its work should continue to be supported.

Recommendation #22

Research and identify legislation that may be required to protect farmers from nuisance complaints including educating police on how to handle these complaints.

Although Connecticut has a strong Right-to-Farm Legislation, this does not stop complaints from neighbors or passersby's. Often these nuisance complaints require the farmer to defend their actions instead of the accuser needing to support their complaint. These complaints require increased attorneys costs and insurance that could otherwise be avoided with legislative support.

In addition, most of these complaints are registered with 911 and the police department who are not well versed on the rights of farmers. Additional workshops should be considered to develop the appropriate protocols to protect both the farmers and police.