

Plymouth County Agricultural Commission Roundtable, April 11, 2026

Carver Public Library

Convened by Sarah Gardner & Pete Westover, MDAR Ag Com Technical Assistance Project

Attendance: 40

Ag Coms Represented: Boxford, Carver, Duxbury, Foxborough, Framingham, Franklin, Freetown, East Bridgewater, Kingston, Marshfield, Plympton (inactive) (11)

Others: Farmers, Mass Dept of Agricultural Resources, Mass. Farm Bureau, Plymouth County Farm Bureau, Old Colony Planning Council, Office of Senator Fernandes, Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD), Wildlands Trust

Speakers: Senator Fernandes, Representative Kathy Lanatra, Sean Bowen (MDAR), Tess Goldman (Wildlands Trust), Karen Schwalbe (MFBF)

Dylan Fernandes, Kingston MA, Senator for Plymouth County: Chair for Agriculture and Fisheries in the Senate for 9 years. Family background is strawberry farmers; Falmouth was the strawberry capital of the world. Now just one strawberry farm. "Farming is a big boost to our local economy and jobs and a healthy food system is important to the health of our communities." In the senate we passed an omnibus farm bill in April/March – the biggest farm bill in about 15 years. A future farm program; codified HIP, FSIG codified into law, cranberry water rights allowing transfer of water rights to allow farmers to make money; food donation tax credit, preference for state schools to be able to buy food locally, and supporting dairy. How can we grow agriculture in Plymouth County and across the Commonwealth? This week the Legislature takes up the Environmental Bond Bill to allow state land to be agricultural land as well natural resource land; a big year for agriculture.

Kathy Lanatra, Rep of 12th Plymouth District: A supporter of farms and agriculture. The House hasn't yet taken up the farm bill.

Pete Westover, Ag Com Tech Assistance Project: MDAR is very supportive of our work; there's been a 5-year gap of Ag Com support; now things are getting mobilized again. We have held 8 county ag com roundtables; a lot of Ag Com activity is going on across the state.

Farmland and Ag Coms: Ch 40 Sec 8L; The Ag Commission Act; Ag Coms can buy farmland, lease farmland, create an Ag Preservation Fund, to create farmland preservation plans for town.

Karen Schwalbe, MFBF: We spend more time fighting against bad legislation than pushing for good legislation, 18 years on the Falmouth Ag Com. Ag Com has done a lot. Falmouth has 3 town owned farms. A non-profit "Farming Falmouth" has a community garden. Our CPC is very ag friendly.

We see a lot of support for Ag Coms; the hardest thing is getting members to join the Ag Com. All Ag Coms get free membership to the Farm Bureau.

Sean Bowen, Aquaculture and Composting, MDAR: Aquaculture is a driving force in agricultural in Plymouth County. Land licensing in Plymouth: MDAR has care and control of much farmland

in the county; put wells on the land and irrigation pumps; exciting to see the new farmers down there.

Delia Delongchamp, Stewardship Planner, APR Program, MDAR: Here representing local Ag Commission.

Bob O'Connor, Metro West Mediation/CW: At age 60 I went back to school to learn mediation; farmers often have conflicts and Ag Coms can help mediate conflicts. All Ag mediation to do with USDA, towns, neighbors, farm succession conflicts, brother and sister conflicts is free. Mediation is confidential and voluntary.

Tess Goldman, Wildlands Trust: A regional land trust working in Plymouth, Barnstable, Norfolk, and Bristol. Focus on land protection for farms and woodlands. Just protected one of the last working farms in the region. Working with Holly Hill Farm in Cohasset, only 5 acres but educational outreach to 40 different schools; Wildlands Trust will co-hold a CR with the town of Cohasset. John Hornstra—the biggest dairy farmers in the region (Norwell) sits on the Wildlands Trust Board. Support the Farmland of Local Importance initiative – helping towns to enact that.

Karen Pettinelli, SRPEDD: Farmland Partnership Program Grant; We want to work with Ag Coms to help with the Chapter 61A situation – to help protect Ch 61 lands.

Phoebe Flynn, Sen Fernandes' office: We can help support your grant applications, if you are from Sen Fernandes' or Rep Lanatra's district, please let us know if you're applying for a grant. Your legislators are working together to help—a lot is going on at Voc Tech.

Rui Santos, Kingston Ag Commission: Chicken farmer; "Anything that happens on the Ag Com in Kingston, is due to John Wheble and Jean Landis N...on the Commission. We have had an Ag Fair every year." "My feeling is, if you're in farming, you have to be doing something else if you want people to know about farming - whatever you're doing you have to do something to get the attention of the public. I am on the Commission and I also make extra money from selling chicken manure." There's a new goat creamery in Duxbury and people are taking pics with goats and John Hornstra is selling ice cream like mad. It helps if the public knows about your farm. "Our chicken manure is very popular!" You must do something so the public knows about your farm - even if it's just coming to look at baby chicks. I did that before avian flu. "There are people out there with 6 chickens, 2 cats and a canary and they think they are Ponderosa. But the Ag Com is about commercial agriculture."

Jean Landis Naumann, Kingston Ag Com: We run programs about maple syrup, on starting seedlings, and veggie gardening 101. We don't get huge numbers of people but we get the word out there that we are here.

John Wheble, Chair of Kingston Ag Com, oyster farmer: We developed regulations a few years ago so people understand what a farm is and what you can do on a quarter acre. You can't have swine. You have to respect your neighbors. "You don't need a rooster to have your hen lay eggs." If you end up with a rooster, you have a problem. The town allows roosters. (Rui Santos)

Bridgewater: Our biggest problem is roosters. We have had good luck with an electronic collar that keeps them from crowing.

Greg Morris, Duxbury Ag Com/Oyster Farmer: Two Rock Oyster Farm. Ag Com helps resolve conflicts—we made a pamphlet that we hand out to everyone about RTF bylaw to educate people about ag practices; Duxbury sold 11 million oysters last year from 29 oyster farms. We have farm tours. So people can see the reality of oyster farming: "They think you just throw oysters out there and they grow up just like that. But each oyster is handled about 25 times. We need insurance. We have workers. We do PR and have shuckfests. We raise the money and it goes to local charities."

Earl Ricker, Duxbury Ag Com, former cranberry farmer: We used to have a farm day, it was very popular and we want to bring that back. Ag Com made a brochure. Cranberry bogs are becoming dog parks. We can't have dogs on the bogs – suburbanizing farmland brings hundreds of dogs going through an area. We have put up signs to keep dogs out.

Ed Lawton, Foxborough Ag Com: We need members. We are looking for new members to revitalize the Ag Com.

Jim Hayward, Halifax Ag Com: We need to be resurrected. Just two current members. Also on the Board of the Cape Cod Cranberry Association, Board of Mass Farm Bureau.

Dick Ward, Founder of Carver Ag Com: We were once told we were the largest agricultural town in the state. Created the Ag Com; we do some activities but not as active as we used to be. We need more younger people on the Ag Com. We sponsor the town farmers market; we do various other things. I Was the first president of the MAAC and we were working toward the goal of helping ag throughout the state. "In agriculture you have to reach out to your neighbors—we lead tours of cranberry bogs."

Frank DiLuna, Boxford, Ag Com & General Counsel to the Farm Bureau: The town has much less farming today. The Ag Com has participated in several mediation sessions, we spend a lot of time fighting with our town boards. We had to talk to our board of appeals. The town is all farming and residential. The town decided anyone boarding horses would need a special permit. Ag Com spent several years fighting with the Board of Health. The Conservation Commission wants all of our town-owned farmland and they aren't allowing pesticides on town owned farmland. But we are still surviving.

Randy Johnson, Chair of Boxford Ag Com: The town is 95% agricultural and residential; we helped develop the MAAC. We have 1200 acres preserved in town under the control of the Conservation Commission. We have tried woodland management to no avail. Still arguing with the town about fertilizer; they only want us to use manure. I am in charge of roosters in Boxford. We have some rooster problems but we have someone with parrots that mimic roosters. But no parrot regulations.

Audrey Calvano, Norton, Bristol Aggie senior/MDAR: Family has a 30 acre vegetable farm, but I'm going into nursing.

Lindel Tucker, Bristol Aggie/MDAR/4-H: Livestock and dairy management, goats, sheep, dairy, beef cows, animal science; Show cattle at local fairs. Mass Dept of Ag Youth Council.

Delia DeLongchamp, MDAR APR, and Marshfield Ag Com: Coming out of covid, so many towns are looking at taxation because there are so many expenditures now, Marshfield is facing a 7 million shortfall, no town administrator, every town is having similar problems with budget shortfalls. Marshfield Ag Com: our main work is to run two community farms. We have a lot in our CPC fund. We do educational programs, seed sales, plant sales, we are present at weekly farmers market. Recent problem: DPW was charging to dump manure. We worked with our DPW to process more compost. We have a lot of rural land in Marshfield, I volunteer with 4H. We have a lot of farms.

Chris Grallert, Millis. Grallert Farm: Veggie farm. 70 %. We used to have an Ag Com, but not anymore. A lot of people look at my farm and look around and criticize farms. My land is in APR.

Tricia Rowell, Marshfield (forming an Ag Com): I will be joining the Ag Com. Ag Com manages a community garden. Many new people in town who want community garden space and we are using multi-language applications for the community garden plots. We want to fill our community garden. We need the community garden plots full to get revenue. There's a lot of interest.

Scott Sauchuck, Sauchuck Farm, Plympton: Inactive Ag Com. We do a lot of agritainment; we have RTF bylaw; we were told we couldn't have a carousel but we have the RTF bylaw. We host field trips and pick your own.

Melissa McKenna, Freetown Ag Com: Just retired from Bristol Aggie.

Marian Szymanski, Franklin Ag Com: We have events every year; they are popular. The town is against RTF bylaw. The Town Manager said they would be happy if there was no farming in town. He said, "We have been told the land is better cared for under buildings."

Frank DiLuna: "The RTF bylaw doesn't give farmers any more right than the statute gives farmers than they have anyway. "

Frances Sullivan, East Bridgewater: I acquired family land – we have cows and pigs and chickens. I had a neighbor complain; Cons Com came down hard on me. I am here to gain information. “It’s tough – these towns have people on town boards that don’t know what they are doing. I was threatened with big fines. And we have a RFT bylaw in East Bridgewater. “

Karen Pettinelli, SRPEDD: The Mass Assoc of Cons Coms needs education about agriculture.

Attendee: “I have never met a Cons Com that supports farms. They usually side with homeowners.”

Dawn Ashley, Freetown Ag Com: We want to start a new Ag Com; I am a cranberry grower and beekeeper.

Sharon Dunn, E. Bridgewater Ag Com: We have open space and we were able to preserve a farm in E Bridgewater; Ag Com has a scholarship.

Fran Sullivan, E Bridgewater: The CPA was voted down twice in town; we want to get more involved.

Chuck Meredith, Carver Ag Com: The one non farmer member of the Ag Com. We have made brochures for cranberry farmers; there are helicopters out at 5 am. The brochures have prevented complaints over the years. Frank DiLuna’s information has come back to help us over the years.

Bill Napolitano, Kingston Ag Com, Farm Bureau: Let’s update the Ag Commission handbook - it was well done. It talked about the towns working together for farmland preservation. It recommended having a 5 year farmland plan – Ag Coms put together a plan to tie into the town Open Space plan, the Master Plan, and to be mediators, etc. Everyone in town needs to work together when Ch 61 land comes up for sale.

Ryan Dugan, Old Colony Planning Council: Working with Wildlands Trust, working on a food hub project.

Jean Landis Naumann, Kingston Ag Com: Our animal inspector is very helpful and supportive of the Ag Com.

Linda Kirchman, Framingham Ag Committee: We have the CPA and I am trying to figure out how to conserve a 100 acre farm. This is my third ag com roundtable. My town is automatically covered by Ch 40 8L.

Issues

- Common problems with Cons Commissions being anti farming; biased against farming; anti herbicide

- Mass Association of Conservation Commissions needs farming education
- Mass Municipal Association needs information about Ag Coms and agriculture; this is where local officials and town managers get all their information.
- The Ag Com Handbook is useful and should be updated.
- We need to create Farmland Action Plans and plan for food security.
- Include farmland planning in ORSPs.
- Should have youth members of Ag Coms.
- Partner with RPAs to develop Local Farmland Action Plans