

Cape Cod Ag Com Roundtable Minutes

Sarah Gardner & Pete Westover, Agricultural Commission Technical Assistance Project

Oct 4, 2025, 10am-12:30pm

The Patch, Farming Falmouth, Falmouth MA

Attendance: 38

1. **Sarah Gardner**: introduction: The Ag Com Technical Assistance Project's role; Roundtables around the state; we will come to your town to help develop an Ag Com or help your Ag Com with new initiatives. Outline of the Roundtable meeting today.

2. **Pete Westover**: introduction: importance of Ag Coms; MGL Ch 40, Section 8L & new powers for Ag Coms: can purchase land, acquire land by gift, lease farmland. Create agricultural funds. Create local farm action plans. Funds from CPA or donations or grants to purchase and protect farmland.

3. **Jess Kowal**: Farming Falmouth: Exec Director, The Patch: grew out of a working group that preserved Andrews Farm; food grown for donation to the Falmouth Service Center; a conservation buyer and board member – Patricia Gadsby—helped make it happen. Closed in June 2025. Donated over 7500 pounds this summer from about ¼ acre. Goal to develop a 3-5 year plan to produce more food for Falmouth.

4. **Stan Ingram**: Falmouth Agricultural Commission; Thanks Karen Schwalbe for supporting the Patch effort. First Falmouth Ag Com passed Right to Farm law; Andrews Farm, a 17-acre farm with 2 community gardens and a service orchard; 300 Committee Land Trust did the fundraising.

--Falmouth Ag Com: brochure listing all the farms; monitor two CRs—monitoring passed on from CC to the Ag Com; monitor The Patch.

-Farmland Protection: Pushing to get portion of the proposed luxury tax to be designated for farmland protection; Ag Coms need to go to the farmers and sit down with them.

5. **Will Poirier**, 300 Committee Land Trust, Director of Stewardship. Mission to protect open space in Falmouth; protected over 2700 acres.

6. **Mark Robinson**, Exec Dir, of Cape Cod Compact of Conservation Trusts. Worked on Cape for 40 years. Top crop on the Cape: nursery stock. Cape has not done a good job preserving farms. Cape was originally a farming community. Famous Eastham Turnip. Largest farm east of the Mississippi was on the Cape: Coonamessett Ranch. We don't do a good job of identifying farms that could be preserved. Eg: Cape Cod country club: not viable as a golf course, is going to be the next solar farm. Should be growing food.

-Every town has one sympathetic realtor.

--Inspiring examples on the Cape: the 2-acre community garden is popular.

--Truro: Francie Randolph.

--Eastham asparagus.

--Brewster: largest community garden on the Cape; 75 plots and 40 plots for children; county master gardeners train people to work with the kids.

--Dennis: Joe M.....: Not Enough Acres Farm.

--Toby Farm: largest saltwater, farm on the Cape.

--Harwich: annual meet your farmer event. Farmers from lower Cape.

--Yarmouth: Greenhill Farm, salt water farm – producing nothing. B/c barn collapsed.

--Barnstable: Fuller Farm, used as staging grounds for Resilient Roots, organic farming non-profit with demonstration gardens.

--Sandwich: Biggest disconnect: Windstar Farm – tragedy—the only APR on the Cape helped by the state; State paid over 900K for development rights; 170 acres; flat farm fields next to the military base; state stepped in to force him back into production.

Mark's theme: There is no necessary conflict between land conservationists and farmers; "land conservationists are not the enemy: the common enemy is the developers. Do not pit farmers against conservationists."

"The Patch: what seemed impossible became inevitable. A powerful ally in the land trust community. LT community do a lot of projects on the Cape—they tend to be small but they add up. We know how to do deals." 100s of non-profits on the Cape; but they need LTs to do the deals and raise money for them.

OPEN DISCUSSION AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Falmouth Food Assessment: a thorough community food assessment.

Karen Schwalbe, Falmouth, MA Farm Bureau Director, former Falmouth AG COM member. Support Ag Coms thru Farm Bureau; AG COMS get free membership in the MAFB; can help with issues with the Board of Health. MA Assoc of Ag Coms is coming back together.

Caroline Pam, Dir, Island Grown, Marthas Vineyard. Run Farm to School, commercial kitchen prepare meals, run a farm. No Ag Com on the Vineyard, no Right to Farm bylaw.

Ellie Costa, Pres Board, Farming Falmouth. Patch wouldn't have happened without the partners. Ag Com holds the conservation restriction. Main issues on the Cape are water, food system, and affordable housing.

Rebecca Miller, Farmer on Martha's Vineyard for 31 yrs, was a wholesale farm before Covid, not a farm stand in 2020, now a 4-season farm store, pigs, built a kitchen and event space; no Ag Com on MV.

Lucy Grinnan, MV Ag Society, 4H; Need an Ag Com; 163 annual ag fair, mobile poultry processing unit, and more.

Jessica Rempel, Cape Cod Commission; doing a regional plan currently; developing a regional open space plan; to support state FLAP, develop model bylaws and regs that towns can follow. Also a farmer: have a plot at Putnam Farm in Orleans; conservation and agriculture; bigger plot than most community farms; contribute to the food pantry.

Frank Responde: Farmer on Cotuit; Cranberry farmer; Cotuit 10 acre cranberry farm acquired thru tax foreclosure; trying to expand to another parcel owned by the town; worked with NRCS

to bring farm back to fully functioning; organic hand picked cranberries; sell to independent markets on the Cape; hosted a Young Marines encampment; connect with homeschooling teachers. Cotuit could benefit from an AgCom.

Stephanie Paventy, Mass Assoc of Conservation Districts. Can help farmers with technical assistance, financial assistance or point toward financial assistance; equipment rental program (eg: no till drill); soil assessments; oyster bed rehab. Cape Contact at MACD: Martha Craig, Cape Cod Conservation District. Trying to reestablish CDs and want farmers on the District board; want to partner with Ag Coms.

Kelly Grant, Land Protection Specialist; Barnstable Land Trust; Harwich Land Trust, understand the need for agriculture.

Amy Vickers, Falmouth Ag Com, bought a fallow farm; 55 acres near her farm that is slowly going on the market; land protection is fragmented here; need more communication among everyone doing land protection; there's a lot duplication.

Kurt Achin, Farming Falmouth, board member; in media; facilitates communication.

Mark Cool, former Minnesota farmer, Falmouth; former air traffic controller. Starting a small farm on his land.

Dee Levanti, Westport Farmer, Ag Com in Westport. Land For Good. Works on farm succession and land tenure. Ag Coms are the first point of connection for farmers, helping them find resources they need; grants, succession planning. Ag Com is important for building relationships with all the farmers in town to keep their ears to the ground to know if farmland is coming up for sale; NE Farmer Finder. Freed Seed Federation: growing heritage seeds for SE Mass.

Tara Racine, Cape Cod Buy Fresh, Buy Local. 10 Buy Locals in State; two on Cape. Runs Buy Fresh Buy Local Cape Cod. Cape Cod Local Guide to Farms & Food. Free program. Any farmer can be a member. Buy from local producers for food pantries (LFPA); community gardens at schools; 4H; after school program, nutrition programs. Tech assistance with farmers.

Jennifer Bessom, Board of Farming Falmouth. Air National Guard. Gardener at preschool on the base.

Will Poirier, Dir of Stewardship, 300 Comm LT; Most important thing we do at the LT is building relationships in the community; go to the farms, talk to the farmers, so down the road when they need help, they will go to you. You want farmers to go to you rather than the developer who is offering cash for their land.

--"Right of First Refusal: the one tool we can use to outcompete a developer"; a wide open landscape.

--Land acquisition committee is critical: they evaluate parcels and evaluate the whole value of the land;

--Need partners in the land trust world to protect farmland.

Joe Massey, Dennis Conservation Land Trust. Own Not Enough Acres Farm. All food given away to Yarmouth Food Bank. Tons of people show up when we announce a community farmwork day at the farm. Kids love to do the work. No Ag Com. Problem: 4 acre farm across the street in a CR, but we can't afford to buy it. No active Ag Com.

Susan Shepherd, Farming Falmouth. The wealthy population here has to give away money every year; we need to get them passionate about farming. Ag Com can accept donations of land. A tax advantage to give to a municipality over a non-profit.

Thomas Moakley, State Rep, Falmouth and Nantucket, Dukes County. Invite the local legislators to these events; very important for legislators to come to these roundtables; invite local officials! We are considering the Envi Bond Bill currently. When apply for state grants—contact to local legislators for letters of support when applying for grants.

Stan Ingram, Falmouth Ag Com.

-- Can APR cover barns and houses? Problem is that it's possible but it increase the price to be prohibitive. Buildings are usually excluded. 35K/acre is upper limit on APR.

--If we had a pool of money available for farmland preservation; how would we decide what parcel to go for? And if saved, how to figure out who to farm it?

--Our Ag Com is identifying parcels to be saved. Recommend saving farmland and carving off a plot for affordable housing.

--Mark R: prioritizing farmland to preserve: The perfect role for LT is to step in and hold land while the town figures out how to fund the purchase; or a private buyer can step in; then the town meeting/CPA funds can come through. The LT can take it off the market. If it's important to the community, the Compact will step in.

Ruth Zwerner, Quaker Group: Friendship Garden, grows food for the Service Center; Wompanaug Food Pantry.

Rod Zwerner, We are part of a cultural transformation here.

Honey Bee Puder, SouthEast Mass Ag Partnership, Bristol, Norfolk County; Buy Local in SE MASS, Local food guide, advocacy, SE New England Ag Conference & Trade Show.

Patricia Gadsby, Farming Falmouth, conservation buyer. "Why are conservation buyers as rare as hen's teeth?" If you form an LLC, can you still get the tax breaks? Yes.

Jack Simonds, Ag Com, Falmouth, market farm, I try to do it for a living, trying to help with Ag Commission save farmland; need to increase the demand for local produce.

Ellie O'Keefe, permaculture; environmentalist; food security; food not lawns; we should grow food everywhere.

Jenny Christian, Farm manager at The Patch, run the farmer's market; it's hard to make a living as a farmer; we need 3 season farmers on the Cape. I have sustainable housing, a long-term lease. Please help create possibilities for my generation of farmers; help us to get access to our own farmland. We need young farmers at the discussion table. We need to make sure we don't get crushed by the economy in the process of growing food. I am grateful for all the years in the making of The Patch.

Young farming program: Food justice program at Falmouth HS; every elementary school has a garden.

Island Grown, MV: Farm to School Programs for 20 years.

Cape Towns that are interested in forming Ag Coms:

Cotuit

Barnstable

Dennis

Also: Martha's Vineyard

Two Ag Coms on Cape Cod: Falmouth, Orleans