

Agricultural Commission Newsletter December 15, 2025

Pete Westover and Sarah Gardner, Conservation Works/Ag Com Tech Assistance

Between August to December 2025, the AgCom Technical Assistance Project organized five AgCom roundtables in Bristol, Barnstable, Middlesex, Berkshire, and Worcester Counties. Winter-Spring 2026 roundtables will tentatively take place in Plymouth-Norfolk Counties, Essex County, Franklin County, Hampshire County, and Hampden County-South Worcester County.

High Points of the 2025 Roundtables*

Westport, Bristol County, July 20

Westport Fairgrounds, Hosted by Westport AgCom

Takeaway: Farm succession planning is a high priority, and help for such planning is available from Land for Good, www.landforgood.org. Some Bristol County towns have successfully purchased farmland with CPA funds or other fundraising and subsequently leased it to local farmers.

A Few of the High Points: Jeff and Priscilla Chandler, Duxbury AgCom, crookedlane@hotmail.com, are examples of key people who have made it known that they are the principal contacts for their AgCom. Westport has a valuable brochure called "Living Next to a Farm," available from Ray Raposa, rayraposa@aol.com. AgComs should do whatever possible to make sure their Boards of Health have set reasonable regulations regarding farm issues. Some towns are planning to conduct Cost of Community Services studies that invariably show that housing costs more in town services than protected farmland.

Falmouth, Barnstable County, October 4

The Patch, Hosted by Farming Falmouth

AgComs Represented: Falmouth

Towns Represented: Cotuit, Dennis, Barnstable, Falmouth, as well as Martha's Vineyard

Takeaway: The county currently has only two Ag Commissions (Orleans and Falmouth), but many farms and there is the potential and interest for more AgComs to form. Martha's Vineyard is actively pursuing this. Extreme development pressures and high land prices; many small acreage farms.

A Few of the High Points: The Falmouth AgCom together with the 300 Committee Land Trust and Farming Falmouth recently raised the funds to buy the property known as The Patch, which aims to promote community conservation and local food systems, with a focus on sustainable agriculture practices. The Cape Cod Compact of Conservation Trusts is a good example of a regional trust that assists AgComs with farmland protection. Rep. Thomas Moakley invited AgComs to contact him for letters of support when applying for grants.

Groton, Middlesex County, October 18

Prescott Community Center

AgComs represented: Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Fitchburg, Framingham, Needham, Pepperell, Stow, Westford

Takeaway: The region has many farms, including several large orchards. The Buy Local organization (Northeast Harvest) that represents the county is not a prominent player in Middlesex and focuses more on Essex County, where it's based. In Rep Scarsdale's district the farm community is well organized because she Rep. has been hosting a series of AgCom meetings for the towns in her district. Much interest among farmers in more regional farmer meetings.

A Few of the High Points: Rep. Scarsdale stressed the importance of farms in the Middlesex County region and offered her ongoing support. Sherill Rosoff of the Pepperell AgCom stressed the need for AgComs to make presentations to other boards and committees to enlist their support. The Sudbury Valley Trustees uses a variety of tools to help towns and AgComs protect farmland and invites farmers to get in touch. Jennifer Raitt, Northeast Middlesex Council of Governments, offered grant writing assistance to farmers. Janet Morrison outlined the rights that AgComs have under Chapter 40, Section 8L, including the right to buy and manage land on behalf of the Town, to lease the land to farmers, and to establish a local farmland preservation fund and apply for grants.

Pittsfield, Berkshire County, November 1

Hancock Shaker Village

AgComs represented: Adams, Chesire, Clarksburg, Egremont, Great Barrington, Lanesborough, Richmond, Sheffield, Stockbridge, Williamstown

Takeaway: Berkshire County has many AgComs with a good proportion of them being fairly active. There are many requests for support for farmland protection, with support from the regional land trust being in high demand. Development pressures and loss of long-term farmland leases/handshake agreements are a challenge, partly because new owners do not support farming.

A Few of the High Points: Rep. Leigh Davis, 3rd Berkshire, offered her continuing support for Agcoms and proposed a partnership in standing together in economic hard times and federal cutbacks. Berkshire Farm Bureau can also be a partner. Land trusts like Berkshire Natural Resource Council and Sheffield Land Trust help farmers compete with home buyers within the county. MDAR is working on a Buy Protect Sell program through which the state can buy farmland, put an APR on it, and convey it to a farmer. Stockbridge and Williamstown are both working to request CPA funds for new town Farmland Protection Funds.

Barre, Worcester County, November 15

Stone Cow Brewery & Carter & Stevens Farm

AgComs represented: Barre, Bolton, Brookfield, Dudley, Framingham, Hardwick, Holden, Hubbardston, Princeton, Rutland, Sterling, Templeton, Westminster, Winchendon

Takeaway: Much farmland has been lost to development and extreme development pressure and high land prices squeeze farmers; there is a need for support for small-acreage farms. Farmers find that some form of agritainment is often necessary for profitability. Few towns in the region have enacted the Community Preservation Act (CPA). The CPA could help many towns provide funding for farmland protection through their AgComs. The Montachusett Ag Alliance is an important farmer organization in the northern region of the county.

A Few of the High Points: A lot of farms are in hay but hay demand is drying up; need to connect available farmland to new farmers seeking land. There is no central clearinghouse for farmers to find available farmland and realtors are not always helpful in that effort. Reps. Stephen Brewer and Anne Gobi have been supportive to Worcester County farmers who are navigating the APR program. Mount Grace Conservancy Trust has expertise in farmland protection and offers assistance to farmers in the region.

Challenges for AgComs Looking Forward:

- Raising monies from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) or other sources to establish farmland preservation funds.
- Enacting the CPA in towns that have not enacted it.
- Being ready to react to Chapter 61A first refusal opportunities or threats to existing farms by mapping vulnerable farmland and preparing land protection plans.
- Understanding the needs of farmers in each town by conducting farmer surveys that determine whether they have succession plans and what their current issues are.
- Helping young or underserved farmers find farmland in town.
- Being in touch with local legislators to better acquaint them with current farm issues.
- Partnering with land conservation trusts to implement farmland land protection.
- Taking all possible steps to support local farming and make the community aware of farm practices and farm needs.

*The complete roundtable minutes may be found on the [AgCom Technical Assistance Project/MDAR website](#).

Pete Westover, westover03@comcast.net

Sarah Gardner, sarahsperrygardner@gmail.com