

Berkshire Agricultural Commission Roundtable Minutes, Nov. 1, 2025

Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield MA

Attendance: 37

Ag Coms Represented: Adams, Chesire, Clarksburg, Egremont, Great Barrington, Lanesborough, Richmond, Sheffield, Stockbridge, Williamstown (10)

Sarah Gardner: Introduction and plan for the Roundtable; A need for Ag Coms to build relationships with farms in town and become more active in farm succession and farmland conservation.

Farmland Action Plan: a call to action; farmland loss in Massachusetts: 113,000 acres since 1997; can't save farmland fast enough to stem the loss.

Leigh Davis, State Rep, 3rd Berkshire. "I stand with you". You are the experts; hear to listen. The legislature needs you to help support agriculture. With federal uncertainty and with cuts to SNAP and HIP, we need to stand together. It's going to be a partnership—and I am here to listen to be more informed in the statehouse.

It is important for me to work with you on challenges you're facing. The more you hear of ways that I can help you as a legislator. I am the conduit to the legislature. Each rep can have an earmark, come see me and it strengthens my pitch if there's an intersection between two issues: help farms and food security, farm and students, farms and housing, transportation, schools, etc

Margaret Moulton, Exec Dir, Berkshire Grown & Mass Food Policy Council: How BG supports farmers: run the winter farmers markets; technical assistance to farms; farm to food access work 50K a month purchases from farms to food pantries. (Due to fed cuts, down to 15K, funded by donors.)

Bob Kilmer, Twin Rivers Farm, Berkshire Farm Bureau President, State Director for Mass Farm Bureau, Select Board Sheffield, Ag Com. Sheffield Ag Com for about 15 year; we have a lot of farms, a lot of dairies. Sheffield Ag Com passed the Right to Farm Bill. We worked to remove the excise tax on farm machinery and livestock. We deal with local problems that arise. We passed a pollinator resolution. Work with 4H in Litchfield County (because better extension service in CT than in MA); kids interested in farming in Sheffield go to school in Canaan CT because a huge and well-funded ag high school (Housatonic High School). Small FFA club at Berkshire High School in Sheffield.

Farm Bureau: "farming and politics have to go hand in hand. Educating legislators is v important; most legislators don't have much to do with ag. There are so few farmers now and most people

don't know where food comes from." We need to educate kids through garden clubs, 4H etc. We could never match Housatonic's Ag Program in CT. FB has an excellent lobbyist in Dan Bosley.

Suggestions for Ag Com activities: 4H Clubs, Remove excise tax on livestock and farm machinery.

Darrell Turner, Turner Dairy Farm, Egremont, Egremont Ag Com

Ag Com activities: pollinator garden in Egremont; town has become a hotbed for anti-agriculture talk. Egremont $\frac{3}{4}$ population is second homeowners or newcomers; Ag Com is fielding a lot of issues with regard to Ag; much anti-pesticide complaints coming from the newcomers; they wanted to pass a regulation against pesticide use (although not legal in Mass to ban pesticides). We have a new member who is a marketing executive and we created new pamphlets for the Ag Com. We promote our work and the history of ag in town; anti-pesticide movement—we got help from Farm Bureau. A big push by new landowners to eliminate farmland in our town—to remove land from Chapter 61A. Turner Farm has lost 60 acres of land we have farmed for year because bought by new people who don't want him farming or growing corn or pesticide uses. A semi-organized movement to push against farmland.

Right to Farm: new owners are supposed to be informed when they buy property, but they are not getting the right information. (*Follow-Up*)

Pete Westover, Ag Com Technical Assistance Project

There is an initiative to revive the Mass Assoc of Ag Coms.

List of activities for Ag Coms: Ag Coms are doing lots of helpful activities to support farming: survey all the farms in town; create an ag profile and ag economy profile of your town; Ag Com member should serve on CPC.

*New Powers of Ag Coms: Ch 40, 8L. Ag Coms authorized to purchase and own farmland with the intention of leasing it out for farming; hold Conservation Restrictions, accept donations of farmland, create an Ag Pres Fund, under total control of the Ag Com to be used to purchase land, pay local match. How to get funds for a fund: The CPC: get an appropriation from the CPC balance to build up funds.

*Ch 40, Sec 8L: if your Ag Com created after 2016, must accept 40 8L.

*Ag Com can exercise ROFR when Chapter Land is being withdrawn.

Ag Coms & Farmland Preservation:

Identify at-risk farmland; create a Local Farmland Action Plan, prepare a ROFR plan to exercise the 120 day period to purchase or assign the right to a land trust; create an Ag Pres Fund.

New Tools: MDAR is pushing Private APRs: non-profits and towns can acquire APRs; private APR applies to parcels less than 5 acres.

Guide to exercising ROFR; Ag Com buy property, puts an APR on it, and sell to a farmer. (See MDAR Ag Com website for examples.)

Friday Nov 14 Webinar about private APR restrictions.

Kathy Orlando, Sheffield Land Trust

Land trusts are partners with Ag Coms for Farmland Preservation; Ag Coms can be the ears on the ground when land is coming up for sale or coming out of Chapter 61.

Farmers cannot compete with home buyers in Berkshire County; need to partner with local land trusts. Ag Coms need to defend farms from neighbors; land trusts can help put people in touch with the resources they need. Not all towns have passed the CPA, but it's an important source of funds.

Selling CRS or APRs, can be good tax benefits for the seller. Sell the development rights and keep the land in the family.

Suggestions for Ag Com activities:

4H Clubs, Remove excise tax on livestock and farm machinery; create local farm action plan; enact the CPC; Ag Com must articulate the importance of farms in towns—the value, the local food, the economy, help people identify why it's important to have farms. "Agriculture needs to be where we can feed ourselves—and we need housing."

- Buy Protect Sell Program: state can step in buy land put an APR on the land, and sell it to a farmer.

-Ag Commissions are in the best position to collect stories about farmers.

-Include agriculture assessment in OSRP.

-Create new brochure for realtors to give new landowners explaining Right to Farm.

Matt Boudreau: Chair of Ag Commission and Forestry Com, Stockbridge

Ag Com started a farmers market. Want to create an Ag Fund to get an appropriation from TM.

We are also a forestry commission - new homeowners want to chop down the forest for their view.

Ch 61A huge issue in town, Ag Com would like to use the ROFR power; we need to do a survey of farmers. Important to work with your Cons Com.

Alan Hanson, Richmond, Ag Com and Selectman

Our Commission has never met; I am here to learn more. *(Would like assistance)*

Beth Carlson, Berkshire Community Land Trust, Farmsteads for Farmers

Applying the community land trust model to farmland that includes housing.

Alyssa Van Durme, farmer and Berkshire Grown

Housing and land access is a big issue for me. Sell at the Sheffield Farmers Market. Each week I feed about 100 people with my produce.

Katie Rubright, Berkshire Grown

Janet Ellsbach, G Barrington fairgrounds. Grows for Mutual Aid Distribution for food security. trying to do something there for years. Fairgrounds lets Bridge farm there for no cost.

Wylie Goodman, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

We have Berkshire Funding Focus, we can help you find grants. Focus on economic development. We need more worker housing and we need housing for farmworkers, can we use land that isn't good for farming to create affordable working housing.

Robin Sears, Williamstown Rural Lands

We have a nature exploration program and land conservation.

Kathy Orlando, Sheffield Land Trust

Laura Tupper, Adams Ag Com, Berkshire Grown Board, farmer

Marvin Michalak, Lanesborough Ag Com

Darlene Newton, Lanesborough Ag Com

We are in the early stages of setting up a meeting of farmers in the winter; we want to set up a seed library in town; we need a budget line item. Lanesborough has more farms than many other towns in the county. Did a farm survey but didn't get much response.

(COULD USE ASSISTANCE)

Jake Levin, BAV, tech assistance, loans.

James Massey, Great Barrington Ag Commission

We work with Multicultural Bridge, we work with a pollinator program, considering farm housing, *(COULD USE ASSISTANCE)*

Mirabai Dyson, Aide to Tricia Farley Bouvie

Larry Lampman, Sheffield, Grass fed beef farmer

Our soils are the most important natural resource. A soil advocate. Farm under APR in 1997 with Columbia Land Conservancy.

Jake Zieminski, Chesire Ag Com, CAVU Farm

Hemp farmer; started in with hemp farming and having to be political. Now switching to veggies. We have a lot of second homes; with new blood more opps to raise money. We need to know who all the farmers are. We don't have the data and information.

(REQUESTS ASSISTANCE)

Ryan Montello, Long Pine Farm, Pittsfield

Berkshire CBD. EOS Farms. Outdoor cannabis grower.

Seth Jenkins, BRPC

Berkshire Mobile Market with Berk Grown. Do OSRPs; includes Ch 61 and APR and CRs.

Sonia McWirt, Adams Ag Com, Broadlawn Farm—the last dairy in Adams.

Working with the OSRP. Our AG Com wants to focus on education in the schools; our focus has been promoting local farms, we table at town events and people were surprised there were so many farms in Adams.

Cian Dalzell, Twin Oaks, West Stockbridge

Farming since 2011; consultant in the winter because vegetables do not pay the bills. Most farmers qualify for SNAP. I live in Pittsfield b/c I can't afford to live in West Stockbridge where I farm. Pittsfield is the only town nearby where I live. So I can't be on the Ag Com even though I farm in West Stockbridge. Ag Com can have an associate member, but not a voting member.

Jess Camp, MDAR. Housatonic; MDAR

Business Planning: APR Improvement Program & Technical Assistance -Matching Enterprise Fund, Beginning Farmer Resource. Private APR webinar and Nov. 19 Webinar on Buy Protect Sell Program.

Martha Tanner, Clarksburg Ag Commission

Started in 2023. Passed Right to Farm bylaw in second year. We have monthly talks open to the community: eg: raising meat rabbits, harvesting herbs. We are working on an OSRP and a master plan in town.

Sharron Wyrick, retired farmer, Berkshire Grown

Trish Wilson, Clarksburg Ag Com

Butch Garrity, Lanesborough

Board horses, grow hay at base of Mt Greylock. One parcel we farmed for 60 years is going up for sale. Working with BNRC to put one farm into a CR.

Linda Bailey (Butch Garrity's sister); working with BNRC to put a CR on 100 acre parcel at the foot of Mt Greylock. It's been a long haul. A very important project to us and we talked it over with our children and grandchildren. BNRC has been excellent. The other parcel: 13 acres.

Questions:

Can town Select Board appoint a non-resident to the Ag Com?