

The State of the Suffolk County Agriculture Industry

Suffolk County Executive – Steve Bellone

2013



A snapshot of the Suffolk County agriculture industry. This report summarizes the expressed attitudes and challenges identified by 143 agricultural producers who completed an agricultural survey in 2013 as part of the County's efforts to develop an Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.

**Prepared by the Suffolk County Department of Economic
Development & Planning with the assistance of:**

Peconic Land Trust

Long Island Community Foundation

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County

Long Island Farm Bureau

New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets

Suffolk County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board



Suffolk County Department of Economic Development & Planning
Commissioner of Economic Development & Planning – Joanne Minieri
Deputy Commissioner – Vanessa Pugh

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

As part of an on-going effort to preserve agriculture in Suffolk County and stem the tide of residential and commercial development that threatens the availability of agricultural lands, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone and Commissioner of the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development & Planning, Joanne Minieri, received \$50,000 in funding from the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets to update the 1996 Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan.

As part of the effort to update the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, the Department of Economic Development & Planning conducted a survey in 2013 of agricultural producers in Suffolk County which received 143 responses. The next step in the plan is to hold focus group sessions with farmers and stakeholders and five sessions are scheduled to be held in the Towns of Riverhead, Brookhaven, Smithtown, Southampton, and Southold to accommodate a comprehensive geographic spectrum of Suffolk County farmers.

Suffolk County still leads New York State in market value of crops produced, a distinction we are proud to have held since the previous Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. Suffolk County is the top region in New York State for the sale of nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod products and Suffolk County accounted for half of all statewide sales in these products. The 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, the latest data available, reports that there are 585 farms remaining in Suffolk County, covering 34,404 acres. Over 10,000 of these acres have been protected in the Suffolk County Purchase of Development Rights Program.

Though strong challenges remain in the agriculture industry, local farmers have made themselves available to confront these obstacles and to identify opportunities for growth. Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone and the Suffolk County Legislature have worked in concert with agricultural and environmental interests to address agriculture challenges in Suffolk County. In 2012, they appointed a new Farmlands Administrator within the Department of Economic Development & Planning. This individual acts as a liaison between the County Executive's office and the agricultural industry and has helped craft legislation friendly to agricultural development. These efforts include the significant reforms to the Suffolk County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. This important update brings the Suffolk County Farmland Preservation plan in-line with the practical, environmental, economic, and technological realities of current Suffolk County farming.

However, new challenges present themselves and creative solutions are demanded. Fifty-nine percent of farmers are very concerned about the future profitability of farming, 42% are very concerned about access to affordable land, and 60% are very concerned about the overall loss of farming in Suffolk County. Amongst the most pressing challenges identified by agricultural producers were 1) High Production Costs 2) High Fuel Costs 3) Availability of Farm Labor 4) Property Taxes 5) Extreme Weather Events/Climate Change. Environmental regulations, the prevalence of pests (deer, insects, birds, etc.), residential encroachment, and land use regulations (zoning) were also frequently cited.

Despite these challenges, Suffolk County farmers are cautiously optimistic. Nearly three-quarters of our survey respondents have reached gross sales equal to or exceeding pre-recession levels and incumbent farmers are expecting to increase, rather than decrease, the size of their operation by a 2 to 1 margin. Additionally, Suffolk County farmers are increasingly familiar with government policies structured to assist farmers. They are also taking advantage of trends favoring increased agritourism and direct marketing opportunities. Leveraging these opportunities, and paying close attention to the changing needs of the agriculture industry in Suffolk County, will help ensure Suffolk's status as the reigning market leader in New York State agriculture sales.

Introduction

In the beginning of 2013, the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development & Planning, in coordination with the Peconic Land Trust (PLT), began to distribute printed and digital copies of a four-page agricultural survey. A copy of the survey can be found in *Appendix A*.

The survey, which was funded in part by a grant received from New York State Agriculture & Markets in 2012 to update the [1996 Suffolk County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan](#), was designed to solicit the following:

- An Inventory of Suffolk County farmers
- An Identification of the Challenges, Opportunities, and Trends in Agriculture
- To Assess Familiarity with Farmland Preservation Tools and other Agricultural Programs

The Long Island Farm Bureau (LIFB) and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Suffolk County, in addition to the Peconic Land Trust, partnered with Suffolk County in the promotion and distribution of surveys through both in-person and digital means. Surveys were filled out electronically or returned through the mail to the Peconic Land Trust and were accepted until April 15, 2013. Surveys responses were solicited through the following methods:

- Direct mailings and e-mails to Long Island Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Peconic Land Trust members, subscribers, and contact lists
- Social Media Accounts (Facebook & Twitter)

- E-Newsletters such as CCE's *March 2013 Agricultural News*
- [Press Release](#) from the Peconic Land Trust (see *Appendix B*)
- Physical Distribution of surveys at the following Conferences & Forums
 - 32nd Annual Long Island Agricultural Forum in Riverhead, January 10-11, 2013
 - Long Island Greenhouse and Floricultural Conference in Riverhead, January 22, 2013
 - Horticultural Conference in Ronkonkoma, January 25, 2013



In the instances where a Suffolk County Town or agricultural commodity was under-represented in survey response rates, additional efforts, including individual farm visits, were conducted in order to elicit additional responses.

Overall, 143 agricultural producers filled out the Farmland Preservation survey. These respondents ranged from duck farmers to potato growers, from fruit tree growers to wine-makers.

While gaps in our survey response rates exist, we remain exceptionally pleased with the high-level of participation in the agricultural survey. This eagerness to participate demonstrates an advanced willingness to work with Suffolk County, local municipalities, and non-profit advocacy groups to develop a comprehensive Farmland Protection Plan.



State of Suffolk County Agriculture

In order to understand the challenges facing the Suffolk County agricultural community, it is first important to understand the economic power and commodity diversification of this important industry.

Suffolk County remains the #1 producer of agricultural products in all of New York State in terms of market value. The 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture estimates that Suffolk County has \$242,933,000 in market value of agricultural production sold (\$273,693,592 in inflation-adjusted 2013 dollars).

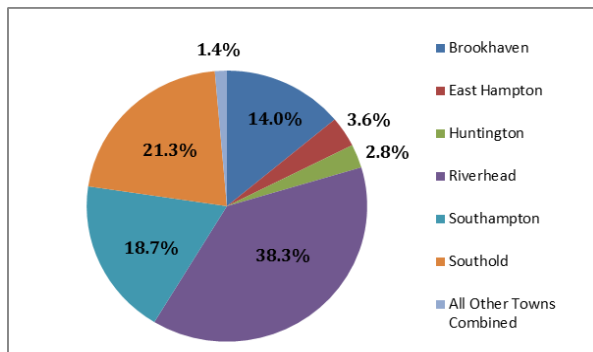
Suffolk County is the top region in New York State for the sale of nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod products and Suffolk County accounted for half of all statewide sales in these products.

Suffolk County is also the state's largest producer of pumpkins, tomatoes, and cauliflower, and the third largest producer of grapes, peaches and strawberries.

The 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture reports that there are 585 farms remaining in Suffolk County, covering 34,404 acres. Over 10,000 of these acres have been protected in the Suffolk County Purchase of Development Rights Program.

Though the latest data we have available is from 1996 Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan, Town officials confirm that the majority of farm acreage in Suffolk County remain in the Towns of Brookhaven, Riverhead, Southampton, and Southold.

Percentage of Farmland Acreage by Town (1996)



Suffolk County also has a very diverse base of agricultural commodities according to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture. See the following table:

Commodity	# of Farms	% of Suffolk
Nursery/Greenhouse/Floriculture	222	38%
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	109	19%
Equine & Other Animal Production	108	18%
Fruits/Nuts/Berries/Grapes	86	15%
Livestock/Poultry & Eggs	33	6%
Other (Hay/Grains/Tobacco/Etc.)	27	4%



Survey Responses

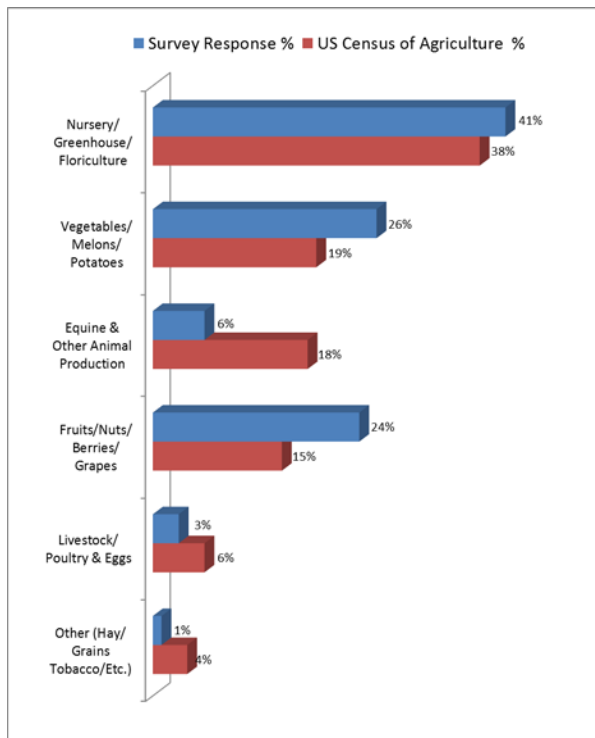
With 143 survey responses, the survey provided the necessary diversity of respondents needed to identify clear trends, challenges, and opportunities in the agricultural industry. This confidence level is needed to draw clear conclusions regarding the scope and intensity of the challenges facing the industry and to identify the steps Suffolk County needs to take in order to ensure the continued environmental and economic viability of this extremely important and iconic Long Island industry.

Survey Composition

Towns: The survey responses received from agricultural producers was approximately in-line with Suffolk County proportions¹:

TOWN	# of Responses
Babylon	0
Brookhaven	31
East Hampton	4
Huntington	13
Islip	6
Riverhead	44
Shelter Island	1
Smithtown	3
Southampton	19
Southold	45

Commodities: The Commodity breakdown² of the survey respondents also approximates the Suffolk County composition as per the U.S. Census of Agriculture:



¹ Percentages may not equal 100% since some farmers have parcels in multiple towns.

² Survey respondents were characterized by their "primary crop" as self-reported.

Acres Farmed: According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, the median size of a Suffolk County farm is 14 acres and the average size is 59 acres. The median size in the survey was 32 acres and the average size was 88 acres.³ The largest farming operation in the survey farmed over 1,800 acres with several separate operations across multiple Suffolk County Towns.



Farm Ownership: For unknown reasons, survey respondents overwhelmingly owned, rather than rented, their Suffolk County farmland. While many new and beginning farmers on Long Island rent all of their land from other landowners, this only held true for 3 of the 143 survey respondents (2%). According to the previous U.S. Census of Agriculture, 10% of Suffolk County farmers rented all of their farmland.⁴

The remaining 140 respondents owned some or all of their entire agricultural operation. Of the 140 farmland owners who owned farmland, 77 of these respondents (55%) lived on one of their farming operations.

³ The median size is generally considered to better approximate the "average" when there are large outliers in the survey data, as in this case.

⁴ This is important to remember when analyzing survey results. This survey will not appropriately tap into the concerns of agricultural producers who strictly *rent* their land.

Years Farming in Suffolk County: As we may expect, survey respondents have been farming in Suffolk County for a very long time. The average number of years a survey respondent has been farming in Suffolk County was 29.8 years (Median = 30.0 years). This is unsurprising since the Median Age of the Suffolk County farmer is 55.2 years.⁵ With such a high Median Age, finding and retaining the next generation of farmers will continue to be a pressing issue facing the local agricultural industry. Due to the ambiguity of the survey questions, many farmers gave a historical accounting of their family's generational farming. The following answers, while not used in survey calculations, were interesting:



Stock Photo

Labor Force: On average, survey respondents employed 10 full-time employees and 16 part-time/seasonal employees. The median was 3 full-time employees and 6 part-time employees.⁶ To give a sense of the potential of this industry, one Suffolk County agricultural producer alone employed up to 150 full-time workers and 300 part-time workers.

Economics

As we are well aware, agriculture is a driver of economic activity and employment in Suffolk County. According to the 2012 Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates, 2,342 are employed in agriculture in Suffolk County.

Suffolk County's personalized outreach to local agricultural producers allowed us to ask farmers

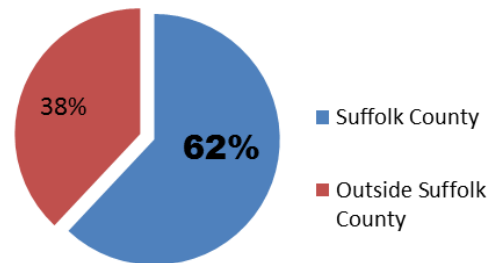
⁵ This compares relatively favorably to a NY State Median Age = 56.5 years and U.S. Median Age = 57.1 years.

⁶ Again, the median value is probably a more accurate indicator.

about economic practices, outlooks, and challenges that the normal U.S. Census of Agriculture does not cover. It is important to understand who the suppliers and consumers are in Suffolk County agriculture, how local farmers sell their products, what the trends are in the industry, and how farmers are expected to change practices and procedures in the next ten years and more.

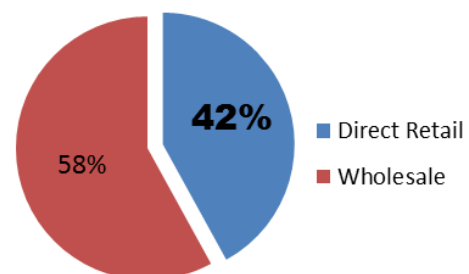
Geographic Sales: Unlike many large-scale producers in the middle of the United States and many countries abroad, Suffolk County farmers sell the majority of their produce locally. The average survey respondent sold 62% of his produce in Suffolk County. A majority of respondents sold 70% or more of their produce within Suffolk County.

% of Produce Sold in Suffolk



Direct Retail Sales vs Wholesales: While Suffolk County still has a very vibrant wholesale community, primarily in the nursery, greenhouse, and sod commodities, as well as field crops such as potatoes, a substantial proportion of Suffolk County produce sales are made directly to the end consumer. The average survey respondent sold 42% of his produce directly to the consumer. 16 respondents sold entirely retail. Alternatively, 50 respondents sold 90% or more of their products wholesale.

Direct Retail vs Wholesale



Direct Marketing and Agritourism: As indicated previously, Suffolk County farmers have increasingly relied upon direct sales to increase their revenues. According to the U.S. Census, the percentage of farms with direct sales increased from 16% in 1992 to 19% in 2007. That trend appears to be continuing, as 63 survey respondents (44%) reported operating a farm stand of some kind. And farm stands are not the only outlet for direct sales and increased revenues. Suffolk County farmers are increasingly selling produce at farmers' markets across the Island. According to Cornell Cooperative Extension, there are 20 farmers markets in Suffolk County and that number is rapidly increasing. 33 of our survey respondents are actively or occasionally participating in a farmers market of some sort.⁷

Suffolk County farmers are also increasingly turning to agritourism activities as an alternative means of generating revenue. 64% of Suffolk County farmers engage in agritourism of some kind. And Suffolk County farmers have proven to be as creative and innovative in the agritourism arena as anyone else in the country. The agritourism activities which fuel tourism visits and spending across Long Island, particularly during the Fall harvest season, run the gamut from "U-Pick" operations to tasting rooms to cooking demonstrations.

Agritourism Activity	# of Respondents
"U-Pick" Operation	27
Seasonal Activities ⁸	24
On-site Tours ⁹	23
Fresh Baked Produce ¹⁰	22
Tasting Rooms	17
Hayrides	13
Animal Displays ¹¹	12
Corn Mazes	9
Other ¹²	4

⁷ Some respondents indicated that they are only involved in the once per year "Celebrate Grown on Long Island" farmers' market.

⁸ Harvest festivals, haunted tours, etc.

⁹ Farm, greenhouse, vineyard or other educational tours.

¹⁰ Roasted corn on the cob, fresh baked pies .

¹¹ Including petting zoos.

¹² Other responses included farm museum, horse shows and rides, and demonstrative field trials.

Expenditures: An inherent attribute of the agricultural economy is that the money spent on agricultural products stay local within the community. In fact, economic multipliers within the agricultural industry traditionally assume a high-level of local, stay-at-home spending. Though the agricultural industry in Suffolk County is facing a noticeable loss of local suppliers, a vast majority of dollars spent by survey respondents still falls within Suffolk County. The average survey respondent spent 67% of the expenditures within Suffolk County.

Expectations

Gross Sales: The agricultural industry, as nearly all other industries on Long Island, was affected by national trends that slowed or stalled economic growth since 2008. 26% (34 respondents) say gross sales have decreased in the past five years, 33% (44 respondents) say the remained the same, and a plurality, 41% (55 respondents), say their gross sales increased in the past five years. While it is worrisome that 26% of respondents have not yet recovered from the height of the recession, it is encouraging that nearly three-quarters have reached or exceeded their 2008 sales numbers.¹³

Size of Operation: It is equally encouraging that survey respondents expect to increase, rather than decrease, the scale of their farming operation. By a more than 2 to 1 margin, farmers expected to increase their operation rather than decrease it over the next one, five, and ten years.

	Within 1 Year	Within 5 Years	10 Years or More
Increase Your Farming Operation	24	38	1
Decrease Your Farming Operation	8	16	5

¹³ The survey does not ask about profitability. So while sales may have returned to pre-recession levels, the costs associated with farming in Suffolk County may have increased in the interim, cutting into the economic viability of the industry.

Land Use and Agricultural Practices: In the face of a changing agricultural landscape, local farmers have different ideas about how they expect to adapt in the next ten years or more. Some farmers may be looking to diversify their farming operation or beginning a new/different farming operation.¹⁴ Others may be looking to sell or rent their land. Still others may be interested in adopting more environmentally friendly practices. Finally, some are simply interested in transferring the operation to a family member.

	Within 1 Year	Within 5 Years	10 Years or More
Diversify Your Farming Operation	28	33	0
Begin a New Farming Operation	5	14	2
Transition to a New Crop or Commodity ¹⁵	10	22	3
Sell All or a Portion of Your Farmland	3	10	9
Relocate and Continue to Farm Elsewhere	0	5	10
Transfer the Farm to a Family Member	1	10	30
Start Renting Your Land for Another's Farmer's Use	1	8	5
Adopting More Environmentally Friendly Practices ¹⁶	21	11	1
Transition to Organic Operation	3	5	2

¹⁴ Such as converting from a sod farm to an equine operation.

¹⁵ Of those interested in transitioning to a new crop or commodity, perhaps due to profitability pressures, 19 are primarily Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod operators, 10 grow Vegetables, and 4 grow Fruits and Berries.

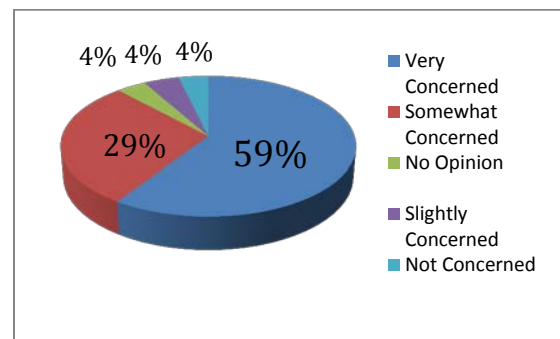
¹⁶ Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod expressed the most willingness to adopt environmentally friendly practices, followed by Grapes/Vineyards, Equine and Vegetables.

Concerns

Concerns About Profitability:

"Farms like mine work harder every season to earn the same or less than years prior." – survey response

Farmers were asked to "circle your concern with the ability to farm profitably" ranging from "Very Concerned" to "Not Concerned". By far, the most common response was "Very Concerned" following by "Somewhat Concerned". Alarming, 88% of all survey respondents were very or somewhat concerned about their ability to farm profitably.

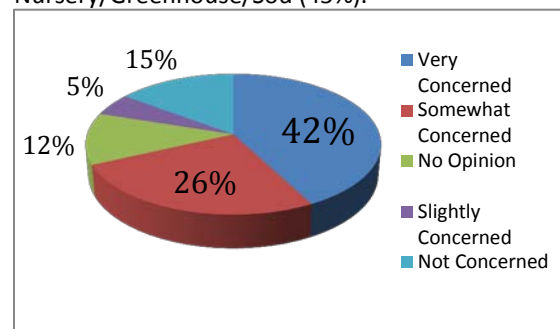


By commodity, Grapes/Vineyard operators had the highest proportion of respondents choose "Very Concerned" (83%), followed by Fruits/Nuts/Berries (73%) and Vegetable Growers (68%).

Concerns About Access to Affordable Land:

"Wouldn't be able to raise the capital to buy more farmland at these high prices." – survey response

Farmers were also asked to indicate their "level of concern with access to affordable and productive farmland." By far the most popular responses were "Very Concerned" (42%) and "Somewhat Concerned" (26%). Vegetable Growers had the highest proportion of respondents say "Very Concerned" (56%) followed by Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod (45%).

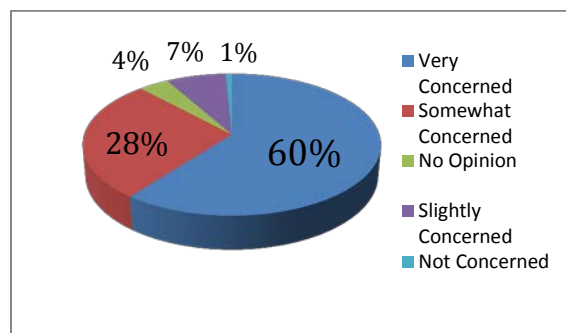


Concerns About the Loss of Farming:

"Most children of actual farmers can't get a high enough salary to support a house and cost of living on the East End from farm income especially with weather being so unpredictable." – survey response

"While the municipalities have done a good job of purchasing development rights, there is a major problem in that these protected lands do not stay in agriculture; in many cases PDR simply lowers the value and allows a wealthy neighbor or homeowner to buy their view at a discounted rate." – survey response

Suffolk County farmers are highly tuned to the developments within their industry. As such, they remained concerned about the diminishing number of farmers left on Long Island, particularly as it affects their ability to purchase from local suppliers, it affects their chains of distribution, and it can affect their abilities to collaborate and advocate as an industry. 88% of survey respondents were either "Very Concerned" or "Somewhat Concerned" about the loss of farmland in Suffolk County.



Concerns About Neighbor Relations:

"While many people like the idea of farmers, and many want to buy local, most people do not like the realities associated with farming, such as deer fence and structures. There is a perception that farmers are wealthy and farm only as a hobby." – survey response

"New neighbors do not accept the existing fabric of the neighborhood." – survey response

"I think farmers who pollute carelessly deserve the wrath of the public." – survey response

Survey respondents were asked, "Do you feel there is a negative relationship between farmers and non-farmers?" This is an important question because neighborhood relations shape the policy atmosphere in which agriculture policy is constructed and because positive or negative relationships within the community can ultimately affect a single farmer's operational effectiveness and profitability. Fortunately, a slim majority (52%) of respondents do NOT feel that there is a negative relationship between farmers and non-farmers. Unfortunately, a substantial percentage of respondents (48%) still feel there is a negative relationship between farmers and non-farmers. The industries that expressed the highest level of concern regarding relationships between farmers and non-farmers were Equine/Livestock (56%) and Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod (54%).¹⁷ The Town of Brookhaven had the highest percentage of respondents reporting a negative relationship (57%)¹⁸ while the Town of Riverhead had the lowest (41%).



¹⁷ Despite some recent news-worthy disputes stemming from public complaints between vineyard operators and their neighbors, only 38% (6 of 17) of all Grapes/Vineyard operators felt there was a negative relationship between farmers and non-farmers.

¹⁸ It should be noted that of the Suffolk County Towns with a significant number of farmland acreage remaining, Brookhaven has by far the highest population density, which helps explain this finding. With 1,881 people per square mile (ppm), Brookhaven has nearly four times the density of Riverhead (499 ppm), Southampton (410 ppm), Southold (410 ppm) and East Hampton (290 ppm). Higher density populations often find themselves in greater conflict with their neighbors, due to increased developmental pressures and increased interaction points with surrounding neighbors.

Commodity Profiles

This survey only had a certain number of commodity groups with a large enough sample size to profile individually. Given data limitations, these profiles are not perfect, but they paint a theoretically sound portrait of each Suffolk County agricultural commodity group and their interesting differences between commodity groups.

	Average # Years Farming
Equine	23.9
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	34.1
Grapes/Vineyard	26.8
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	32.2
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	29.3

	Average FT Employees
Equine	1.0
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	2.1
Grapes/Vineyard	10.7
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	15.5
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	4.7

	Average PT Employees
Equine	0.4
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	6.9
Grapes/Vineyard	10.2
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	25.4
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	12.6

	Percent with Farmstand or equivalent
Equine	0%
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	73%
Grapes/Vineyard	43%
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	21%
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	86%

	Percent with Sales Revenue > \$1 million
Equine	0%
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	0%
Grapes/Vineyard	30%
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	46%
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	6%

	Percent of Sales Within Suffolk County
Equine	NA
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	84%
Grapes/Vineyard	69%
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	55%
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	74%

	Percent of Sales = Retail
Equine	NA
Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries	79%
Grapes/Vineyard	58%
Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod	18%
Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes	62%

Interesting survey findings:

- Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod and Grapes/Vineyards are the most prolific employers.
- Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod and Grapes/Vineyards generate the highest sales revenues by far.¹⁹
- Nursery/Greenhouse/Sod also most likely to sell outside of Suffolk County. Fruits/Tree Nuts/Berries most likely to sell within Suffolk County.
- Fruit and Vegetable growers are the most likely commodity groups to sell retail and to sell local.

¹⁹ It should be noted that sales revenues do not necessarily speak to the operation's overall profitability.

Challenges

Suffolk County is, without question, a truly unique environment in which to farm. Fortunately, Suffolk County farmers enjoy:

- rich agricultural soils
- temperate climate supporting a diverse array of commodities
- access to a wealthy local consumer base
- close proximity to high-end markets like New York City and the Hamptons
- long-established and community-supported government programs meant to preserve local agriculture
- robust government, non-profit, academic, and advocacy groups devoted to sustainable agriculture industry

However, Suffolk County can also be a challenging environment in which to farm. With development pressures, real estate acreage which would normally be suitable for farming can sell in Suffolk County for over \$100,000 per acre. And with the loss of local agricultural support businesses, expensive energy costs, and rising fuel costs, the expenses associated with farming continue to rise both nationally and locally. As such, any comprehensive Agriculture and Farmland Protection plan will need to address the issues that farmers identify as lasting challenges in the Suffolk County agriculture industry.

In the agriculture producer survey, farmers were asked to indicate the top five challenges “facing you and the future success of your farm.” Listed in order of total citations, here is the complete ranking of all available options:



High Production Costs	83
High Fuel Costs	70
Availability of Farm Labor	70
Property Taxes	61
Extreme Weather Events/Climate Change	58
Environmental Regulations	51
Prevalence of Pests (Deer, Insects, Rodents)	50
Residential Encroachment/Complaints	46
Access to Affordable Farmland	44
Land Use Regulations (Zoning)	38
Estate Taxes	32
Prevalence of Disease/Blight	25
Loss of Productive Farmland	16
Access to Adequate Financing	14
Lack of Local Demand	13
Limited Succession Plans and/or Options	11
Lack of Processing Facilities	10
Access to Marketing & Business Support	8
Access to Infrastructure and Equipment	7
Access to Agri-services	7

While it is true that “High Fuel Costs” could be considered to be embedded within the definition of “High Production Costs”, it is interesting that 70 individual farmers considered it to be an important enough distinction to cite separately.

Clearly, the costs associated with farming continue to be the primary concern for Suffolk County farmers. And the “costs of farming” is one that can be expected to have both local and global foundations. When formulating solutions to this problem, planners will need to take a micro-level local approach while keeping a close eye on the more expansive global trends that drive these expenses.

The “Availability of Farm Labor” is an equally pressing concern for local farmers. Even in an environment where economic challenges persist, and unemployment in Suffolk County runs at 6.5%²⁰, farmers continue to struggle to find reliable employees. Temporary Work Visa programs, such as the H2-A Visa, continue to be an option for Suffolk County agricultural employers. However, the program has been described by many employers as restrictive, expensive, and overly bureaucratic.

²⁰ Latest figures July 2013 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Property taxes are another enduring concern for Suffolk County farmers. As previously indicated, property in Suffolk County can be extraordinarily valuable. High property values are associated with high property taxes. Unfortunately for the remaining farmers in Suffolk County, a vast majority of them are located on the North and South Forks of Long Island, which are some of the most traditionally expensive places to live on Long Island. The North and South Forks, like all of Suffolk County, face intense developmental pressures. These residential and commercial development pressures will continue to exert upwards pressures on property values and, thus, property taxes on agricultural lands. Fortunately, they are some programs, such as the Suffolk County PDR Program and the New York State's Agricultural Districts Law, with its accompanying agricultural assessment tax rates, that can alleviate these tax pressures. Nevertheless, property taxes remain a Suffolk County concern.

Rounding out the top 5 list of challenges is Extreme Weather Events/Global Climate Change. A farmer's success is, of course, extraordinarily tied to the vicissitudes of weather. Extreme heat, drought, intense rain, floods, and powerful winds can all have catastrophic effects on yearly harvests. Obviously, in light of Tropical Storm Irene (2011) and Super Storm Sandy (2012), Suffolk farmers are finely tuned to the perils of extreme weather events. Additionally, farmers are aware that global climate change may increase the frequency of these extreme events. Thus, preventing continued climate change (when possible) and mitigating the damages associated with extreme weather events will play an important role in future Suffolk County agricultural success.

Clearly, the timing of a catastrophic weather event is extremely important. While Tropical Storm Irene²¹ was smaller on a meteorological scale than Super Storm Sandy, Irene occurred much earlier in the growing season (late August) versus Sandy (late October). Thus, the impacts on the growing and harvest season were substantially different. Regardless of the season, extreme weather events, including intense winter snow storms, can have a noticeable impact on both infrastructure (storage units/greenhouses/etc.) and equipment (tractors/generators/heating/chilling units/etc.), not to mention an employee's ability to get to work.

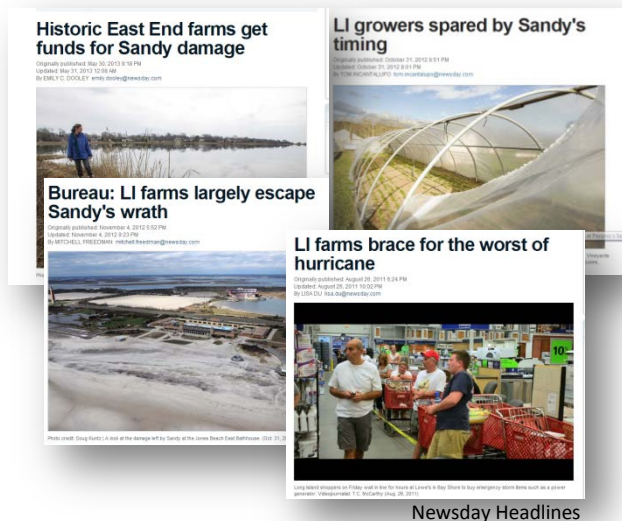
The next five most-cited challenges were, in order, "Environmental Regulations", "Prevalence of Pests", "Residential Encroachment/Complaints", "Access to Affordable Land", and "Land Use Regulations".

While the survey itself does not identify the environmental regulations specifically at fault, comment such as this was common:

"Base environmental regulations on sound science, not political science. The current political climate is putting Long island growers at a severe disadvantage."

Given the importance of Long Island's sole source aquifer and our surrounding waterways is not surprising, and indeed necessary, that Suffolk County farmers are held to a high environmental standard. And agencies such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation *do* hold Suffolk County to a different standard, particularly when labeling and permitting the application of pesticides on Suffolk County lands. Pesticides that are commonly used in mainland New York, and across the country, are frequently banned for use on Long Island. While these and other regulations may be deemed necessary, it is important to note they can impose real economic and practical hardships on Suffolk County farmers. Some environmental regulations cited in the survey as burdensome were water-use reporting rules, fertilizer storage regulations, and Suffolk County Health Department regulations.

²¹ Tropical Storm Irene was preceded by 4.5 inches of rain on August 14th, which was just as damaging as the storm itself. These "flood and famine" conditions are just as problematic as catastrophic weather events.



When citing the prevalence of pests, many survey respondents were quite specific – particularly singling-out the economic and environmental costs associated with the explosion in the white-tailed deer population. Currently, there is an estimated 24,500 to 36,300 deer in Suffolk County according to the DEC. That number of deer is well above density and carrying capacity numbers estimated by Cornell University. Deer management can cause severe damages to both vegetable and nursery growers, not to mention the damage deer can do to home gardens and home landscapes. The Long Island Farm Bureau has estimated annual damage to crops from deer to be between \$3-5 million.

Other pests concern Suffolk County farmers in addition to deer. Said one farmer,

“New invasive pests may wipe out our business. New York State did nothing to protect us farmers from Spotted Wing Drosophila (i.e. fruit fly from Hell) as it marched across the country from California.”

“Residential Encroachment/Complaints” speaks to both development pressures and conflicts between immediate neighbors. Many survey respondents indicated that “new” neighbors were particularly problematic, as they frequently found themselves unaccustomed to many of the neighborhood style nuisances associated with living next to a farm, such as: tractors and other slow machinery on public roads, increased traffic, dust-kick-up from plowing and discing, stormwater run-off, the use of sprayers and pesticides, the use of diesel generators, and the use of cannon booms to scare off pests like crows.

As indicated previously, and re-affirmed here, existing Suffolk County agriculture producers are very concerned about “Access to Affordable Land”. And this says nothing of the next generation of farmers who are only now investigating farming opportunities in Suffolk. Finding affordable land for new and existing Suffolk County farmers will continue to be a concern in the immediate future. Ensuring that existing, *protected* farmland was actively being farmed was also cited as a concern.

“More land that development rights were already sold on needs to be made available for farming. Neighboring land is allowed to sit idle. Pressure should be placed upon landowners to allow willing farmers to utilize land. Land should be in production.”

Rounding out the top 10 challenges is “Land Use Regulations (Zoning)”. Comments such as these were not atypical:

“Town officials act in an arbitrary and capricious manner when enforcing building and zoning codes on farms...They hold you up for years and prevent you from expanding and thus spending money in Suffolk, hiring more workers, etc.”

One survey respondent called for “*updated agricultural zoning laws for all townships*”.

Of the remaining challenges identified in the survey, here were some additional opinions offered:

On “Access to Adequate Financing” –

“The unavailable money to borrow is a major concern. I know several farmers who because of two bad years can’t get funding to keep operating. The best way to protect farmland is to give farmers money to farm. No true farmer wants to stop.”

On “Access to Marketing and Business Support” –

“The County should start a public relations program, encouraging producers to label food and wine that is “Grown in Suffolk County” and “Organically Grown in Suffolk County.”

On “Access to Infrastructure and Equipment” –

“Access to infrastructure is our biggest concern, which goes hand-in-hand with land-use regulations. Local code requirements are unduly burdensome and de facto prohibit the erection of barns, greenhouses, etc. The issue is compounded by those of us on rented land, where we cannot readily claim Ag & Markets protections, because our landlords do not want to be dragged into a battle with municipalities.”

On “Access to Agri-services” -

“The apparent decrease in the size of the equine industry in Suffolk County concerns me because I fear that support services (hay and feed supplies, barn supplies, veterinarian and farrier services) will become more difficult to access in the future.”

As a final note on **challenges**, it is interesting to note, and important from a policy-making perspective, to see that there are differences in rankings across not only commodity groups, but also across Suffolk County townships. In other words, the top five challenges cited by Grapes/Vineyard operators are different in important and significant ways from the top five challenges cited by Vegetable/Melon/Potato growers. The same holds true for agricultural producers in Riverhead versus agricultural producers in Southold. Here are the Top 5 Challenges cited by commodity groups and townships where sample sizes were appropriately large enough to draw conclusions.

Commodity: Grapes/Vineyards

Rank	Challenge
#1	High Production Costs
#2	Extreme Weather Events/Climate Change
#3	Property Taxes
#4T	Residential Encroachment/Complaints
#4T	Prevalence of Pests (Deer, Insects, Rodents)

Commodity: Nursery/Greenhouse/Floriculture/Sod

Rank	Challenge
#1	Availability of Farm Labor
#2	High Production Costs
#3	High Fuel Costs
#4	Property Taxes
#5	Environmental Regulations

Commodity: Vegetables/Melons/Potatoes

Rank	Challenge
#1	High Production Costs
#2	Availability of Farm Labor
#3	Affordable Farmland
#4	Extreme Weather Events/Climate Change
#5T	High Fuel Costs
#5T	Property Taxes
#5T	Prevalence of Pests (Deer, Insects, Rodents)

Town: Brookhaven

Rank	Challenge
#1T	Property Taxes
#1T	High Fuel Costs
#3	High Production Costs
#4T	Extreme Weather Events/Climate Change
#4T	Environmental Regulations

Town: Riverhead

Rank	Challenge
#1	High Production Costs
#2	Availability of Farm Labor
#3	High Fuel Costs
#4	Environmental Regulations
#5	Property Taxes

Town: Southampton

Rank	Challenge
#1	Availability of Farm Labor
#2	Prevalence of Pests (Deer, Insects, Rodents)
#3T	High Production Costs
#3T	Affordable Farmland
#3T	Estate Taxes

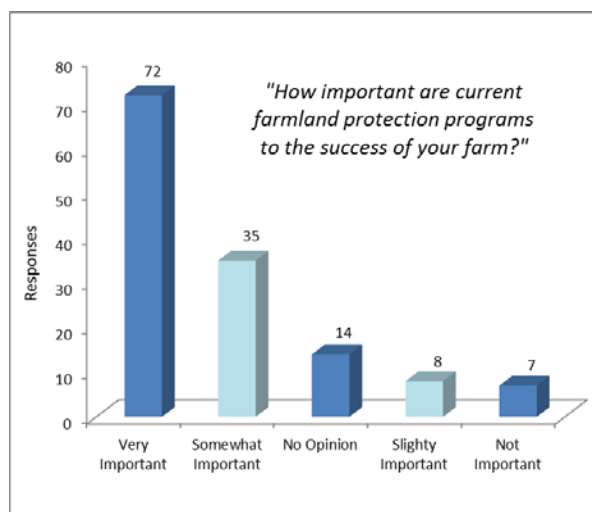
Town: Southold

Rank	Challenge
#1	High Production Costs
#2	Availability of Farm Labor
#3	High Fuel Costs
#4	Extreme Weather Events/Climate Change
#5T	Environmental Regulations
#5T	Prevalence of Pests (Deer, Insects, Rodents)

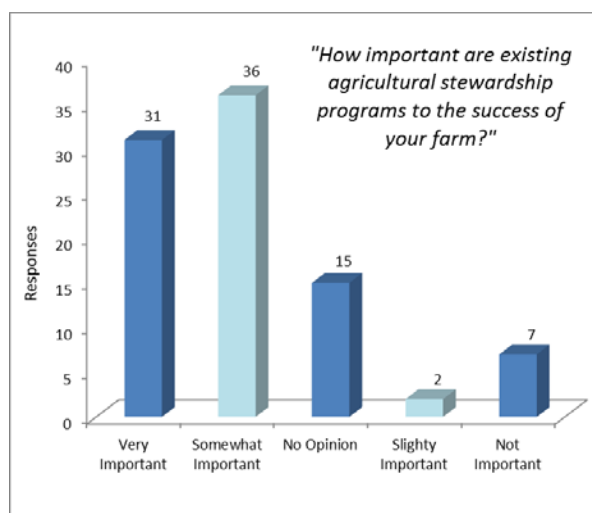


Farmland Preservation and Agricultural Programs

Survey Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of farmland protection programs to the success of their own personal farm operations. Suffolk County farmers demonstrate a very high level of appreciation for farmland preservation programs. 79% of all survey respondents indicated that farmland protection programs are “Very” or “Somewhat” important to the success of their farm. Farmland protection strategies will continue to play a very important role in the long-term success of the Suffolk County agriculture industry.



Additionally, the survey asked farmers how important existing agricultural stewardship programs were to the success of their farm operation.²²



²² Print survey responses only - all data associated with the online version of this question was lost.

Of the 91 responses collected, nearly three-quarters (74%) found agricultural stewardship programs, such as those offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension, to be “Very” or “Somewhat” important to their personal success.

The survey also measured the industry’s familiarity with different farmland protection tools and strategies. The following tools and strategies are ranked in order from most familiar to least familiar. A brief description of each tool and strategy can be found in *Appendix C*.

	% of Respondents
Purchase of Development Rights	90%
Transfer of Development Rights	80%
Agricultural Assessment	73%
Conservation Easements	69%
NYS Agricultural District	67%
“Right to Farm” Law	65%
Loan Programs	52%
Conservation Subdivisions	51%
Town Comprehensive Plans	46%
Farm-Friendly Zoning	38%
Exclusive Agricultural Zones	30%
Overlay Zoning Districts	27%
“Growing New Farmers”	24%
Agricultural Enterprise Zoning	22%
Incentive Zoning	14%

Finally, survey respondents were asked to indicate their top 3 strategies, either from the list above or others, that they felt the County should pursue to help keep farming viable. The following suggested strategies not only highly correlate with the familiar strategies ranked above, but they also mirror the top responses given by the industry in the **Challenges** section of this report.



Strategy	Number of Citations
Purchase of Development Rights	35
Right to Farm Law	20
Reduce Regulations (Environ/Health/Etc.)	16
Agricultural Assessment	13
Tax Relief (Property/Estate/Sales)	11
NYS Agricultural District	11
Transfer of Development Rights	10
Fix Chapter 8 PDR Program	9
Marketing/Branding LI Produce	9
Conservation Easements	7
Farm Friendly Zoning	7
Exclusive Agricultural Zones	7
Improved Access to Labor	6
Loan Programs	6
Growing New Farmers	6
Town Comprehensive Plans	5
Energy Subsidies/Renewables	4
Incentive Zoning	4
Deer Management	4
Public Education About Farming	4
Increased Environmental Regulations	4
Co-operative Efforts (Equip/Fuel)	4
Conservation Subdivisions	3
Cornell Cooperative Extension Funding	3
Promote Equine Farming	3
Crop Insurance	1
Succession Planning	1
Subsidize Enviro-Friendly Practices	1

With 35 citations, Suffolk County farmers identify the County's PDR program as the most important strategy the County can take to preserve farmland on Long Island. Conservation easements were also singled out as an important strategy with 7 citations. The number of references to the PDR program increases even further when we see that 9 additional individuals cite changes, updates, and adaptations to the County's Chapter 8 program as a Top 3 strategy to maintain agricultural viability.

When discussing these potential "fixes" to the County's PDR program, individuals specifically mentioned adding an "Abandonment of Agricultural

Uses" prohibition (to ensure that preserved farmland is used and made available to actual farmers), the allowance of value-added onsite processing, and an increase in greenhouse coverage limitations. The allowance of agricultural tourism on preserved land was also cited.

Some additional interesting findings:

- The NYS Agricultural District (11 citations), the "Right to Farm" laws (20 citations), and the Agricultural Assessment (13 citations), which are all interrelated, comprise the second most important strategy to continued Suffolk County agricultural success.
- Interestingly, while many individuals (16) cited a need for a reduction in overall government regulations (including environmental) as a top consideration important to agricultural success, a few others cited an *increased* need for environmental regulations (4), improved access to renewable energy subsidies (4), and increased access to subsidies for environmentally-friendly practices (1).
- Zoning in the form of "Farm-Friendly Zoning" (7), "Exclusive Agricultural Zones" (7), "Incentive Zoning" (4), and "Town Comprehensive Plans" (5) are identified as a top strategy for agricultural producers.
- Farmers across commodities expressed a need for a private/public partnership to help build the marketing and promotion of Long Island produce.
- Those who referenced a need for "Public Education for Farming" referenced one of two needs: 1) A need to teach young Long Islanders and schoolchildren about agriculture and 2) A need to educate neighbors about the necessary workings and inconveniences associated with living next to an operational agricultural production.

Conclusions

Based on the survey results, Suffolk County's agricultural producers remain enthusiastic about the occupation of farming. Farming families have been on Long Island for generations farmers hope to pass along these practices to a new generation of farmers who are inspired by a "foodie" ethos that values locally-raised produce grown in an environmentally sustainable manner. Their ranks are complemented by greenhouse, sod and nursery-stock growers who are embracing exciting new technologies and methods such as bio-controls, hydroponics and aquaponics, and renewable energy sources. Add into this equation wine-makers, who are quickly gaining worldwide acclaim, new agritourism and direct retail marketing opportunities, a growing shellfish aquaculture industry, and a renewed vigor in equine operations, and the industry seems robust indeed.

Suffolk County enjoys a diversity of farming practices that is not frequently seen in either New York or the rest of the country. This diversification will continue to fuel innovation and the adaptation of environmentally-friendly practices in Suffolk County agriculture. It should also fuel profits. Long Island farms are efficient with their limited acreage – they produce sales of \$7,249 per acre, more than ten times the NY state average of \$616 per acre.²³

Unfortunately, challenges remain. These challenges are not unfamiliar to the industry professionals who follow the Suffolk County farming industry. It is no secret that Suffolk County is an expensive place to farm. Encroaching development pushes property values upwards, which generally (though not always), push property taxes upwards. Recently, the rising production and energy costs associated with farming have emerged as the top concern in Long Island agriculture. Speaking with farmers one-on-one, they are quick to point-out that they are "price-takers", not "price-makers". They must accept the prevailing price in the market for its products being paid by wholesalers and ultimately set by consumer demand. In practice, this means it is difficult to pass along production cost increases to the consumer (as a more strongly positioned price-maker" could).²⁴ At

the end of the day, these cost increases can cut into the farmer's profit margins and ultimate profitability.

The availability of farm labor also challenges the Suffolk County agricultural industry²⁵. Farming is an extraordinarily labor-intensive activity and technological advances can only minimize the need for human labor to a certain extent. The continued need for labor in the farming community speaks highly of its economic potential and impact within the Suffolk County community.

Additionally, environmental concerns, ranging from deer management, to global climate change, to severe weather events, to increased pollution controls and regulation also define, and sometimes confine, the local agricultural industry.

Navigating these challenges will prove crucial in our attempts to stem the decline in Suffolk County farmland acreage. Suffolk County voters, through support of their legislators and votes on bond referendums funding farmland preservation, have demonstrated their continued support for Suffolk County farming. Whether it is the scenic vistas, the "U-pick" operations, the tourism opportunities in Long Island Wine Country, or simply the appreciation for locally-sourced food, citizens have proved with their ballots and their pocketbooks an appreciation for Suffolk County farmers.

Suffolk County implemented the country's first PDR program in 1974 and over 10,000 have since been preserved in the program since then. An additional 4,000+ acres have been preserved by the East End towns. That leaves approximately 20,000 acres of farmland unprotected. In order to maintain Long Island's rich agricultural heritage, we must continue to adopt policies that preserve farmland and reflect the changing reality of Suffolk County agriculture. Suffolk County's updated **Agriculture & Farmland Protection Plan**, to be completed in **2014**, will take the necessary next steps in identifying the policies and action steps needed to ensure agricultural viability in both the short and long-term.

²³ Source: New York State Comptroller's Office

²⁴ It is important to note that some savvy agricultural producers have established themselves forward as

"price-makers," including many organic and direct sales marketers.

²⁵ Though these are concerns experienced even more acutely across the nation, as in states such as California, Georgia, and North Carolina.

APPENDIX A

Suffolk County is the #1 producer of agricultural products in all of New York State and agriculture continues to operate as a driver of economic activity. Suffolk County has recently received funding from New York State to support the development of a long-term agricultural plan. But we need your input in order to make this planning effort a success. This survey is our first step toward a more complete understanding of the many issues, concerns and opportunities related to agriculture. We hope you will take 15 minutes to complete this survey and return it to the Peconic Land Trust by April 15th, 2013. This survey is completely anonymous. Thank you for your time and careful response!

Part I: Farm Enterprise Inventory

1. What primary crops/products do you grow?

2. In what town(s) is your farmland located?

3. How long (in years) have you been farming in Suffolk County? _____

4. How much land (in acres) do you farm in Suffolk County? _____

5. Of the land farmed, how much do you own? _____

Do you reside on the land you own? _____

6. Of the land farmed, how much do you lease? _____

7. How many full-time workers do you employ? _____

8. How many seasonal or part-time workers do you employ? _____

9. What percentage of your product is sold within Suffolk County? _____

10. What percentage of your sales is retail? _____

Does your farm operation have a farm stand? _____

Does your farm operation ever sell at farmers' markets? _____

11. What percentage of your sales is wholesale? _____

12. What percentage of your sales is agri-tourism related? _____

13. Do you engage in any of the following farm activities that diversify your farm operation?

- ☐ Pick your own (i.e.: apples, pumpkins, berries)
 - ☐ Corn maze/crop art
 - ☐ Hayrides
 - ☐ Petting Zoo/Animal Display
 - ☐ Farm Tours/Greenhouse Tours/Vineyard Tours
 - ☐ Tasting Rooms
 - ☐ Fresh baked produce on premise (i.e.: roasted corn, pies, jams)
 - ☐ Educational programs on premises
 - ☐ Seasonal events (i.e.: harvest festival, haunted tours)
 - ☐ Other: (Specify)
-

14. What percentage of expenditures did you spend in Suffolk County on non-capital purchases for supplies, equipment and services for use during the 2012 growing season?

15. What is your average gross annual sales total from your farm in the past year?

Please place a check next to the appropriate category.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$0 (personal, non-commercial use) | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1 - \$9,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 – \$24,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 – \$49,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 – \$99,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 – \$199,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$200,000 – \$499,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500,000 – \$1,000,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than \$1,000,000 | |

16. Please circle: In the past five years, have your average gross sales:

Increased

Decreased

Stay the same

Part II: Challenges, Opportunities and Trends in Agriculture

1. Please indicate the top five challenges facing you and the future success of your farm

Please number 1-5, one being top priority.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| _____ Availability of farm labor | _____ Property taxes |
| _____ Access to affordable farmland | _____ Estate taxes |
| _____ Residential encroachment/complaints | _____ Loss of productive farmland |
| _____ Environmental regulations | _____ Land use regulations (zoning) |
| _____ Global climate change | _____ Extreme weather events |
| _____ Access to adequate financing | _____ Access to agri-services |
| _____ Access to infrastructure and equipment | _____ High fuel costs |
| _____ Limited succession plans and/or options | _____ High production costs |
| _____ Access to marketing and business support | _____ Lack of local demand |
| _____ Relations with non-farm neighbors | _____ Lack of processing facilities |
| _____ Prevalence of pests (deer, insects, rodents) | _____ Prevalence of disease/blight |

2. Please indicate which of the following you plan to do, and within which timeframe.
Please check all that apply:

	Within 1 Year	Within 5 Years	10 Years or More
Increase your farming operation			
Decrease your farming operation			
Diversify your farming operation			
Stay the same			
Sell all or a portion of your land to another farmer			
Relocate and continue to farm elsewhere			
Transfer the farm to a family member			
Start renting your land for farm use			
Stop renting your land for farm use			
Begin a new farming operation on your land			
Transition to a new crop or commodity			
Adopt more environmentally friendly practices			
Transition to an organic operation			
Other (please explain)			

3. Please circle your concern with the ability to farm profitably.

Very Concerned Somewhat Concerned No opinion Slightly Concerned Not Concerned

4. Please circle your concern with access to affordable and productive farmland.

Very Concerned Somewhat Concerned No opinion Slightly Concerned Not Concerned

5. Do you feel there is a negative relationship between farmers and non-farmers?

Yes _____ No _____

Part III. Farmland Preservation and other Agricultural Programs

1. Please circle your level of concern with the loss of farming in your community.

Very Concerned Somewhat Concerned No opinion Slightly Concerned Not Concerned

2. How important are current farmland protection programs to the success of your farm?

Very Important Somewhat Important No opinion Slightly Important Not Important

3. How important are existing agricultural stewardship programs to the success of your farm?

Very Somewhat No opinion Slightly Not
Important Important Important Important Important

4. Are you familiar with the following farmland protection tools and strategies?

	Yes	No
A. Purchase of Development Rights		
B. Transfer of Development Rights		
C. Conservation Easements		
D. Conservation Subdivisions		
E. Farm Friendly Zoning		
F. Loan Programs		
G. Agricultural Assessment		
H. Growing New Farmers		
I. Ag Enterprise Zoning		
J. Overlay Zoning Districts		
K. Exclusive Agricultural Zones		
L. Town Comprehensive Plans		
M. NYS Agricultural District		
N. Right to Farm Law		
O. Incentive Zoning		
P. Other (please explain):		

5. Please indicate your top 3 strategies, either from the list above or others, that you feel the County should pursue to help keep farming viable.

Thank you for your participation! Your input and the survey results will remain completely anonymous. If you are interested in helping the Peconic Land Trust gather additional information regarding agriculture in Suffolk County, please feel free provide your contact information below:

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email:

*Please return this survey to: Peconic Land Trust
 296 Hampton Road
 Southampton, NY 11968*

APPENDIX B

PECONIC LAND TRUST



*****Media Advisory*****

**Peconic Land Trust Announces Initiative
in Support of Suffolk County's Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan
to Solicit Feedback from the Local Farming Community**

Online Survey Now Available on the Trust's Website

February 7, 2013. Southampton, NY. The Peconic Land Trust announces today that an online survey has been made available to assist Suffolk County in updating its Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan.

Suffolk County is the #1 producer of agricultural products in gross receipts within New York State and agriculture continues to operate as a driver of economic activity. Suffolk County is conducting this planning effort in order to update its 1996 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, in furtherance of its goals to protect viable farmlands and natural resources, to preserve its pastoral character, and to promote the agricultural industry on Long Island.

The survey is available on the Peconic Land Trust's website at www.PeconicLandTrust.org/fpp_survey or can be sent to interested farm operations by contacting Kim Quarty, Project Manager, at the Trust at 631.283.3195 or by email to KQuarty@PeconicLandTrust.org. All responses will be confidential.

In September, the County announced that it had received \$50,000 grant from the New York State Department of Agriculture that would in part fund the update to its

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Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. The update is also funded by in-kind services from the County and a \$10,000 grant from the Long Island Community Foundation (LICF). The funding from LICF was made directly to the Peconic Land Trust to support the County's effort through outreach to the farming community, of which this survey is an important piece of the plan.

In its announcement in September, the County outlined the following three topics and outcomes that would be addressed in the update:

- Sustainable local agricultural economic development,
- Agricultural land stewardship, and
- Access to affordable farmland.

"The participation in this survey by local Suffolk County farmers and growers is a necessary ingredient in creating an effective, economically and environmentally conscious farmland protection plan. Updating the plan will help ensure that existing farmlands remain in production and that rich, productive soils remain available for future generations of Suffolk County farmers," said Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone.

The Peconic Land Trust is honored to be working with Suffolk County on this important initiative.

About the Peconic Land Trust

2013 is the 30th Anniversary year for the Peconic Land Trust, which was established in 1983 to conserve Long Island's working farms and natural lands. Since its inception, the nonprofit Trust has worked conscientiously with landowners, donors, local government,

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partner organizations, and communities to conserve over 10,000 acres of land on Long Island. The Trust's professional staff carries out the necessary research and planning to identify and implement alternatives to outright development. While working to conserve the productive farms, watersheds, woodlands, and beachfront of Long Island, the Trust is also protecting the unique rural heritage and natural resources of the region.

The Trust has Stewardship Centers in Cutchogue, Southold, Bridgehampton and Amagansett and its Main Office is in Southampton. *A common misperception, however, is that the Peconic Land Trust is the recipient of the monies raised through the Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund (also referred to as the 2% land transfer tax or the Peconic Land Tax). This is NOT the case. The CPF tax is collected by Suffolk County and then redistributed to the five East End towns, the distribution of which is based on the location of the property from which the tax is acquired.* For more information about the Peconic Land Trust visit www.peconiclandtrust.org or call 631.283.3195.

Press contact:
Yvette DeBow-Salsedo, Peconic Land Trust
631.283.3195
YDeBow@PeconicLandTrust.org

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APPENDIX C

Glossary: Farmland Protection Tools and Strategies

Agricultural Assessment – Regulations which allow for a special, reduced-rate tax assessment to be placed on parcels, which have been certified as being used for agricultural purposes.

Agricultural Enterprise Zoning – Any zoning which encourages farm and agri-business retention, development and expansion in designated zones. This can be done through government incentives, local regulatory flexibility, and policies to retain agricultural infrastructure.

Conservation Easement – A power invested in a qualified private land conservation organization (often called a "land trust") or government (municipal, county, state or federal) to constrain, as to a specified land area, the exercise of rights otherwise held by a landowner so as to achieve certain conservation purposes. The conservation easement "runs with the land," meaning it is applicable to both present and future owners of the land.

Conservation Subdivisions – A residential subdivision in which a substantial amount of the site remains as permanently protected open space or farmland while the new (mainly residential) development is located on the remaining portion of the site.

Exclusive Agricultural Zones – Zoning law which restricts land use to solely agricultural purposes.

Farm-Friendly Zoning – Policies enacted across multiple zones, which ease restrictions on agricultural and supporting or related businesses.

Growing New Farmers – Program which seeks to encourage the success of new farmers by providing professional development, mentorship and other resources.

Incentive Zoning – Zoning regulations which allow developers to create small pockets of dense development in exchange for the inclusion of community improvements, which can include, but are not limited, to open space and farmland.

NYS Agricultural District – NYS law first enacted in 1971, which allows for agricultural assessments, limits unreasonable regulation on farm practices, modifies eminent domain rights, modifies state administrative regulations and procedures to encourage continuing farm businesses, and provides "Right to Farm" provisions for protection from private nuisance suits against lands in agricultural districts and parcels receiving agricultural assessments outside the districts.

Overlay Zoning Districts - A regulatory tool that creates a special zoning district, placed over an existing base zone(s), which identifies special provisions in addition to those in the underlying base zone. Regulations or incentives are attached to the overlay district to protect a specific resource or guide development within a special area.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) – Program which allows government entities to protect farmland by purchasing the development rights on agricultural parcels using a legal document such as a

conservation easement or deed of development rights. The use of the land is then restricted to agricultural purposes.

Right to Farm Law – A law adopted by a government, which gives special rights to farmers, in the face of nuisance complaints or lawsuits if the farmers use accepted and standard farming practices. Such nuisances may include noise, odors, visual clutter and structures.

Town Comprehensive Plans – A document which documents goals and aspirations regarding community development. The document can dictate public policy with regard to land use, transportation, utilities, recreation, and housing.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) – The transfer of development rights from one parcel to another. TDR permits all or part of the density potential (established in the local zoning law or ordinance) of one tract of land to be transferred to a noncontiguous parcel or even to land owned by someone else.