

Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities v1

From Farmers Workshops (February 2016)

Key

Green= Highest ranked strengths (3 or more priority stickers)

Yellow=Moderate ranked strengths (2 priority stickers)

Gray=Lower ranked strengths (1 priority sticker)

No Color= Identified by farmers, but not prioritized

Strengths (in order prioritized by farmers:

- Diversity of agriculture – of crops, of markets, of sizes of farms, of types of farms
- Strong community that is built upon and supportive of agriculture, strong history of ag in County
- Strong support among community at all levels – neighbor, town, county
- Ag infrastructure and ag businesses that support farms still intact and strong
- Soil, water, climate, natural resources support agriculture
- ASA
- Small, family farms
- Washington County Fair
- Agriculture's role in the County's look, aesthetic appeal, beauty
- Positive attitudes about farming here
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Hunting, fishing and recreational lands provided by agriculture
- Location of County in relation to markets
- Ag's role in quality of life
- Location in the Capital District
- Cost of land
- Family history of farming
- FFA/4-H programs
- Farmers work together and have good communication
- Access to capital resources
- Farm has significant role in the economy of the area
- Skilled and hardworking farmers
- Lack of development compared to other areas nearby
- Farm and ag-tours

Weaknesses/Challenges

- Lack of education of public about farming
 - Lack of internet and broadband
 - Bureaucracy and over-regulation/restrictions
 - Development
 - Taxes and unfunded mandates
 - Lack of access to low cost capital
 - Competition of land among farmers and with non-farmers
 - Labor costs are high
 - Animal rights activists
 - Difficulties for first time and new farmers for land access and capital
 - Difficulties finding labor
 - Lack of ways to market effectively downstate
 - Public perception that food is expensive
 - Shrinking profits and high costs of farming
 - Aging farmers
 - Need to get all farmland protected in County
 - Lack of food hub and aggregation
 - Lack of school budget for ag education
 - Lack of transition and succession planning
 - Farmer and non-farmer conflicts
 - Lack of funding for CCE
 - Lack of control over dairy prices
 - Lack of USDA slaughterhouse
 - Lack of understanding by non-farmers and by farmland owners who rent land to farmers
 - Need more markets to grow
 - Poor attitudes by non-farmers leads to conflicts
 - Limited value-added
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- A variety of other challenges were identified – many of which were related to the above and include
 - Lack of education of youth about agriculture as a positive career
 - Land issues (land grab, land assessments, lacking land to expand, marginal lands not fully utilized)
 - Lack of understanding of agriculture and farming practices
 - Lack of political clout of Washington County hurts advocacy
 - Problems are beyond farmer, town or County to control

Opportunities

68 ideas were generated by farmers. There is some overlap between ideas, but the Committee will need to look fully at the list for details. However, the ideas can be organized around several central needs and themes. Marketing, aggregation/food hub, education, telecommunication improvements, and funding were the general top programs identified. Generally, farmers supported the following efforts (in order of their priority):

- Marketing and promotion including enhanced marketing/PR for County products, a coordinated system for marketing, develop a regional brand, cooperative marketing, and centralized marketing.
- Additional food processing including USDA facilities, value-added, and efforts into funding additional processing facilities needed in the County. Related to this is the desire to see more aggregation, distribution and transportation programs to help efficiently bring together, package and distribute county produce (food hubs, for example).
- Education with a variety of audiences. There is need to enhance ag education in the schools, with non-farmers, general and institutional consumers, and with the general public. This includes collaboration, internships, mentoring, and coordinated efforts.
- Cooperative buying and other methods to help reduce input costs for production.
- Infrastructure improvements mainly centered on improving broadband and internet.
- Programs to increase access to and training of labor. This is related to the broader educational needs in the county but ideas also included ideas such as a labor pool clearinghouse. Related to this was prioritization of first time farmer programs such as internships, mentoring, and capital programs.
- Promote new commodities and emerging markets with training and technical help.
- Advocate for policy and regulatory changes, especially related to labor and environmental regulations.
- Protect additional farmland and develop mechanisms to fund more programs that protect farmland.
- Help farmers use and adopt new technologies. This is related to decreasing costs, enhancing farming as a career, and helping farmers be more efficient.
- Help farmers address climate change and protection of water.