

# Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities Compiled – all public input

## 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:

### Community/People

- 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
- Family history of farming
- Farmers work together and have good communication
- More young people showing interest in farming
- Positive attitudes about farming exist in County

### Types of Farming/Farm Operations

- Diversity of agriculture here including crops, markets, sizes of farms types of farms
- Small, family farms exist
- Local food trend – fuels smaller farms and retail markets - beef, organic
- Productive county – a strength
- New homesteaders coming to County looking for small farms
- The buy local trend is positive - fuels niche, new, and smaller farms and new retail markets
- More pork producers in Washington County
- More specialized sales – new types of farms here, niche farms
- More interest in livestock grazing

### Land and Environmental Resources

- Soil, water, climate, natural resources support agriculture
- Cost of land/ Land cost here cheaper than elsewhere
- Lack of development compared to other areas nearby
- Side hills great for sheep, goats, etc. Diverse land base is good
- No shortage of timber and woodlots for more forestry

### Role of Agriculture in County

- Washington County Fair
- Agriculture contributes to County's look, aesthetic appeal, beauty
- Ag's role in quality of life

- Farm has significant role in the economy of the area
- Hunting, fishing and recreational lands provided by agriculture

### **Agricultural Infrastructure**

- Ag infrastructure and ag businesses that support farms still intact and strong, such as CCE, Farm Credit
- ASA/ ASA important role with easements – farmers have used that money to reinvest in their farm - all been very helpful.
- Location of County in relation to markets and in Capital District
- FFA/4-H programs
- Access to capital resources exists
- Farm and ag-tours are good for agriculture and builds agri-tourism
- Washington County Fair
- Agriculture well represented in county government

## Weaknesses/Challenges

### Lack of Education and Awareness

- **Lack of education of public about farming, value of Ag and value of land**
  - Lack of understanding of agriculture and farming practices
  - Land owners who rent can put restrictions on renting farmer – can be an issue
  - Public concerned about manure spreading – needs education on agronomics and production - especially related to manure management
- Lack of funding for CCE
- **Lack of school budget for ag education**
  - Lack of education of youth about agriculture as a positive career
  - Lack of involvement of the 17 to 22 age group with farming as career choice
- Lack of public relations with community
- Lack of agri-tourism in the county
- Little support available for organic farming

### Hi Costs of Production and Doing Business/Capital/Credit

- **Lack of access to low cost capital** – limited to NBT, FSA or Farm Credit East
- **Labor costs are high** / Minimum wage issue
- **Lack of control over dairy prices**, Low milk prices and volatility in the milk market
- Hard to compete as a small farmer – can't make money due to costs
- Very hard to find a market that meets price point for goods
- Transportation to markets very hard
- **Cost of production** High – particularly in NY, not competitive nationally and globally – shrinking profits and high costs of farming
- Taxes and unfunded mandates – need subsidies to ag districts, School taxes, not consolidating governments
- Financial stability and ability to make profit is low
- High cost of workers' compensation insurance

### Types of Farming/Trends

- Not enough diversification of farm operations
- There are fewer farms, but larger
- Pastureland reverting to forest
- Lack of meat processing
- Fewer woodlot owners who understand the lumber industry or their use of woodlands
- Lack of networking or peer mentoring for people to learn about the forest/lumber industry
- Changing trends in retail and online shopping affects farmers
- Lack of market for hides, trim, bones and guts make it hard to do meat processing.
- New York State does not allocate any money for maple syrup marketing, yet it's a large industry
- Limited value-added operations

### Land Resources and Environment

- Development removes land for farming
- Competition of land among farmers and with non-farmers – harder to find land to farm
  - Land issues (land grab, land assessments, lacking land to expand, marginal lands not fully utilized) – large farms taking all the land squeezing out opportunities for small farmers.
  - Prime ag land is becoming expensive
  - All land being farmed - intense land competition.
  - Funding issue – wetland and conservation protection compliance – have to follow these plans for all land you own and rent. Some farmers can't be in compliance and can't get their loans – land competition drives these issues.
- Difficulties for first time and new farmers for land access and capital
- Need to get all farmland protected in County - falling short on its vision for land conservation
- Contamination of water by ag sources
- Solar array farms and its impact on rental land for farmers – loss of ag land. Compete with renters who can get more money renting to solar companies
- Small farmers piecemeal land from full time/larger farm operations
- Climate change – water quality issues/ Climate change – stabilize loss to crops - improve yield of soils
- 15-year tax exempt for solar arrays – not taxable as improvement on land

### **Regulations and Requirements**

- Bureaucracy and over-regulation/restrictions
  - They are a barrier to entry – regulatory demands, CAFO and GAP regs, bookkeeping demands
  - Need funding to implement OSHA rules
  - CAFO regs stranglehold on dairy industry.
  - CAFO is here to stay – as added expense. Costs of doing business is higher. Farms looking at satellite storage for manure. NIMBY for manure management issues.
- Taxes and unfunded mandates

### **Infrastructure/Labor**

- Lack of internet and broadband
  - Access to cellular and digital communication – huge barrier – difficult to do job, sell house, etc.
- Difficulties finding labor – getting, training, and keeping labor very difficult
  - Migration of youth outside of county – clients are older and not having youth come into business; question whether there will be a next generation customer base
- Lack of food hub and aggregation
- Lack of USDA slaughterhouse
- Have open plan but don't have ag infrastructure support for other businesses to come in (i.e. yogurt plan and beef processing)
- Changes at Cornell Cooperative Extension – moving back to just ag education focus

## **Promotion and Marketing**

- Access to markets –
  - saturated in immediate vicinity – farmer not ready for direct or wholesale markets. Adirondack Grazers is a model. Will need to be addressed.
  - Need more markets to grow
  - Access to markets is low
  - Lack of ways to market effectively downstate
  - Wholesale markets are hard to enter/ retail markets are saturated
- Lack of county branding of local products
- Lack of marketing of products and of county

## **Community/People**

- Animal rights activists/ Animal welfare both a barrier and a need for farmers to be transparent
  - There is need to address humane treatment of animals
- Public perception that food is expensive
- Aging farmers/ lack of Farm transition and Farm succession planning
- Farmer and non-farmer conflicts
  - Land transfers to new generation not affordable
- Lack of understanding by non-farmers and by farmland owners who rent land to farmers
  - Poor attitudes by non-farmers leads to conflicts
- Lack of political clout of Washington County outside the area hurts farms
- Horse industry often not considered part of ag and they need to be brought in. Are part of agricultural fabric
- Isolation of farmers and loss of the farming culture

## Opportunities

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 – need marketing infrastructure
  - enhanced marketing/PR for County products
  - coordinated system for marketing
  - develop a regional brand
  - cooperative marketing
  - centralized marketing.
- Additional food processing
  - USDA meat facilities,
  - value-added, and efforts into funding additional processing facilities needed in the County.
- More aggregation, distribution and transportation programs to help efficiently bring together, package and distribute county produce (food hubs, for example).
  - County is very connected to New York City and markets there is important.
  - Food Hub - Need aggregation to decrease cost to get produce to NYC.
  - Promote support businesses such as small meat processors, meat delivery
- Education with a variety of audiences.
  - ag education in the schools
  - with non-farmers, general and institutional consumers
  - with the general public.
  - This includes collaboration, internships, mentoring, and coordinated efforts.
  - Need template for newsletter to educate public
  - Tractor dealerships serve role as educator
  - Farmers need to be a good neighbor, proactive and communicate with neighbors on farm practices – example is Dutch Hollow Farm in Schodack
  - Education needed for farmers with residue avoidance plans and CAFO plans
- 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.
  - Related to the broader educational needs in the county but ideas also included labor pool clearinghouse.
  - first time farmer programs such as internships, mentoring, and capital programs.
  - Long-term, no interest loans for young/new farmers
- Promote new commodities and emerging markets with training and technical help.
  - Promote new crops - hemp – hops, alcohol/beverage diversification – move into these types of farms – for crop/tourism, hoop houses for year round produce.

- Diversify – need a diverse set of enterprises – organic, small, sustainable, niche, local food
- Advocate for policy and regulatory changes
  - labor
  - environmental regulations.
- Protect additional farmland and develop mechanisms to fund more programs that protect farmland.
  - Rework requirements for easements
- Help farmers use and adopt new technologies. This is related to decreasing costs, enhancing farming as a career, and helping farmers be more efficient. - need money to assist farmers with implementing regulations
- Help farmers address climate change and protection of water.
- Promote ag-tourism especially to foodies looking into going to farms for food experience – can take advantage of this and a huge asset. People want to come to Washington County, eat, and see farm and willing to pay price.
  - County needs to do more for helping and coordinating cheese and fiber tours.
  - Promote farmers on social media, TV and radio
- Create microloan programs
- Work with Adirondack College for workforce enhancement
  - Need skilled 2 years herdsmanship, practical training, need more technical training – guidance course or trade school. Need a tech school
- Business planning for start-up/young farmers
- Prioritize taking care of Route 22 – physical road, maintenance is bad – it affects farm and agri-business
- Use term easements to spread money around more
- Land swapping
- Rail – need improvement (Battenkill) – keeps trucks off road – concern has data to help if needed \$700,000 to decrease costs for use of rail – need rail infrastructure. Fort Edward site has rail after dredging is over that Cargill might use – huge opportunity. Great site (Barge dock, huge rail yard, flat storage) – could increase grain
- Have an implementing committee – include some Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board members and some legislators and a few individuals to oversee implementation of plan.

- County needs personnel to market WC resources
- Incentives that lower taxes.
- Take PDR money and instead of funneling it to a few farms, offer annual incentives to many farms to stay farming.
- New York State should allow unused state lands to be farmed at affordable rates for young, new farmers.
- Develop more social interactions and connections between farmers
- Increase funding for CCE
- More pesticide and chemical take-back days
- Fencing cost share or refund pay back program
- More public meetings/training with planning boards related to ag and its positive impact on communities.
- Manure storage tools, and training on manure for small farms
- Farm transfer information and tools
- Promote Sunday on the Farm program, and other communication programs to get farmers and public together.
- Translator services for farm workers.
- Flat tax on land similar to the Vermont program.
- Deal with solar on farms.
- Involve the 17 to 22-year-old age group and provide business and management training
- Taxes and Assessments
  - Spread cost of ag assessments throughout the county, not on town to town basis.
  - Need another class of land for those that are preserved so it is not taxed the same as vacant land. There needs to be recognition of landowner's decision to permanently preserve the land.