

Why Extension is Important in Preserving Farm Land



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Onondaga County

Why is it important to protect our farmland?

Of course there are MANY reasons, but to point out a few....

1. The U.S. Food and Farming system contributes nearly \$1 TRILLION to the national economy – or more than 13% of the gross domestic product – and employs 17% of the workforce
2. When farms and ranches are pushed off the most fertile soil, they are forced to rely more on fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to do what the best land does naturally
3. The cost of basic services (schools, fire, police and maintenance) skyrockets in communities across the country that sacrifice farmland to uncontrolled growth. Scattered development increases taxes and makes services more costly.
4. The food and farming system employ nearly 23 million Americans across the country. **Farmland protection is an investment in the backbone of our economy.**

Agriculture Statistics for Onondaga County

2002

Number of Farms: 725
Land in Farms: 156,284
Average Size of Farm: 216
acres

2007

Number of Farms: 692
Land in Farms: 150,499
Average Size of Farm: 217
acres

Since 2002, there has been a 5% decline in the number of farms within Onondaga County. We have also seen a 4% decline in the overall number of acres in agriculture production.



BUT.....

We've experienced a 75% INCREASE in the market value of the products sold! So what does that signify?

Through proper farm business planning and education, farms can become not only more profitable and successful, but more importantly, sustainable.

What is
sustainability,
and how do I
achieve it?



Sustainable: of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged

How do we achieve sustainability??

Two Major Factors:

1. Education
2. A realistic business plan



Need farm success in order to achieve sustainability.

The greater the success rate, the greater the number of acres that are preserved.

Anyone can grow a product

- **Farmer A:**
 - Wants to raise pastured turkeys
 - has the land
 - Talks it over with his friends.
 - Friends agree to buy their Thanksgiving turkey from him
- **Farmer B:**
 - Wants to raise pastured turkeys
 - has the land
 - Calls her local CCE agent
 - together they put together a farm plan



But can they make a profit on their product? Because without profit, you don't have a business. At least not a very good one!

Farmer A

- ❖ Harvests turkeys and they dress at 20 lb. each.
- ❖ Calculates his feed costs, and comes up with a price of \$4.50/lb.
- ❖ Calls his friends. Their turkeys will cost \$90.
- ❖ Shocked by the price
- ❖ Agree to buy their bird, but never again.
- ❖ Tensions are high.

Farmer B

- ❖ Before poult arrived, plan in place. Good idea of price inputs.
- ❖ Markets to right market for \$5.00/lb.
- ❖ Turkeys dress out at 20 lb.
- ❖ Customers thrilled to have found a local source for turkey.
- ❖ Everyone is happy.

Same product... VERY different results. Why?

- Farm business planning, foresight and education
- Agriculture is a business. Large or small.
- You can't jump in without thinking down the road.

Anyone can grow a product, but without proper planning and education, it isn't worth a dime.



- ❖ Farm planning not just for new farmers.
- ❖ When you're working a business day in and day out, you tend to focus on today, not 5 years down the road.
- ❖ Extension can help look to the future and suggest changes that can be made in the here and now to get the producer to a better place down the road.





- Many times, farms are generational.
- Technology moves fast.
- Extension is a great resource to introduce new methods, markets, procedures, etc. to make an operation more efficient, more effective and more profitable.
- **It's often hard to think "outside the box" when you're living in the box!**

Why Extension?



- Extension is Education
- Direct connection to Cornell campus
- Translates to the latest research, information, techniques
- Service is FREE to the farmer.
- Keep producers up to date in an ever changing industry.

If a farm is successful, **EVERYONE** is successful.

- If not successful, chances of the land being utilized in agriculture diminish.
- The greater the success rate, the greater the probability that land will remain in agriculture production.
- Agriculture is backbone of economy
- Education, proper planning = more successful farms = more farmland protected.



**"Agriculture is our wisest pursuit,
because it will in the end contribute most
to real wealth, good morals, and happiness."**

- Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington (1787)



Created by: AgricultureImpressions



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Onondaga County