



Agriculture Day at the State House

LOCAL GOVERNANCE: The tone of all agricultural laws in the Commonwealth is set by a basic constitutional provision. Agriculture is a stated public purpose, and the right of all residents to utilize the agricultural resources of their land is guaranteed under Article 97 of our constitution. Paralleling this guarantee, Massachusetts has some of the nation's strictest laws regarding animal welfare, the environment, and public health, all restricting agricultural operations. These laws, with few exceptions, are based on sound science and cooperation with industry that has led to one of the world's safest and most secure sources of food and other agricultural products for our citizens. We are threatened however at the local level. Some communities across the Commonwealth have sought to prohibit, or restrict agricultural operations that have been ongoing for, in some several bills that have been filed affecting local control over agriculture. The Freedom to Farm is guaranteed in the Constitution of our Commonwealth and must be preserved.



An Act Regulating the Keeping of Swine in the Town of Tewksbury; This bill is perhaps the largest threat facing agriculture statewide at the moment. Based on the incredibly restrictive, sound, science based state statutes and regulations, neighbors of a 60+ year old family farm have been unable to shut it down. They are now seeking special powers to "regulate" agriculture in their town in such a way as to effectively prohibit it. This is not a swine issue or a Tewksbury issue. This is an agricultural issue for the entire Commonwealth and must be defeated.



An Act to Promote Small Plot Farming in the Commonwealth; This is a bill to tear down the barriers between small and large farms. Between 2002 and 2007 farm acreage stayed steady and the number of farms in the Commonwealth rose 27%! As farming changes in the Commonwealth, our farms have shrunk. Many niche farms have fallen below the 5 acres now used for defining agricultural land and this bill corrects that.



An Act to Protect Farm Viability; Agriculture has long standing protections from local zoning to assure farm regulations are science based and coordinated statewide. Several municipalities are now looking to restrict farms through the use of health regulations. This bill would apply the same basic provisions to local health regulations – the assurance that municipalities cannot prohibit or unreasonably regulate agriculture through health regulations.

FISCAL ISSUES: We are all aware of the economic outlook of the state and its budgetary implications. The Department of Agricultural Resources, the University of Massachusetts Extension, and many of agriculture's NGO partners have all taken drastic cuts. As we go through the upcoming budget cycle and look at various economic stimulus opportunities at the federal, state and local level, we need to keep in mind that agriculture is a driver of rural economies. Agriculture supplies jobs, tourists, an unparalleled scenic view, a safe, local supply of food and an incredible quality of life to our residents. With that being said, our programs are at rock bottom. UMass Extension, once again has taken a budget cut disproportionately higher than UMass Amherst. Historically, the UMass Extension budget has been protected by language in the Commonwealth's budget. MDAR's Agricultural Innovation Fund in the last three years has gone from \$3 million to nothing. The Linked Loan Program passed under the dairy revitalization legislation saw its \$5 million in funding vanish. The special grants and the economic programs are gone.

Agriculture will suffer further due to budget cuts at DAR and UMass Extension will lose its ability to leverage both federal and private funds. Preventing further cuts to both of these key partners who provide research, new technologies and practices that assist farmers in meeting the public demand for safe, high quality agricultural products, providing new farmers with the tools to be economically viable and to continue the growth of the agricultural sector is critical to the Commonwealth.

Agricultural Stats of Interest:

USDA has released its 2007 agricultural census report. It shows some interesting things for Massachusetts Agriculture. Here are just a few:

- 2002-2007 saw a growth in the number of farms across the US – nationally farm numbers grew 4%. Across the northeast they grew 16%, in Massachusetts **farm numbers grew 27% to 7,691.**
- 2002-2007 saw a relatively small (700 acre) drop in the **total acreage of farmland in the state to 517,879 acres.**
- **Farms with under \$20,000 in revenue a year went up 29%** from 2002 to 2007, while the total revenue to those farms rose 83%.
- **Farms with over \$100,000 in revenue a year went up 16%** from 2002 to 2007, while the total revenue to those farms rose 29%.
- The **value of agricultural products sold rose 27%** from 2002-2007. For 2007 it hit \$490 million.
- **Farm payroll was over \$118 million** for 2007.
- **6 Massachusetts counties are in the top 1.5%** for total sales directly to the consumer.
- **671 (9%) of the farms are rented** in the Commonwealth – not just the land, but the entire farm.
- Between 2002 and 2007 the percentage of **farms that were principally operated by women rose from 21%** to just under 30%.
- The average farm operator has **been on the same farm for 21 years and is 56.3 years old.**
- **1,150 of our farms are owned by someone 70 years old or more.**
- **Our farms are local, family owned businesses** – of the 7,691 farms, 75 are owned by non-family corporations (and some of those are land trusts, towns, and not for profit entities.)
- Massachusetts **farms paid \$32.5 million in property taxes** in 2007.
- The value of Massachusetts **farm land and buildings was \$6.38 billion** in 2007.

Farms by County, 2007

Barnstable

406 farms on 5,233 acres
with \$17.6 M in sales

Berkshire

522 farms on 66,352 acres
with \$20.6 M in sales

Bristol

777 farms on 39,252 acres
with \$44.2 M in sales

Dukes

81 farms on 7,916 acres
with \$3.3 M in sales

Essex

531 farms on 27,834 acres
with \$25 M in sales

Franklin

741 farms on 79,465 acres
with \$56.8 M in sales

Hampden

508 farms on 36,841 acres
with \$25.7 M in sales

Hampshire

711 farms on 52,756 acres
with \$38.6 M in sales

Middlesex

700 farms on 33,893 acres
with \$81.7 M in sales

Nantucket

14 farms on 615 acres
with \$2.9 M in sales

Norfolk

264 farms on 11,654 acres
with \$14 M in sales

Plymouth

882 farms on 49,612 acres
with \$78.4 M in sales

Suffolk

7 farms on 99 acres
with \$212,000 in sales

Worcester

1,547 farms on 106,357 acres
with \$80.6 M in sales