

Report on
The 2007 Survey of Farms
Colchester, Connecticut

Prepared in Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a study of farming in Colchester, Connecticut, and recommendations for keeping that farming viable, with the ultimate purpose of preserving farmland. The project was funded by a Connecticut Department of Agriculture “Agricultural Viability Grant,” awarded in January 2007 to the Town of Colchester. The specific plan for fulfilling this grant mission, as stated by the town in its application, was to “identify our agricultural land, inventory parcels and rank them – all in an effort to preserve our agricultural resources.”

The consultant hired by the town to gather data, Llyn Kaimowitz, interviewed eighteen Colchester farmers concerning their farm activities, the problems they encounter in farming, and their plans for the future of their farms. The consultant then met with officials from the Town of Colchester regarding issues brought up in the interviews. This report presents the information gathered by the consultant and her recommendations for further actions by the town to promote farm viability and preservation.

In general, the farmers in the survey indicated that the best ways to preserve farming in Colchester would be to:

- help farmers to develop and promote sales of their farm products, for those farmers who sell to the public;
- make it easier for farmers to obtain and maintain their agricultural tax status, known as 490 A (for agricultural lands) and 490 F (for woodland);
- make it easier for farmers to navigate town zoning regulations when making changes to their farms;
- listen to the farmers and their needs, make an effort to understand the difficulties of farming, and show that farming is important by supporting them. This support can include town adoption of the state’s right-to-farm laws, showing a little flexibility in the strict application of regulations, and being more helpful when farmers want to make changes to their farms.

The consultant also discovered that, while the farmers are very knowledgeable about the business of farming, some might benefit from programs on farm financial and succession planning and conservation options.

Recommendations for improving Colchester farming viability include economic development aid, educating town residents about their local farms and farm products; adoption of the state’s right-to-farm laws, farming definitions, and regulations; helping farmers to navigate the town’s land use regulations more efficiently; creation of a town Agricultural Advisory Commission; self-study projects such as identification of prime soils and investigations of the benefits of establishing equestrian-friendly parks or developments; and the education of local farmers about farm preservation programs.

INTRODUCTION

Colchester has a long history as a farming community, but farmland has given way to housing subdivisions during the past fifty years. The modern demand for new homes on large rural lots and the town's location on major transportation routes combine to make Colchester a highly desirable location for residential developers seeking new business opportunities. In the face of high demand for land on which to develop new homes, some residents are concerned about preserving the town's farms and the benefits that they impart. This, then, is a good point at which to assess the state of agriculture in Colchester – its products, advantages, needs, and problems – to see what role agriculture currently plays in the town and what can be done to make it more viable in the future.

With the right balance, guided by the town government, development and agriculture can live together. New residential areas can provide markets for farm products, while farms can provide the open space, ambience, and tax support that maintain strong property values. This report provides insight into the needs of farms that the Colchester town government can use to work on achieving that beneficial balance.

ABOUT THE TOWN OF COLCHESTER

Colchester is a town of approximately 15,000, situated in the southeast quadrant of Connecticut, midway between Hartford and New London. The town is conveniently located on one of the state's main commuter highways, Route 2. Driving thirty minutes north on Route 2 brings one to Hartford, and twenty minutes in the opposite direction brings one to Norwich. New London is about thirty minutes south, using a combination of state routes, and Middletown is about thirty minutes west.

Location is part of why Colchester is “the fastest-growing town in Connecticut over the last two decades.”¹ The schools and the rural ambience combined with convenient shopping opportunities also contribute to its growth. Today the town is a mix of historic homes and farms with modern subdivisions and amenities. Within minutes of exiting Route 2, one can wind through woods on dirt roads. A minute's drive from the charming town green surrounded by beautiful nineteenth century homes, one finds grocery stores, restaurants, and other modern services. There is a careful balance of new and old.

The town was founded in 1698, and for the first two centuries its economy centered on farming and local industry such as iron works, tanneries, and textiles. In the early 20th century, the Hirsch Foundation settled Jewish immigrants from Europe in the town as farmers. As the century progressed, however, farming in general declined and farms began to take in summer boarders from nearby cities. Soon, these farms were converted into rural resorts. After World War II, the resorts closed, but the construction of Route 2 in the 1960s led to Colchester's new role as a bedroom community for local urban areas, which it remains today.²

GRANT PURPOSE AND HISTORY

This project is supported by an Agriculture Viability Grant funded by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, with matching support from the Town of Colchester.³ The State of Connecticut provides grants to municipalities for capital or planning projects to promote agricultural sustainability and/or increase the economic viability of farm businesses. Funding for these grants was established in 2005 through Public Act 228-05, An Act Concerning Farm Land Preservation, Land Protection, Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation. The particular type of grant awarded to Colchester is known as a Farm Viability Program Grant.

The purpose of the Farm Viability Program is:

- to provide a cash match for capital projects that are defined as fixed assets and have a life of ten years or more; including projects in conjunction with farmers markets, processing facilities and storage facilities;
- to develop and implement local or regional agriculture-friendly land use regulations;
- to develop and implement local or regional farmland protection strategies;
- to develop and implement plans that sustain and promote local or regional agriculture;
- to fund the production of outreach materials and provide educational workshops to inform municipalities of agriculture-friendly strategies, resources, and programs;
- to fund advertising for local or regional agriculture;
- to provide a 50% cash match to approved applicants.⁴

In applying for this grant, the Town defined its mission as “to identify and rank all agricultural land in Colchester with the goal of preserving valuable farmland.” The specific plan for fulfilling this grant mission was to “identify our agricultural land, inventory parcels and rank them – all in an effort to preserve our agricultural resources.” The project overview specified that this would be a two phase plan: first, a consultant would conduct the inventory of properties, then the Town would establish a five member Agricultural Advisory Committee who would work with the Town to rank and prioritize the parcels of farm land that are critical to preserve. Following this process, appraisals and surveys might be performed to determine property values.⁵

Following a public Invitation to Bid for performing the consultation duties related to this grant, the Board of Selectmen awarded the consulting contract to the author of this report in April 2007. This consultant met with members of the Town Planning Department and with members of the Colchester Land Trust to develop a strategy for identifying farm owners to include in the inventory and to discuss the types of data needed from the interviews. The inventory interviews were conducted in Fall of 2007, and interviews with town officials occurred in January 2008.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

In the early stages of this project, the consultant met with Adam Turner, Town Planner, and Alicia Watson, Town Wetlands Enforcement Officer, to discuss the categories of data required to complete the report and methods for prioritizing farm owners to interview for the

inventory. As a framework for prioritizing the interviews and creating the interview questionnaire, we created a list of Agricultural Land Categories [Appendix A]. Alicia Watson then developed a tour of properties in Colchester that exemplified the categories in the land category list in order to give the consultant a context for the project.

The consultant developed a list of questions to use in the survey interviews, and the questions were reviewed by Adam Turner and Alicia Watson, Elisabeth Moore of the Connecticut Farmland Trust, and an ad hoc committee of the Colchester Land Trust. The Colchester Land Trust committee, composed of Lisa Hageman, Chuck Toal, and Elizabeth MacAlister, also helped to shape the interview list and suggest ideas for gathering information vital to understanding the role of farms in Colchester.

The basis for the list of farm owners that we chose for interviews was the Town Assessor's list of land owners whose property is taxed under the provisions of Connecticut Public Act 490⁶ which allows farm, forest, or open land to be assessed for taxation at its "use" value, rather than at fair market value. There are 66 town property owners taxed under the law's section A, agricultural use, and these formed our initial list of farm owners. With input from the Colchester Land Trust and Alicia Watson, we refined the list to include additional land owners with large agricultural parcels that were not on the "490A" list. Priority was given to interviewing owners of parcels greater than 12 acres.

Farmers chosen for interviews received a letter introducing them to the survey project, and the consultant then phoned each farmer to schedule an interview. The consultant met face-to-face with each participating farm owner. Farm owners were often, but not always, the male head of the family. In some cases, both spouses considered themselves equal contributors to running the farm and both were consulted. Spouses who were not primary farmers were also invited to sit in and contribute to the interviews, but most responses to the questions were given by the family member considered to be "the farmer." Interviews generally lasted from a half hour and an hour and a half. Each participant received a packet containing publications from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, the Connecticut Farmland Trust, the American Farmland Trust, the Land Trust Alliance, and other sources. These materials were chosen to support farm viability through information on agricultural laws, product marketing, farm succession planning, development easements, and other viability techniques. [See Appendix C for a list of materials.]

Interviewing a full roster of 50 farm owners proved to be impossible. Some farmers chose not to participate in the project. Many others could not find time in their schedules because they worked full time at a job and farmed part time. Some farmers spoke to the consultant on the phone about specific concerns, but were not interested in responding to all questions. And some farmers simply could not be reached regardless of the time of day that calls were placed and chose not to respond to messages about the project. Ultimately, 18 farmers received the full interview and responded to all questions. Only those responses are tallied in the data report in Appendix B.

At the completion of the entire set of interviews, the consultant organized the data and shared it with the Town Planner to discuss methods for examining the data for useful information. The consultant then met with various officials of the Town of Colchester who work

in positions related to the issues that concern the town's farmers. These officials responded to concerns raised in the survey, and their views are presented later in this report.

Following the publication of this report, public meetings will be held to share the results of the project with the residents of Colchester.

Originally, this survey was spoken of as an inventory of farms with a goal of eventually ranking farms for preservation activity. However, it became clear that we would never obtain interviews with fifty farmers for the reasons noted above, and this was not going to be an actual inventory of all farm activity in town. It also became clear that most farmers had relatively little interest, at the time of their interview, in some programs designed especially for the preservation of farmland, such as conservation easements. The project data does, instead, offer something very valuable – the words of the farmers themselves regarding their needs in order to continue farming. Helping farmers to continue their farming is ultimately the best route to preserving farms, and the preservation efforts that take place following the report will be grounded in a fuller knowledge of farmers' priorities for their own lands.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The questionnaire used in the interviews of farmers, along with the data and opinions that were gathered, is presented in Appendix B of this report. The responses to each question are first tallied as statistical data whenever appropriate. For example, the tally might sum the number of farmers who responded "yes" to a question, the number that responded "no," and the number that responded "don't know." Then, additional comments related to the question are presented below the data for that question. All of the responses have been randomized in order throughout the various tallies in order to preserve as much of the anonymity of each respondent as possible.

At the end of each interview, the consultant also gave each farmer the opportunity to express opinions or give additional information related to being a farmer, farming within the Town of Colchester, problems of farming, or any other topic of concern. These comments are included at the end of the presentation of data in Appendix B. In many cases, comments have been summarized and shortened down to their basic gist in order to make the document easier to work with and in order to preserve the privacy of the farmers, when possible. It's important for the reader to know this because the comments often appear to be brief mild remarks, spoken without passion. In reality, the farmers who participated in this project were usually very passionate about their work and their concerns. They spoke quite forcefully about the problems they encounter and the difficulties that may cause them to quit farming.

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

About the farmers and their families:

Nearly all of the Colchester farmers in this study come from a farming background, some of them tracing their family farm connections back for several generations. Nearly all of the

farmers themselves have been farming for decades. Some of the farmers regard the beginnings of their own farmer status as their birth because they had farm chores as children and were aware of the family as a farming family from their earliest days. The average number of years in farming was 34.

Colchester's farmers are a hard-working group. About half of them work full-time at another job, then come home to work on the farm in their spare time. Several others also did so before retirement. The other half of the group are full-time farmers. (There is some overlap in the numbers because some people who work full-time outside of the farm also say they work the equivalent of a full-time job on the farm as well.) While the work is somewhat cyclical for many farmers, it nevertheless continues throughout the year. Farmers generally rise very early to begin their work, and those who work at a job elsewhere, work well into the evening. Even the crops that may seem to a non-farmer to be self-sustaining, such as Christmas trees, require year-round labor, such as pruning and clearing out storm damage, to keep them going.

Unlike earlier times when many children were needed on the farm, today's farm families are much smaller. In this study, the average number of people per residence on the farms was 2.56, but some families had older children who had their own homes elsewhere; the general range for the total number of children in families was from 1 to 4. Though the children usually helped on the farm while growing up, only a few farmers receive help from their adult children now. As a result of this and the difficulty in finding affordable labor, Colchester farmers try to keep their farms and the products of their farms on a scale that they and their spouses can manage alone, with some occasional outside help.

About the farms:

The farms that participated in the study vary widely in size, products, and land utilization. The study focused on farms that were larger than 12 acres in order to gather data on pieces of land that were most likely to be missed as open space if developed, and 12 acres was a convenient dividing line in the 490A list. The exception was Caring Community, a job training and vocational rehabilitation day program that farms on 7 acres. Other than Caring Community, the size of farms in the study ranges from 18 acres to 200 acres. The median size is 40 acres.

A common characteristic of Colchester farmland is that it consists of a number of different types of terrains which lend themselves to various uses which contribute to the diversity of products. Among the studied farms, most have some combination of tillable land for crops, pasture, wetland, woodland, hills or ledges, and sand and gravel deposits. All of these terrains have important uses on farms. In addition to the obvious utility of tillable land and pastures, Colchester's farmers use woodland, steep land, and some of their wetland areas for animal pasture. Woodlands also produce fire wood. Several farmers have developed their sand and gravel deposits into businesses. Land that would probably be unsuitable for residential development because of the grade or floodplain is therefore useful as farmland, though it should be noted that not all farmers can use all of these types of land for their particular types of farming. The percentage of their property that farmers were able to utilize for farm activities

ranged from 20% to 100%, the median being 65% and the average being 62%. Most farmers did not lease land from others or to others.

The list of products from Colchester farms (in Appendix B) shows the breadth of items for which there is a local market, including numerous vegetables and fruits, eggs, beef, fire wood, Christmas trees, hay, and many types of animals, including horses for equestrian activities. There are also foods made from the produce of town farms, such as cheese, wine, and jams. The high quality of the items produced here, combined with the growing trend toward purchasing local foods from sources that can be visited and trusted, gives Colchester the potential to become a destination for people who subscribe to the wholesome food, “green” living, and “slow food” movements. The year-round nature of the products could lead to a sort of marketing synergy as, for example, Christmas tree buyers come back to town for berries in early summer or corn in late summer.

In addition to traditional farm products, several farmers have used their land for other businesses. These include sand and gravel excavation and sales, lumber, recycling, and a store for Christmas items. In view of the frequently expressed opinion that it is hard to make a profit at farming because of the skyrocketing costs of fuel, land, and taxes, these additional businesses are important to keeping farmland operational. Nearly half of the respondents have alternative ideas for their farms that they would like to develop, including soil manufacturing, hayrides, decorative plants, recycling, and equestrian activities. Encouragement of alternative activities such as these will help to preserve open space in Colchester at no cost to the town.

Half of the respondents like to buy farm supplies locally and keep their money in the community, but nearly half do not, often because they cannot afford the feed prices. The incomes of local farms from farming activities are generally not high. On the farms of those willing to discuss income, sales ranged from less than \$10,000 to more than \$100,000, but were skewed toward the lower part of the range. The one farmer who brought in more than \$100,000 mentioned that nearly all of that was paid out in expenses.

There is already a farmers’ market on Friday afternoons at the Priam Vineyard. When asked if a bigger or longer market would be helpful, most farmers said no. Some products, such as hay, aren’t suitable for markets, and markets take time out from other farm work.

The question of what the town or state could do to help farms brought a variety of answers. Many answered that taxes could be lowered and their 490 tax status made more secure. Farmers also want the town to adopt the state’s legislation and regulations that pertain to farming. Farmers would also like to see the town educate other residents about farming. Readers should see the entire list of comments in Appendix B.

The problems of farming:

Farmers were asked the open-ended question, “What are the biggest problems that you encounter in farming?” By far, the top answer was “taxes.” One third of the group gave that answer, though nearly all other farmers echoed “taxes” as a major concern in other portions of

the interview. Other answers, in order of number of responses, were: weather; finding labor; complaints from the public about farm practices; crop and animal diseases; shortage of land; fuel costs; the cost of fertilizer, seeds, or supplies; expenses in general; town administration issues; machinery costs; health/age; risk; and trespassing.

At some point in their interviews, every farmer worried about taxation. This issue has raised a lot of ire in the farming community, and some of the farmers expressed themselves with considerable anger and frustration during this part of the discussion. In fact, several of the people who refused to participate in the survey did so only after first venting great anger over farm taxes. Most of the farmers are aware that farms typically pay much more in taxes than they receive in town services and pointed this out. They feel that they are already helping to carry the expenses of the town and are being squeezed to carry even more of the load as town expenses go up.

The other responses to the question about farming problems were similarly “under reported.” That is, while farmers may not have mentioned certain problems in answer to this open-ended question, those problems often came up elsewhere during the discussion. For example, only three people mention finding labor as a problem during this question, but seven people said “yes” in response to the later question “Do you have problems finding and keeping farm labor?” Also, the general inability to match price income with the cost of production and frustrations in dealing with town administration were common complaints that were often voiced in other parts of the interview, rather than in response to the question about biggest problems.

When asked what would make it easier for the respondent to continue farming in the future, two-thirds of the responses were complaints about either taxes or governmental regulations or activities. Readers are urged to see Appendix B to see the specific answers. A common thread among these answers is a desire for the town to be more supportive of farming. Specific ideas included town adoption of the state’s right-to-farm law, education of town residents about local farms (both their available products and their farming methods, such as manure application), and easier and quicker decisions from town offices about changes farmers want to make to their properties. There is a tone running through these comments and others in the interviews that the town is, at best, not trying to help its farmers and, at worst, is working against them.

Finally, farmers were given the opportunity at the end of each interview to discuss other issues or add additional comments. Most farmers elected to reiterate or elaborate on points they had made in earlier responses, and their feeling on these topics were sometimes quite passionate. Generally, these additional comments fell into the following areas.

First, farmers feel strongly that they need more support from the town administration, especially in regard to right-to-farm laws and support of farming techniques, such as manure spreading, when other residents complain.

Farmers also asked for support from other residents in Colchester. They feel that if more people are educated about farms and food production, this will be very helpful to farmers in many ways, including fewer complaints and more product sales.

Farmers had a great deal to say about their interaction with the town administration. They are particularly frustrated with land use regulations and restrictions that farmers feel don't always make sense for farms. They are also upset about the difficulties they perceive in connection with getting approvals for land use changes, including the length of time needed for approvals.

Taxation also elicited great frustration. There is widespread concern over the possibility of losing their 490A tax status without warning. Some feel that farmers are carrying a disproportionate share of taxes. They feel that there are no tax incentives to keep farming in town, and that the town actually taxes things that could be exempt or taxed at a lower rate.

Regarding the general outlook for farming in Colchester, many farmers were quite gloomy, saying it is too late to save. Farming has many problems; in particular, the expenses of producing are too high in relation to sales income. Beyond taxes, feed, or fuel, it's also expenses such as repairing buildings or equipment, insurance, vandalism, and buying livestock that have them worried.

Readers are urged to read the entire list in Appendix B to better understand these concerns.

About the future of Colchester farms:

Despite the risks and costs of farming, two thirds of the respondents actively want to expand the size of their farms, and a few others would expand if it were possible. The most common reason keeping farmers from expanding is the inability to buy land. In some cases, it is the lack of any contiguous land that prevents expansion, in others it is the high cost of land, sold at development prices, that prevents it.

Asked if they were satisfied with farming and wanted to continue indefinitely, every farming household said yes, with the exception of one spouse in a farming couple who felt worn down by the constant difficulties of farming, including hard work without respite.

The wish to continue farming and to expand the farm isn't surprising in view of the passion for farming that many farmers expressed in their interviews. "Farming is our way of life" was the statement heard over and over. No one ever mentioned any longing for an easier life away from the soil. Older farmers said that they would like to farm as long as they were able. Though several spoke of retirement from their non-farm jobs, no one spoke of retiring from farming. Farming clearly holds a different status for these people than a job. It defines them and their place in the world, a place of honor. Many farmers expressed the feeling that they were doing something valuable by producing food and by making the land fertile. No arrogance or feeling of superiority about this, it was simply an expression of the job that they had to do in life.

Whether those farms will continue indefinitely or not is a big question, however. Two-thirds of the group had no expectation that children would take over the farm. Some farmers had no children, but most said that their children were not interested in farming or didn't live in the area. This is clearly a concern for the town if it wants to preserve farmland as open space. Although a few farmers spoke hopefully of selling their farm as a farm, this is clearly not an option that carries certainty because several farmers said that their soils were not prime soils. Farmers were given a pamphlet on the state's Farm Link project⁷ that links farm buyers with farm sellers.

The issue of what will eventually happen to these farms is only half the question. The other half is "what will happen to these farmers?" The issue of retirement funds is particularly important to the group interviewed for this survey as most of them are over the age of 50. One third of the group fell in the age range of 50 to 59, and another third fell into the group of 60 to 80+ years of age. Among full-time farmers, land is generally like a retirement account. Farmers turn much of their income into farm equity. Among part-time farmers who have full-time jobs off the farm, there is often an anticipation of retirement income from their jobs, but those who are already retired say that they have a difficult time trying to meet the expenses of farming, such as taxes and fuel, on a fixed income.

When asked if they had talked to a retirement planner or financial advisor, nearly two-thirds responded that they had not, and half have not made formal arrangements to transfer their farms to heirs. This suggests that the preservation of these farms as farms may be vulnerable, especially if farmers die prematurely. Providing local farmers with access to knowledge about farm succession planning from one of the non-profit organizations in New England that offer these services will allow them to learn techniques to set achievable goals for preserving their farms. There are also firms and non-profit organizations that specialize in farm or family business planning, and these can be helpful, as well.

Given the passion of these farmers for their farms, there was an expectation that they would be eager to consider conservation easements in order to receive cash for farm improvements or retirement while assuring the continued use of the land as a farm. Conservation easements result from the sale of the farm's development rights. The farmer is left with ownership of the farm as a farm. Future sale of the land must be made with the intention of maintaining the land as a farm, undeveloped. The development rights are often purchased by or donated to a governmental body or non-profit agency.

Contrary to our expectations, however, about three-fourths of the participants have not considered preservation options such as easements for various reasons. Several were worried about losing the flexibility to sell their land as they pleased. A couple farmers felt that they couldn't get enough money to make it worth while. A couple farmers also mentioned land formerly owned by Ruby Cohen and feared that turning over any of their rights to the town could be risky.

When asked, then, if these farmers had seriously investigated the outright sale of their land to a developer, a few responded that they had spoken to developers but, by far, most have not. Developers are actively contacting some farm owners on a regular basis, but most farmers

want to preserve their farms intact. Only one, to date, has sold any portion of his farm to someone outside the family for building lots. Most reported that they haven't discussed the idea of selling to developers with their farming friends, but a few said that they have discussed it, and the general feeling is to sell. This was reinforced later in the general comments made by a number of farmers who said that if they became frustrated enough with taxes or the town administration, they would sell to a developer.

An overall view of Colchester farmers and farming:

During the interviews, several important threads emerged that are not captured fully in the responses of Appendix B. First, it is clear that the old-fashioned stereotype of the farmer as a "hayseed" is totally inappropriate. The farmers that participated in the interviews are smart and articulate. They keep up with national news and are keenly aware of how that news will affect them as farmers. Some of them keep up to date on commodity prices via the Internet, while some others read the Wall Street Journal. Though not everyone spoke of their farming as a business, those who did were versed in state regulatory law, the forecast for fuel costs and produce prices, and real estate trends.

One should not judge the farmers' prowess as business people by their income, however. Unlike traditional retailers or manufacturers, the farmers in the survey see part of their payoff from farming in the satisfaction that it brings them in producing something of value and protecting open land and a rural ambience within the town. While they hope that their hard work is producing enough income to pay for expenses, taxes, mortgages, and their family needs, they don't expect to rake in enormous profits. Retaining their land when they could reap a real estate windfall and farming the land despite significant economic and weather risks is an act of commitment and faith.

Another characteristic of the farmers that became evident is their resourcefulness. One farmer mentioned that every day brought an unexpected surprise on the farm. It might be the need to repair a feed trough kicked by a frisky bull, removal of a fallen tree from a tractor path, or an essential piece of equipment biting the dust, but farmers need to be ready to deal with unanticipated barriers and emergencies on a regular basis. To do this, many of them have prepared themselves with a wide array of skills in construction, machinery repair, and general problem solving for natural calamities. It would seem that people like these are valuable resources for any town.

Perhaps some of the conflicts that arise between farmers and the town are because the farmers have a different relationship with their land than the average landowner. Farmers nurture their soil, coax it to grow things, and assess its value and productivity, not just from border to border as square footage, but from the top of the leaves of the plants growing on it all the way down deep into the earth. For farmers, their land is a living asset with which they have a daily conversation. Because of this greater intimacy with their land, it's probably hard for farmers to bow to the restrictions that an outside agency might want to put on their land in pursuance of an abstract and broadly generalized law.

Also, many of these farmers have been working their land for years, some of them following generations of family members in doing so. For them, working the land has permanence, in contrast to changing housing trends and population fluctuations. It's possible that some of them feel that the stability and durability of their activity should merit some priority, some consideration from the town in order to keep the town from flying too rapidly into the spiral of increasing development followed by increasing taxes.

RESPONSES TO FARMER CONCERNS BY TOWN OFFICIALS

The consultant met with Colchester town officials in the Planning and Zoning Department, Health Department, and the Assessor's Office. We discussed the definition of farming and the role of farms in Colchester. These officials were asked about the types of farming issues that they deal with and how they approach those issues, in general and on a case-by-case basis.

Linda Hodge, First Selectman, feels that farms, both commercial and the "hobby farms" for personal use, are a key to the character and environment of Colchester. They can have an important role in tourism and marketing to make the town a destination. They play an important role in environmental preservation and in the control of sprawl. She is an enthusiastic supporter of farms and wants to help and encourage them. She is looking for ideas on ways to make farming more sustainable. One area she sees as important is energy efficiency; another is finding ways to help their sales.

Wendy Mis, the Director of Health, says that common issues brought to her department by town residents are fly and odor complaints, usually related to manure applications on farm fields or manure and fertilizer storage areas. She recommends the manure handling techniques promoted in publications from the University of Connecticut. She also works to be proactive as well as reactive to problems, preferring to head off potential problems early in the planning stage of any land use changes. She advocates sufficient space between structures on adjoining properties and good advance land use planning to mitigate odor problems.

Ms. Mis agrees that public education about farms and their benefits would be very helpful to the town. New residents should be aware of the nature of farming communities, including the poultry noises and odors, before they settle in, and she advocates signage announcing that this is a farming community. She also wants people to understand farming because of food-borne illness issues. If citizens understood how food is produced and shipped, they would prefer local food from area farms. She would like people to know more about the farms in town.

Ms. Mis also discussed farm markets and retailing, enumerating the types of concerns she would have with such ventures, such as proper refrigeration and the handling of sliced fruits, but if a farmer is working with the state Department of Agriculture, she is willing to step aside and let their regulations govern the situation. In general, she shows a strong appreciation for farming and significant knowledge about farming issues.

Members of the town's Planning and Zoning Department are involved daily with farms as they administer land use programs. Craig Grimord, though new to the town, has many years of experience with farming communities, and he agrees that manure smells, flies, and poultry noises are common problems. But rules allowing people to own livestock with only a few acres of land, and requiring them to leave at least 100 feet between animals and the nearest neighbor can create problems as well, in the form of animals being crowded on a small plot. As development grows in town, complaints about farms will grow. Clearly, cooperation and creative problem solving are needed in order to protect everyone's interests.

Mr. Grimord sees a role for the state in supporting farming. State grants can help farmers with manure management and actually improve the farmer's bottom line. The state can also help with grants for conservation easements to encourage preservation.

Jay Gigliotti, the Wetlands Enforcement Officer, spoke of the important balance that he tries to bring to his job. He tries to give as much leeway to farmers in farm wetlands issues as he can when there are gray areas in the regulations, but certain rules simply must be enforced for public health and environmental preservation. In a discussion of some specific cases brought up by farmers who felt that the town was overly restrictive in applying rules and unhelpful in navigating the zoning enforcement system, Mr. Gigliotti felt that it would be helpful to make clearer policy distinctions regarding types of farming. Some farms are based more upon their commercial aspects in a way that shifts the emphasis from farming to agricultural-related business. Equestrian activities are a prime example, where riding lessons are more commercial than farming, he feels. The application of definitions is important because it plays a role in determining the particular rules that need to be applied.

Another issue that some farmers mentioned was the difficulty they have in correcting the changes in wetlands that were made by other owners or by the government in road maintenance activities. Farmers feel that if someone else dumped soil that formed a dam, creating a swampy area on their property, the farmer should be able to remove the soil and restore the use of the land for pasture. Mr. Gigliotti pointed out that once such dams and the area around them become stable, the surrounding soil changes to adapt to the new situation, and removing the dam creates a new environmental situation that has to be evaluated from the point of the recent stability.

Salvatore Tassone, the Town Engineer, has a strong appreciation of farms and the open space they preserve. His professional area leads him to be concerned about issues such as safe road access on farms, the protection of town roads, and storm water management issues. Case-by-case review of building and zoning applications is vital. Barns or the areas around them can create impervious surfaces that alter storm water flow. This altered flow can create health or safety problems, such as washing manure out of the property onto town roads. Mr. Tassone is particularly concerned with road and drainage issues when parcels are relatively small and farm building are located near other properties. In one ongoing case, it is the parcel size and proximity to others that mandates a cautious review of drainage systems.

Timothy York, the Town Building Official, emphasizes that the health, safety, and welfare of others is a top priority when he reviews building plans. There has been relatively little building activity on active farms in town, but he has advised farmers and participated in

occasional Health Department inspections. He mentioned that pre-application meetings are already a practice for any new development activity in town, and that is a good way for anyone planning a new building to learn what is required and how to navigate the review system.

Lack of advance planning can be a big problem for land owners wanting to add buildings to their properties. Mr. York advised that they need to completely think out their project and solidify their plans before entering an application. In one local farm case, for example, the owner hadn't completely decided what to do in the project prior to approaching the town and failed to mention all aspects of the project. As the project description changed, including a larger building and a different business plan, the new specifications affected every area of the approval process, and earlier approvals and permits became outmoded. He felt that better preparation prior to application would have streamlined the process.

A Town Assessor's job is not easy. The entire town benefits when the Assessor works hard at bringing in as much tax income as is legally possible. If the Assessor doesn't, people complain about the failure to realize all the assets and to spread the tax burden fairly. Yet no one is happy when the Assessor does his job.

John Chaponis, Town Assessor, sees his job for the Town of Colchester as discovering property changes and the value of those changes that should be added to the town's tax list. He mentioned that most farm taxation is governed by state or local laws which he enforces uniformly, except for the exceptions that are grandfathered in.

An important aspect of farm viability is receiving 490A or 490F tax status, the status that allows a farm to pay taxes based upon the use of the land, rather than on the fair market value. In a developing town like Colchester, the determination of what is or isn't farmland, and who does or doesn't receive 490 taxation, is important, and the Assessor says that he is happy to take time to explain to the criteria to anyone with questions.

He noted that while 490 taxation is a state process, every town has its own regulations. The state allows each town to consider many factors in its assessments but doesn't require that all of these factors figure into the consideration. In selecting the factors that he uses, Mr. Chaponis feels that he is liberal in favor of the farming community. For example, he has created an assessment formula for farmland, unlike that used in other towns, that assesses farmland as open space at \$1400 per acre, which he says is lower than it would be assessed if it were based upon the value as farmland. He also requires no minimum acreage for land to be classified as farmland, unlike many towns that have established a five acre minimum in order to qualify for special taxation.

Mr. Chaponis feels that he is a proponent of 490 taxation for farm and forest land, including equestrian farms. He is always willing to inspect forest or wetland to determine whether they are a legitimate part of operational farmland and happy to extend 490 tax status if they are.

He says that property owners do sometimes get confused over procedures or the requirements for retaining their farm tax status, and they lose their special status. For example,

farmers can't have negative income year after year and retain their status. They must have farm equipment; a lack of equipment signals that there is no farm. Often, small farms don't meet the requirement for ten years of operation as a farm (to be taxed as a farm), and when farmers sell such property, the Assessor must tax them at the regular market value of the land. The farmers are usually unprepared for this action. Also, every year some people sign a declaration saying that they are no longer farming, then change their minds and call him to reverse their declaration. Such cases help to create the idea that 490 status is highly vulnerable.

Farm equipment is an area that sometimes draws argument. Although the presence of farm equipment helps to qualify a property as a working farm, the equipment is a tax liability. Mr. Chaponis audits the equipment in question because, in order to qualify for special farm equipment taxation status, it must be legitimately linked to farming activities, as opposed to being used for routine lawn maintenance or for non-farm business activities. Defining whether a business or a portion of a business is actual farming or not is a situation where there may be a gray area subject to individual interpretation.

For example, the gray area begins when agricultural products are converted into, and packaged as, processed food items. If some of the agricultural products are purchased from another farmer, the situation becomes muddy. A gray area may arise in the matter of equestrian farms. When do the business aspects of their activities move from agricultural to non-agricultural? For example, although the boarding of horses may be an agricultural use, is the equipment related to the training of riders necessarily agricultural? Computers are another type of equipment that would be questioned. While they may be important to keeping the farm business finances straight or for obtaining farming information on-line, they are not farming equipment. In establishing the tax rates for farm equipment, Mr. Chaponis seeks to determine that farm taxation is extended only to portions of a business clearly related to the production of a farm's agricultural output. Serious disputes by farmers have arisen over the Assessor's choices of where to draw the line in determining the purpose of equipment, but Mr. Chaponis feels that he has a clear and consistent standard for the decisions he makes. Ultimately, state law dictates how farm equipment is assessed, and there is an appeal process for farmers who dispute the Assessor's decisions.

Mr. Chaponis speculates that some of the farmers' unhappiness with the Assessor's office comes about as a result of unhappiness with the changes that the whole town must adjust to as a result of its rapid development and the rise in property values in general. He also understands that there is discontent with the audits of personal property that occur in connection with farm equipment, but that farmers must remember that this questioning is uniform for all businesses in town. Generally, however, he says that farm tax issues are a relatively small percentage of the tax issues in town.

All of the town staff who were asked to meet to discuss the farm inventory responded willingly and gave generously of their time. While they are always happy to meet with farmers to discuss problems, staff members were consistent in mentioning their obligation to all residents of the town with respect to promoting safety and health through observance of regulations. While farm owners dislike interference in their use of their land, town staff members are charged

with overseeing a uniform application of the laws, regardless of the type of land use. All staff members spoke of approaching problems on a case-by-case basis. While all were concerned with pursuing issues that they are mandated to pursue, they truly exuded enthusiasm for farms.

WHY WORKING TO IMPROVE FARM VIABILITY IS IMPORTANT TO COLCHESTER

For Colchester, an important reason to preserve farms is for the open space benefits. The farms in this survey consist of large parcels of land with naturally attractive features such as pastures, woods, and wetlands. The farmers who own them have a strong connection to their land and they care for it well, restoring the nutrients in the soil and maintaining it as a workable asset. The open spaces maintained by farms contribute to the character of the town, making it more desirable to residents and contributing to the full package of characteristics that make the town so appealing to homebuyers.

Furthermore, farms preserve this attractive open land while paying taxes, unlike open land that is owned by governmental or non-profit agencies and removed from the tax list. In fact, farms pay much more in taxes than they cost the town in expenses, in contrast to residential developments which cost more in services than the residents pay in taxes.⁸ Farm taxes, therefore, help to support and balance the town's budget.

Wetlands are vital parts of the town's landscape. They control flooding, purify water, and aid in the recharging of groundwater reserves. Developments often disrupt wetland functions through construction of roads, paving with impervious materials, unauthorized dumping of fill, or changes to surrounding landforms and slopes. Farms, however, preserve natural wetlands and enable them to perform their natural functions.

Farms provide vital natural habitats and travel corridors for wild animals, and this benefits humans. Habitat disruption, which occurs with land development, removes the natural predators in the food chain that keep mosquitoes and vermin in check, thereby increasing the danger to humans from diseases.

Local farms can be an important source of food security. American has become increasingly dependent on food imported from other countries, such as produce from Chile. As oil demand increases, especially from rapidly developing nations such as India and China, oil prices will rise and oil supplies will be less secure. This will inevitably affect the prices of produce and other foods in Colchester. Additionally, major food-producing regions of the U.S. have seen an upswing in the severity and unpredictability of disastrous weather such as droughts, flooding, hurricanes, and frosts. Some of these regions also face severe water shortages during the coming generation due to diminishing ice packs that feed their rivers. Consumers of produce grown in areas such as California or Florida will see a rise in prices and the uncertainty of availability. Therefore, local farms that produce food should not only be preserved, they should be encouraged to expand in order to provide food security and price stability in the future.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY

Several general messages stand out clearly from the comments of the Colchester farmers.

Many of Colchester's Farms Are Businesses:

Farming is, for many of the respondents, a business, and it is a particularly risky and difficult business. Farmers have relatively little control over their costs and their prices. Fuel needed for heavy trucks and tractors has risen well beyond what anyone would have expected a decade ago. Farm labor is extremely difficult to find, and when available, farmers sometimes have to pay higher than average salaries or provide amenities such as lodging. Land value, and, therefore, the taxation of some farmland goes up as development spreads through the town. The money put into fertilizer or labor is easily lost when there is a lack of or excess of rain. Crop or animal diseases can be unpredictable and expensive to fight.

The prices a farmer can ask for his or her products, on the other hand, are kept low. Large grocery store chains establish competitive prices for produce. Their produce may be of lower quality, having been picked early and stored for long periods before sale, but many consumers expect farmers to meet or beat the store prices. Sometimes estate owners with no interest in being farmers may lower the local price for hay by discounting the hay produced on their acreage. In general, many farmers noted that the prices they get for their products don't match or keep pace with the costs of production. One of the most important ways to help farming to continue in Colchester is to help farmers make their businesses thrive. Part of the plan to keep local farmers in town should include economic development support.

Taxes Are An Important Factor in Farm Survival:

Another very clear message from the farmers is their concern about property taxes. By far, respondents feel that 490 A and F taxation, taxing the land based upon its use, not its fair market value, is absolutely essential to their continuation in farming. But many of them expressed concern that their 490 tax status might be removed or denied by administrators who apply definitions for farming that differ from those of the state Department of Agriculture. The issue of 490 taxation (and taxation in general) is so vital to farming in Colchester that the town administration should examine its existing policies, hold a forum where farmers can express their concerns, and make sure that both the farmers and the town are "on the same page" in their understanding of the farm taxation process. Policies that benefit farmers in the area of taxation are essential for ensuring the continuance of farms.

Support From The Town Will Help Farms Thrive:

Farmers in Colchester feel that the town could be much more supportive. "Town support" can take many forms. The town can start by promoting the idea that Colchester is still a farming community and proud of it. Adopt the state's right-to-farm laws and let newcomers

know that farming is a treasured tradition in town. Use various opportunities to communicate to the public the importance of local farms and how products are produced on farms. Help farmers to develop their businesses with economic development services.

Help With Laws and Regulations Is Important:

An area of concern among farmers is its relations with the town administration regarding ordinances and regulatory law. Farmers want the town to use the state's definitions of what activities constitute farming, the state's right-to-farm law in conflicts between non-farmers and farmers over farm smells and farm vehicles, and the state's regulatory oversight for food products. Doing so will standardize expectations; both farmers and the public will have uniform guidelines that are easy to reference, and application of these laws will signal support from the town for farming activities.

Also, where farm activities bump up against the town's regulations, farmers wish that there could be more flexibility on their behalf. Many feel that the town defaults in favor of development and is more willing to make it easy for builders to get variances and exceptions than it is for farmers. Farmers feel that the town is stricter about the land use changes that farmers want to make and less willing to help farmers navigate the regulatory system in a timely fashion. Farmers ask the town to recognize that some regulations – fuel storage limits or classification of cattle food as a hazardous substance, for example – don't make sense for farms.

It seems that everyone today is busy and overextended with their commitments, but many farmers are already working full-time jobs in addition to spending all of their remaining hours farming. Others find that, even as full-time farmers, they need to make the most of their daylight hours on the farm. From early spring to late fall, they need to concentrate on farming, so when they have to interact with the town for changes in their land use, they hope to accomplish the process as expeditiously as possible. A way to show town support would be to look for ways that applications for land use changes on farms could be expedited or streamlined.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS TO SUPPORT THE VIABILITY OF LOCAL AGRICULTURE

Take Action:

The Town government and organizations in town can remind people that Colchester is a farming community. Place signs at town borders that remind visitors that this is a farming community. Feature farm pictures in the town website and in town literature and reports. Install permanent posters at the entrance to Town Hall. Link these materials with names, locations, and the products of town farms so that residents can begin to incorporate these farms into their list of local shopping resources. The goal is to educate the public about Colchester's farms so that they will buy local products and so that incoming home purchasers are aware of existing local farms and their potential impact on a neighborhood.

Government officials, officers in local organizations, and citizens can all think and talk about farming as a positive attribute of Colchester. Think about how it adds to the town, both materially and in terms of town character. Whenever town decisions are made that may affect farming in some way, actively discuss the impact of those decisions on farming, invite critical comment from farmers, and weigh those decisions against the values and benefits that farming confers on the town.

What town economic development mechanisms can be used on behalf of agriculture? Examine ways in which the town's Economic Development Commission can become involved in the support of the farming sector. Discuss whether it is possible to support the town's agricultural producers by listing their farms and products on the town website or as an insert in a town mailing. Examine whether an annual Colchester Farm Day, featuring a driving tour of farms, would be economically useful to local farm owners.

Create an Agricultural Advisory Commission for the town. Include several farmers in its membership. Create an e-mail address list for farmers and other citizens who want to be informed of its meetings and receive the meeting minutes. Let the commission work to make local farmers aware of support and information sources that are available, through a web page with links to educational and organization websites, for example. Consider setting up an on-line bulletin board for local farmers. Make everyone aware of the programs that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture provides, such as their Agriculture Directional Signage. Gauge interest in and need for an additional farmers' market. Use the Agricultural Advisory Commission as a platform to increase two-way communication between town government and farmers. Encourage it to sponsor periodic educational seminars, perhaps in conjunction with other towns or farm organizations, on topics such as farmland succession and retirement planning, conservation easements, marketing techniques, creating value-added products, and family business management.

Educate local students about the role of Colchester's farms in food production and their community, so that they grow up to support their local farms. Encourage schools to make field trips to local farms. Invite farmers to speak on special topics in biology. Hold a discussion in a civics class on today's farms and their role in food security. Ask students to write about the rich history of farming in Colchester and how much farming remains today. Work with the Colchester Historical Society on materials that can be worked into classes on town history and encourage field trips to the Zagrav Farm. See if a plot is available in town for student vegetable gardens. When discussing the food pyramid, show how many foods in the pyramid are produced in Colchester. Contact the Connecticut Agricultural Education Foundation for other classroom ideas.

Invite the public library to come up with ideas for supporting Colchester's identity as a farming community, such as a reading list of books that address modern food supply issues or a permanent display on the town's farming history.

Engage in Further Self-Study:

Consider performing a Cost of Community Services study or look at the results for studies in other communities. These studies are a snapshot of the relationship of tax income to town expense, by sector, at a given point in time. In Connecticut, other parts of New England, and across the U.S. in general, these studies indicate that agricultural activities pay far more in taxes than they require back in town expenses for services.

Examine and define the “town character.” Hold a photo contest for residents of Colchester and ask them to take photos that depict the town character. Hold discussions on what these photos signify, whether the town character needs to be preserved or changed, and how this should be done. Talk specifically about the role of farms in creating town character.

Many communities across the U.S. are developing innovative ways to incorporate equestrian activities into town life and town design. Some towns are encouraging equestrian-based residential developments that preserve open space in the form of riding trails and pasture. Others sponsor public equestrian centers or horse parks, something like small fair-grounds, that provide space for competitive equestrian activities while also maintaining open space that brings in income and can be used for public cultural events. Invite local horse farmers to join the Agricultural Advisory Commission (to be established) in working on developing a business plan for a town horse park. Research and discuss other innovative equestrian developments, public and private, around the U.S. and whether developments such as these should be encouraged in Colchester.

Identify local prime and important soils in town and the parcels in which they occur. This information is important for farmland preservation activities. The Town of Lebanon has already done this and can provide guidance.

Continue Farmland Preservation Activities:

An early objective of this grant project was to create a committee that would create a set of guidelines for establishing preservation priorities for Colchester farmland. One of the goals spoken of during the planning for this survey was to create some type of prioritization list that would help to guide future preservation activities. It is clear from the survey that any prioritization of parcels or zones would be very difficult at this stage. Most of the farmers in the survey are not looking for formal preservation programs (such as conservation easements) to help them keep their farms running. They have made it clear that the best way to preserve farmland in Colchester is to promote activities that support agricultural viability. The review of taxation and other town policies, taking steps to minimize friction between agricultural activities and non-farming residents, and promoting activities that help to increase access to customers will make Colchester a “farm friendly” community and will insure continued interest in farming. Moreover, gaining a wider reputation for these qualities will attract other farmers to the area, helping to assure aging farmers of the ability to sell or rent their farms as farmland.

This is not to say that groups such as the Colchester Land Trust should not be actively seeking farms that can be secured permanently as farms. Some farmers indicated a lack of sufficient knowledge about conservation options to make a fully informed choice. Efforts to bring more information to local farmers on the wide array of support available to them can allow farmers to choose the types of support that best match their interests and needs.

Here is a suggested outline for the town's farmland preservation strategy:

- Begin with a review of town policies that involve the issues already discussed in this report, especially for taxation, zoning, and environmental or health issues. Adopt the state's definitions for farming and their right-to-farm law as town policy. Incorporate a policy to promote agriculture into town planning documents, and examine opportunities to incorporate agricultural priorities into the programs of other departments, as well.
- Create an Agricultural Advisory Board with several farmers as members. Alert members of the farming community and hold a meeting to discuss the town's intention to support and preserve farmland. Create a subcommittee that will become knowledgeable about public and private funding sources for the purchase of land or easements.
- Clarify what the town character is and what town residents think it should be. Identify the town characteristics and other desirable values that farms contribute to. Think about which farms or what types of farms contribute the most to the characteristics that the town wants to preserve, and use this list to form a clear idea of what the town is working toward.
- Hold public discussions on how to modify planning and zoning policies to protect the needs of farms. Are better buffers needed to avoid complaints by residential owners? Can the rules for new development incorporate a priority of preserving prime or important soils intact?
- Create a GIS layer that identifies all prime or important soils and check for the presence of these soils at the earliest stage of any development activity.
- Create a GIS layer that identifies all parcels with 490 tax status and all parcels lacking 490 tax status that are known to be used for agricultural purposes. When new subdivision or industrial/commercial development projects are proposed, make sure that any contiguous agricultural lands are identified early in the planning process.
- Create a map from GIS with various GIS layers identified with farm preservation issues. For example, include the layers of prime and important soils, 490 tax status or agricultural use, public parks and open space, and wetlands. Don't forget to examine the border lands of the contiguous towns and note which farms in Colchester meet up with farmland or open space in other towns.
- Combine the graphic information from this map with the list of desirable characteristics, the list of farms embodying those characteristics, and a list of the total sizes of town farms (some farms are made up of several smaller parcels) in order to create a database of farms that can be ranked for preservation discussion purposes.
- Discuss the products of this work in public meetings for feedback.
- Begin an campaign to educate the public about the importance of farmland to Colchester and the changes and resources needed to enable farmland preservation.
- Organize a seminar under the sponsorship of the proposed Agricultural Advisory Commission or other local organization, such as the Colchester Land Trust, on farm

viability and farmland preservation. Invite speakers from the American Farmland Trust, Connecticut Farmland Trust, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service, University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, New England Farm Transfer, Land for Good, and similar organizations. Include organizations and businesses that specialize in planning, risk management, marketing, or financial services for farms, allowing them to purchase booths or make a presentation. Include presentations by farmers who have used various tools to preserve their farms. Open the invitation to participation by other towns in order to increase the number of presenters and to improve attendance and impact. The booklet Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland, produced by the American Farmland Trust, is an excellent starting point for planning the forum. Send personal invitations to every farmer in town to make sure that they have the opportunity to learn about all of the tools available to help them preserve their farm.

- Whether or not a farmland preservation seminar is held, every farmer should be contacted personally about farmland preservation questions. The farmers who participated in the survey received packets of information about the options available to them. Follow up with these farmers to see if they have questions about the information or whether they want to take the next step.

Non-Governmental Support Activities:

Farmers generally try to support local businesses such as equipment sales and service companies, but in some areas, local business prices are too high for them to consider, given the difficulties of keeping other expenses in check. Some farmers mentioned that it might be worth exploring a cooperative purchasing club for commonly used supplies such as feed.

In support of the suggestion to educate the public on the importance of preserving farms, wetlands, and open space, and an understanding of the ratio of taxes from the farm, residential, and commercial sectors in relation to their public expenses, a non-profit organization might be the best choice for holding a forum on these issues.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

Organizations Mentioned in This Report:

American Farmland Trust, <http://www.farmland.org/>

Connecticut Farmland Trust, <http://www.ctfarmland.org/>

Connecticut Agricultural Education Foundation, <http://www.ctaef.org/>

The Working Lands Alliance of the American Farmland Trust,
<http://www.workinglandsalliance.org/>

Information on Connecticut's soils is available at the following USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website: <http://www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/soils.html>

Suggested Reading:

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life by Barbara Kingsolver, with Steven L. Hopp and Camille Kingsolver (HarperCollins, 2007) chronicles the life of the author's family as they convert to eating only food from local sources. Kingsolver explains in detail the social and economic importance of preserving local farms, and sidebars by Hopp compellingly explain scientific and policy factors.

¹ From the home page of the official town website, <http://www.colchesterct.net>.

² From the town history page of the official town website, <http://www.colchesterct.net/ourhistory.html>, and from Art Liverant, President of the Colchester Historical Society.

³ Colchester's financial contribution to the project comes primarily from staff time used in conjunction with the project activities.

⁴ Information on the State of Connecticut's Agriculture Viability Grants can be found at the Department of Agriculture website under "Programs and Services." <http://www.ct.gov/doag/site/default.asp>

⁵ "Agriculture Viability Grant, Town of Colchester, Inventorying and Ranking Agricultural Land." Jenny Contois, 15 November 2006. This is the grant application submitted to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

⁶ Connecticut General Statutes, sections 12-107a to 12-107f.

⁷ <http://www.farmlink.uconn.edu/>

⁸ Based on the results of numerous Cost of Community Services analyses performed by the American Farmland Trust and others, it has been demonstrated that working lands generate more in tax revenue than they receive back in services. See the following webpage for statistics: http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27757/COCS_8-06.pdf.