**Fayette Agriculture and Forest Resources Profile**

Fayette’s traditional landscape and economy is really owed to our rural resources – agriculture, forest management, and other resource-based activity. Though the time has passed when most of the population owned a farm or worked with timber, rural towns like Fayette still value the traditional land uses that keep our community healthy and productive.

There is another good reason for maintaining farm, forest, and other open space land – they are good for the tax base. Some towns, particularly fast-developing ones, conclude that, in order to get on top of rising taxes and service demands, they have to add to their tax base, usually in the form of more development. But case after case shows that in more undeveloped towns, taxes are lower. The simple fact is that even though open land pays very little in taxes, it costs less than it pays because it makes few demands on public services. The same cannot be said of commercial, residential, or any other type of development.

The American Farmland Trust, a national agricultural advocacy organization, has documented the value of farming to a community in their *Cost of Community Services* studies across the country, including Maine. Their findings: the average home requires about $1.16 in municipal spending for every $1 it generates in tax revenue. The average farm requires only $0.37. That means a community takes two out of every three dollars that farmland owners pay in taxes to provide services to their new tax base. It might make sense, therefore, to keep as much land in farming as possible. New development is not the cure for rising taxes; it is the cause.

**Agriculture in Fayette:**

Farming in Fayette is a vital and continuing part of the community. Agriculture formed the backbone of its economy until recently. A combination of changes in the nature of farming, competition, demand for suburban land, improvements in transporting food and other factors have contributed to a tremendous drop-off in local agriculture. There are, however, signs of a transition in farming, which could benefit both Fayette and its surrounding region.

Farming in Fayette, as in most of New England, has moved from being commodity oriented and land-intensive to being labor-intensive, value-added, and generally smaller-scale and with a local emphasis.

To illustrate: between 1987 and 2012, Kennebec County went from 299 full-time farmers to 276 and total farm acreage dropped from 112,203 acres to 78,050 acres, a 30% decrease. Furthermore, the average size of farms decreased 34% from 195 acres in 1987 to 129 acres in 2012. Yet, the number of farms increased from 576 to 604 and the market value of products sold grew by more than 12% in that same 25-year period. In other words, farms have become smaller, yet more profitable.

Fayette Agriculture Inventory

In Kennebec County, crop sales now account for 29% of all agriculture sales while the remaining 71% is comprised of sales of livestock, poultry, and their associated products. In 1987, just 12% of sales were attributable to specialized crops and 88% came from the sale of livestock, poultry, and their products. The sale of specialized crops has increased significantly in Kennebec County. The same trends are notable in Fayette. As of 2019, just one active dairy farm remains, while several more have found niches that contribute to household income and are compatible with small-scale living. Principal farms in Fayette include:

* Meadow Brook Farm. Dairy and beef. Banford Hill Road.
* Home-Nest Farm. Sheep. Baldwin Hill Road.
* Steep Hill Farm. Blueberries and raspberries. Clyde Wells Road.
* Moose Hill Farm. Christmas Trees, spices. Moose Hill Road.
* Pinkham Farm. Beef.
* Mark Auclair. Beef.
* Leo St. Pierre. Beef.
* Joe Stevenson Beef.
* Bob Gray. Sheep.
* Beaten Path Farm. Goat. Giles Road.
* Marvin Crock. Beef.
* Forest Flagg. Beef.

Soils and Slopes

The Soil Survey of Kennebec County, a set of maps published by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (now Natural Resource Conservation Service), delineates the soils found throughout Fayette, and describes their attributes and limitations.

For the purpose of development planning, we do not need to know the technical details of soils. We are concerned with the limitations that soils may impose on development. Soils may be too saturated or too erodible for construction of foundations, septic systems, or roads. Or the topography (also reflected in soil types) may be too steep for construction. In general, septic systems, for example, are prohibited on slopes in excess of 20 percent. Development restrictions are typically placed on areas of both poorly drained soils and steep or erodible soils.

Poorly drained soils and soils with seasonally high water tables (marine sediments and wetlands) pose problems for road construction, structures with basements, and subsurface waste disposal systems. Such soils occur most extensively in wetlands and along streams and ponds in Fayette. By avoiding such high-cost soils, developers also avoid wetlands.

Soils on steep or erodible slopes are also mapped. However, isolated steep areas tend not to show up on maps, so the best way to regulate development on steep slopes is on a case-by-case basis. The most likely areas in town to encounter slopes of greater than 20 percent are the western shore of Echo Lake, east of Young Road, and Pine Hill. Also, some slopes leading down to lakeshores and streambeds will have areas in excess of 20 percent.

Just as there are soils very difficult and expensive to develop, other soils are very easy. These are not a constraint on development; they are an opportunity. On these soils, we are much less likely to create environmental problems or raise housing costs. These soils, too, are depicted on the map. To the extent possible, we should encourage growth on the best soils.

Prime Agricultural Soils

Fayette possesses fairly extensive areas of prime agricultural soils and farmlands within its boundaries. Prime farmland is that land which has the best soils types nationwide for the production of food for human consumption, feed for livestock forage, and oilseed crops. Prime farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce a sustained high yield of crops while using acceptable farming methods. Prime farmland produces the highest yields and requires minimal amounts of energy and economic resources and farming it results in less damage to the environment. Paxton, Paxton-Charlton and Woodbridge soils occur extensively along the Town’s many ridgelines while Buxton soils lie in lower areas.

Prime farmland soils are among those best suited and easiest to develop, placing competing values upon a limited resource.

Support Efforts

In this era of intensive farming, the quality of the farming support systems may be just as important to successful agriculture as the quality of land and soil. Farmers need the support of infrastructure, from useable roads to equipment dealers to marketing assistance. This is particularly true for the new generation of farmers, who are looking for niche markets and local sales to sustain them.

The Maine Department of Agriculture provides support through publicity, events, and marketing strategies for small farms. Other organizations, such as the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, also provide assistance.

Any local/municipal support efforts? Is use of the state’s Farm and Open Space Tax Law Program encouraged locally? To qualify, designated farmland must consist of at least five contiguous acres and produce gross agricultural income of at least $2,000 annually (in at least one out of the last two years or three out of the last five years).

Any farm machine mechanics? Farm supply outfits? Large animal vets?

Ralph Black. Fayette Ridge Road. Mechanic- performs tractor and farm equipment repair.

**Forest Land:**

Forests contribute to the community in many ways. They provide a source of pleasure and income to landowners and residents. Trees collect water into the landscape and aquifer by intercepting precipitation, reducing the rate of runoff, soil erosion, and phosphorus loading. Forests also bind up soil moisture in an area that may otherwise be subject to seasonal flooding or drought. In addition, they provide outdoor recreation and habitat for wildlife.

Tree Growth Program

Enacted by the Maine Legislature in 1972, the Tree Growth Tax Law helps Maine landowners maintain their property as productive woodlots and incentivizes the designation by reduced valuation and tax burden.

Land enrolled in Tree Growth in Fayette includes TBD. While the smaller wood lots may not qualify for Tree Growth classification, some forest owners find the Tree Growth Program to be too onerous, in the form of its penalties or requirements for management plans. To address this, landowner outreach is needed. Dependent upon the State’s financial standing, the Town is sometimes reimbursed for a portion of the property tax reduction from this program.

Small-scale forestry activities are the norm in Fayette. While forestland comprises much of the land cover in Fayette, only a small portion of that is commercial forest.

Statewide, Certified Tree Farms and forestland registered under the Tree Growth Program make up what is generally recognized as working forests. However, the State allows all parcels of land over ten acres with commercial tree species to be classified.

Timber Harvest

Because wooded land is so extensive, not just in Fayette but also throughout the State, people tend to take its presence for granted and not to think about its gradual disappearance as development continues throughout the area. However, forests add another dimension to the local economy. The clearest example is in the harvesting of timber. According to landowner reports to the Maine Forest Service, between 1991 and 2017, Fayette landowners averaged 25 timber harvest operations per year. Each operation averaged about 18 acres. Most harvests were a selection of individual or small groups of trees; just 2% of harvested trees were clear cuts. Most of the land was left to grow back into forest; “Change in land use” was the reason for cutting in only 1.7% of cases.

It is worth noting that the last significant clearcut harvest in Fayette occurred in 2000 when 16 acres were harvested using clearcut measures. Of the 246 acres harvested by clearcut since 1991, 240 acres were harvested in 2000 or earlier.

Any local timber businesses like firewood suppliers or sawmills?

There are firewood suppliers (Dead Peppers, Matt Chalmers) and forester consultants (John Churchill, Joe Stevenson) in town.

**Mineral Resources:**

Mineral extraction in the town of Fayette generally means gravel extraction. The occurrence of gravel pits is limited to areas of gravel-bearing soils. These soils are usually either glacial formations or outwash plains. These occur in few locations in Fayette, predominantly around Mosher Pond. Because of the lack of significant gravel-bearing soils, gravel pits are a relatively small issue in Fayette. The only licensed mining facility in Town, under the DEP’s performance standards, is the Horne Pit, which is an active gravel pit. A second pit, the Mercier Pit, is located on Chesterville Ridge Road.

Nevertheless, due to the potential for impact on groundwater aquifers and lake watersheds, the town must be sensitive to any future development of open pits, for gravel, topsoil, or other resources.

Much of mineral bearing locations currently protected by local land use restrictions (resource protection and shoreland).

**Other:**

A great discussion was had regarding community gardens and advocating for their creation in town. Should certainly be included in survey questionnaire.

**4. Agricultural and Forest Resources**

A. **State Goal**

To safeguard the State's agricultural and forest resources from development which threatens those resources.

B. **Analyses**

To generate minimum analyses to address state goals, use Conditions and Trends data in Section 3.4(C) to answer the following questions.

(1) How important is agriculture and/or forestry and are these activities growing, stable, or declining?

(2) Is the community currently taking regulatory and/or non-regulatory steps to protect productive farming and forestry lands? Are there local or regional land trusts actively working to protect farms or forest lands in the community?

(3) Are farm and forest land owners taking advantage of the state's current use tax laws?

(4) Has proximity of new homes or other incompatible uses affected the normal farming and logging operations?

(5) Are there large tracts of agricultural or industrial forest land that have been or may be sold for development in the foreseeable future? If so, what impact would this have on the community?

(6) Does the community support community forestry or agriculture (i.e. small woodlots, community forests, tree farms, community gardens, farmers’ markets, or community-supported agriculture)? If so, how?

(7) Does the community have town or public woodlands under management, or that would benefit from forest management?

C. **Conditions and Trends**

Minimum data required to address Analyses:

(1) The community’s Comprehensive Planning Agriculture and Forestry Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Department of Agriculture, the Maine Forest Service, and the Office, or their designees.

(2) A map and/or description of the community’s farms, farmland, and managed forest lands and a brief description of any that are under threat.

(3) Information on the number of parcels and acres of farmland, tree growth, and open space enrolled in the state’s farm, tree growth, and open space law taxation programs, including changes in enrollment over the past 10 years.

(4) A description of any community farming and forestry activities (e.g. community garden, farmer’s market, or community forest).

D. **Policies**

Minimum policies required to address state goals:

(1) To safeguard lands identified as prime farmland or capable of supporting commercial forestry.

(2) To support farming and forestry and encourage their economic viability.

E. **Strategies**

(1) Minimum strategies required to address state goals: Consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices as required by 12 M.R.S.A. §8869.

(2) Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.

(3) Amend land use ordinances to require commercial or subdivision developments in critical rural areas, if applicable, maintain areas with prime farmland soils as open space to the greatest extent practicable.

(4) Limit non-residential development in critical rural areas (if the town designates critical rural areas) to natural resource-based businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farmers’ markets, and home occupations.

(5) Encourage owners of productive farm and forest land to enroll in the current use taxation programs.

(6) Permit land use activities that support productive agriculture and forestry operations, such as roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, sawmills, log buying yards, and pick-your-own operations.

(7) Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation that supports them in local or regional economic development plans.