

A green metal basket filled with harvested cauliflower and leafy greens, sitting in a field of similar crops. The image has a green tint and a white border.

REGIONAL AGRICULTURE FARM VIABILITY STUDY

PLANNERS LUNCH - AUGUST 20, 2025

Project Funding



DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

This project was funded in part by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Farm Viability Grant established by the Community Investment Act (C.G.S. Sec. 22-26j).

Consultant Team



AGRITECTURE
CONSULTING

Project Management



The Edible Group

Agenda

- Study Objectives
- Methodology
- Existing Conditions
- Key Findings: Survey
- Key Findings: Interviews
- Key Findings: Code Review
- Regional Recommendations
- Continuing Efforts
- Questions/Comments



Project Objectives

1. Identify and describe impediments to and opportunities for the growth of farming in the region
2. Propose and facilitate the implementation of best practices and recommendations to realize this growth
3. Explore the economics of agriculture at the micro and macro level by examining business opportunities, regulatory and technical obstacles, and innovations

The study shall be informed by a Study Advisory Committee comprising stakeholders with relevant expertise or interest.



Fort Hill Farm, New Milford, CT

Methodology

1. Inventory of Local Farms, Support Organizations
2. One-on-One Interviews with Stakeholders
3. Survey to Local Residents - 330 responses
4. Regulatory Review of 18 Municipalities
5. Meetings with Study Advisory Committee
6. Sustainability Analysis for Local Policymakers
7. Report Drafted, Reviewed, and Finalized



Warrup's Farm, Redding, CT

Inventory and Existing Conditions

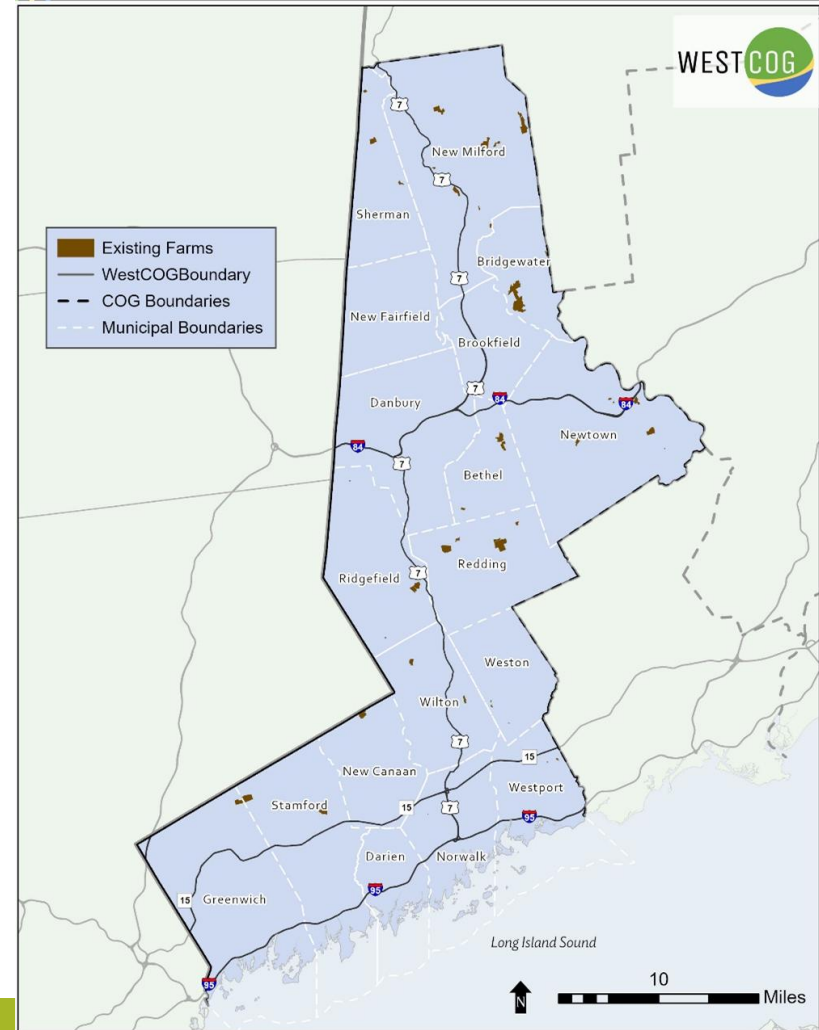
- **Inventory of Current Active Farmland and Farms**
- **GIS Analysis:**
 - **Potential Commercial Farmland**
 - **Potential Hobby/Secondary Use Farmland**



Stuart Family Farm, Bridgewater, CT

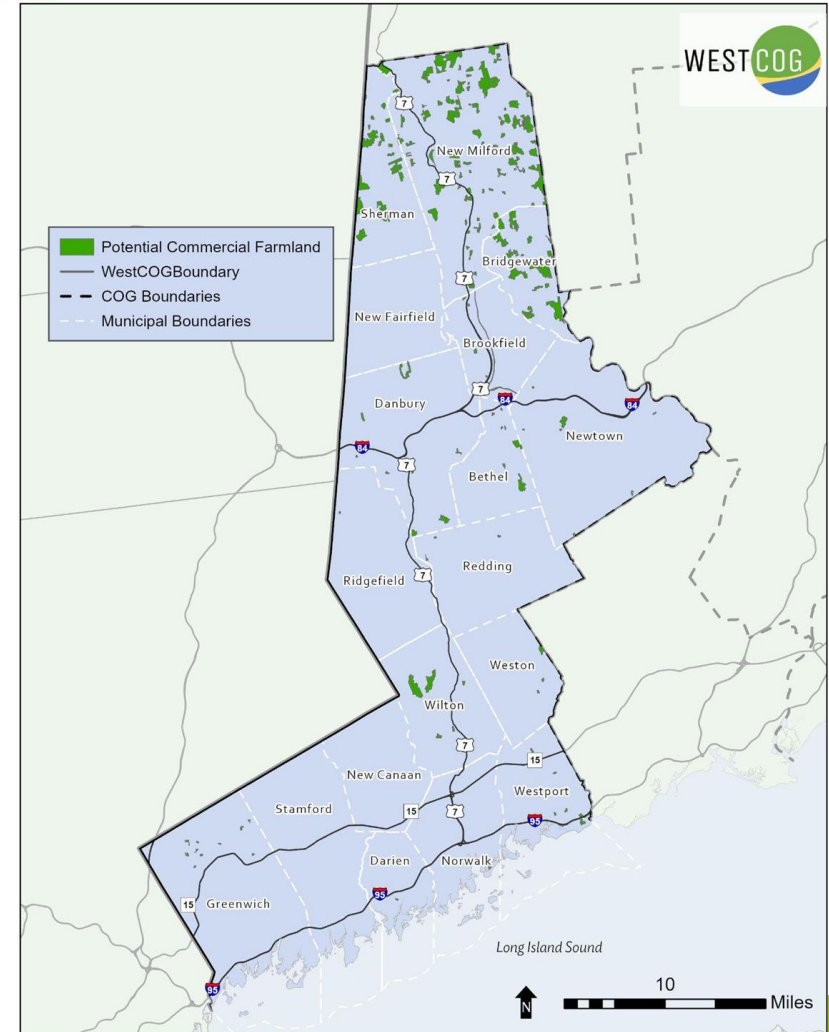
Current Active Commercial Farmland

- ~60 farms
- Diverse production methods
- Direct-to-consumer focus
- Agritourism



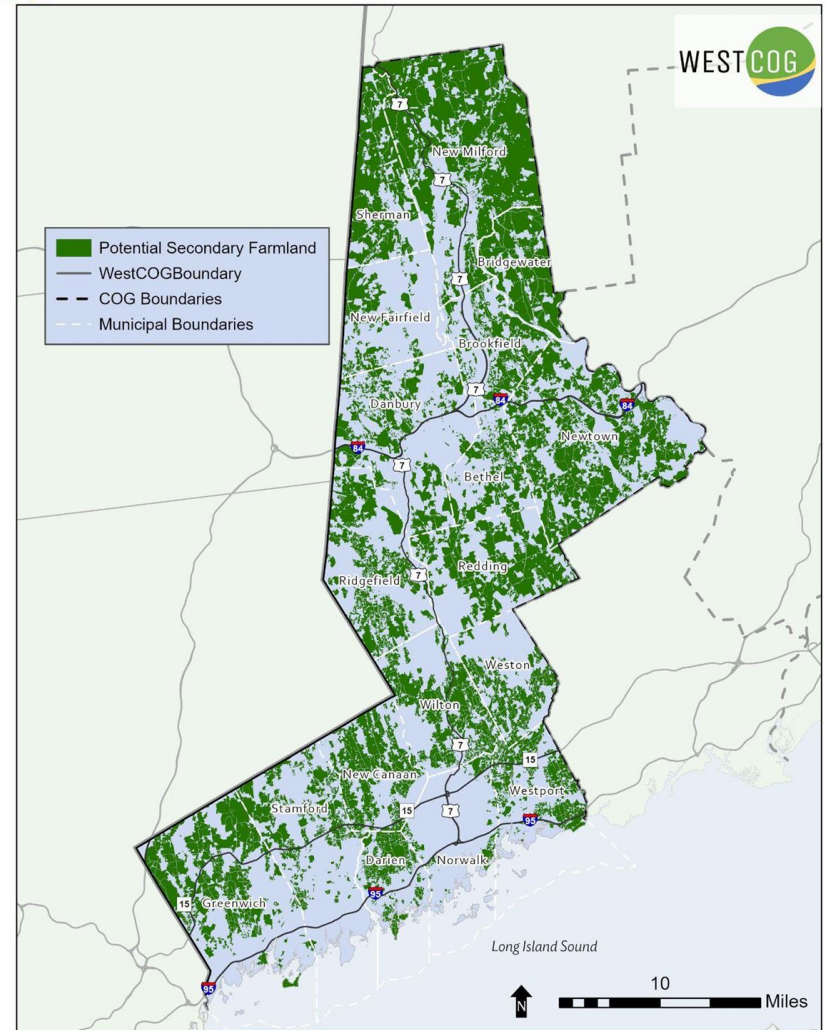
Potential Commercial Farmland

- 3-acre parcels
- Excluding state forestland and tree canopy covered land
- Excluding wetlands or watercourses
- No permanent structures
- 2 miles from Superfund sites
- <10% slope
- Prime Farmland (any)



Potential Secondary Farmland

- 1-acre parcels in Residential Zone
- Excluding state forestland
- Excluding wetlands or watercourses
- 2 miles from Superfund sites
- <10% slope
- Prime Farmland (any)



Survey

- 331 responses
- 15/18 municipalities
- 16 farmers
- Flyer distribution

**Do you care about
local farming
in Connecticut?**
(¿Te preocupa la agricultura local
en Connecticut?)

Take 5 minutes to tell us why!
(¡Tómate 5 minutos para contarnos por qué!)

[HTTPS://WWW.SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/5DSC5GB](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5DSC5GB)

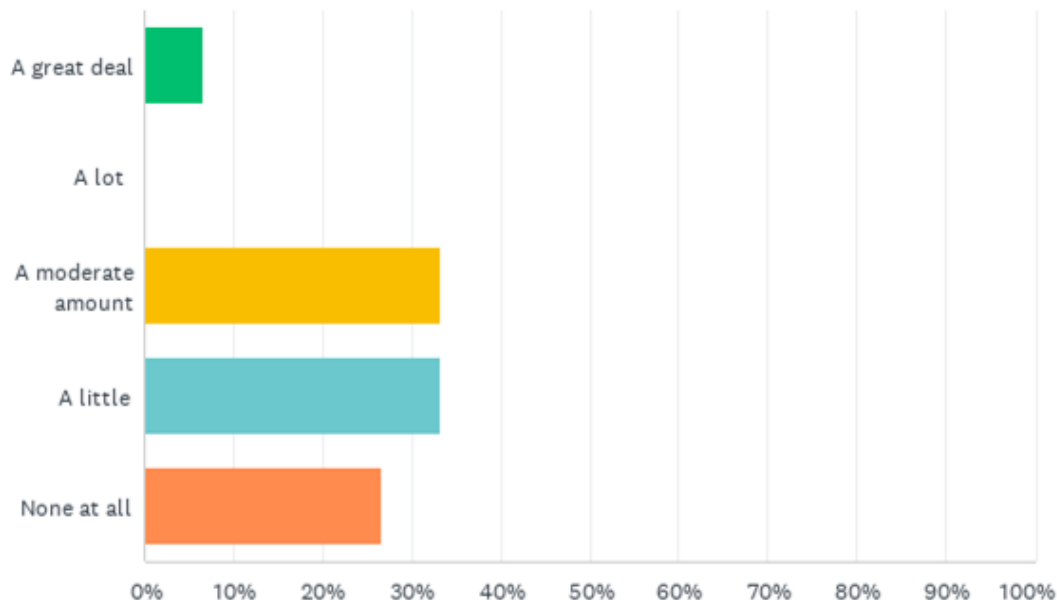


**This survey will inform the Western Connecticut
Regional Farm Viability Study**
(Esta encuesta informará el Estudio de viabilidad
agrícola regional del oeste de Connecticut)

WEST COG

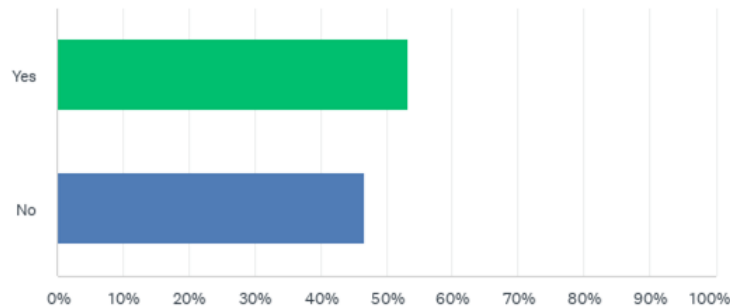
Survey Results (Farmers)

(Farmers) Are there zoning or permitting restrictions negatively affecting your farm?

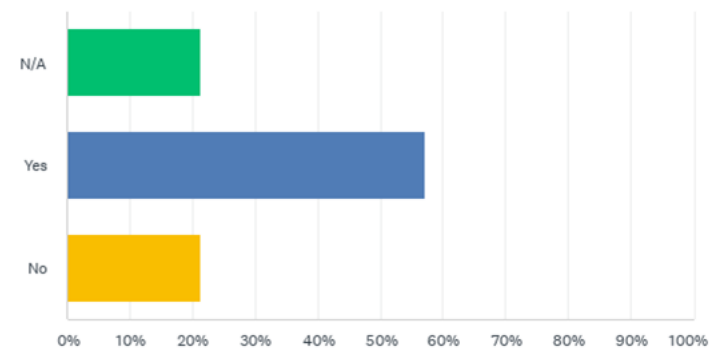


Survey Results (Farmers)

Have you spoken with your town about code, permit, or zoning issues before?

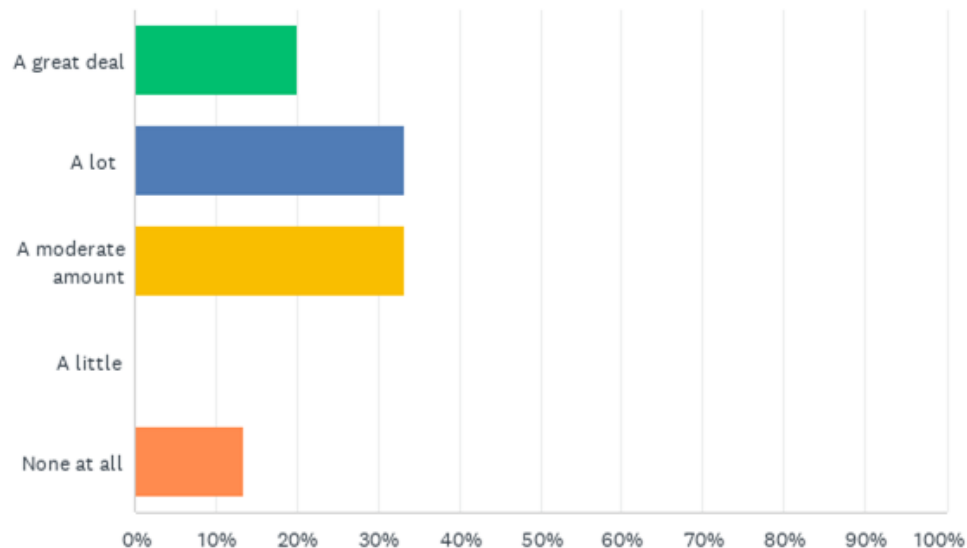


Q8 If not, do you know who you could speak with?



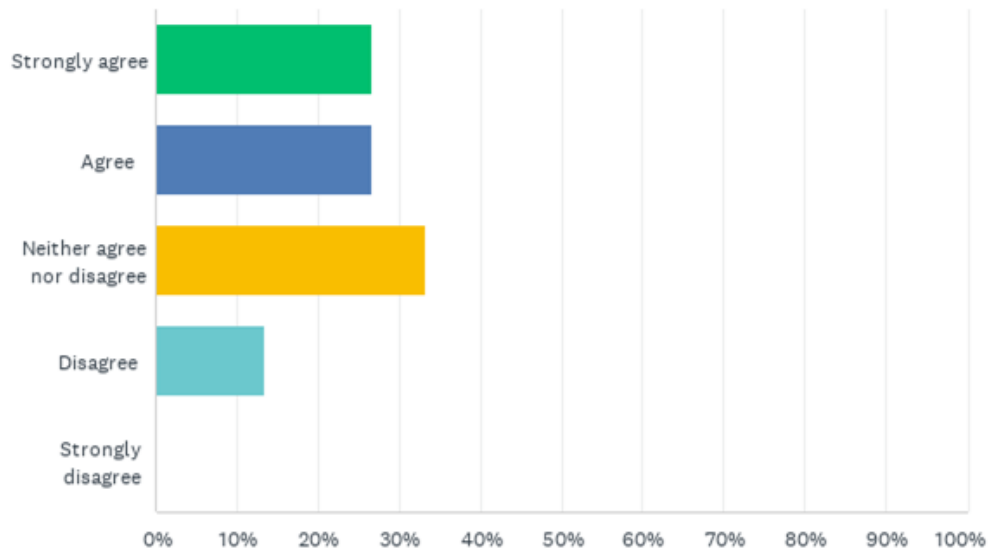
Survey Results (Farmers)

Q11 Is there additional demand for these services that you could expand to meet if given the financial and technical support to do so?



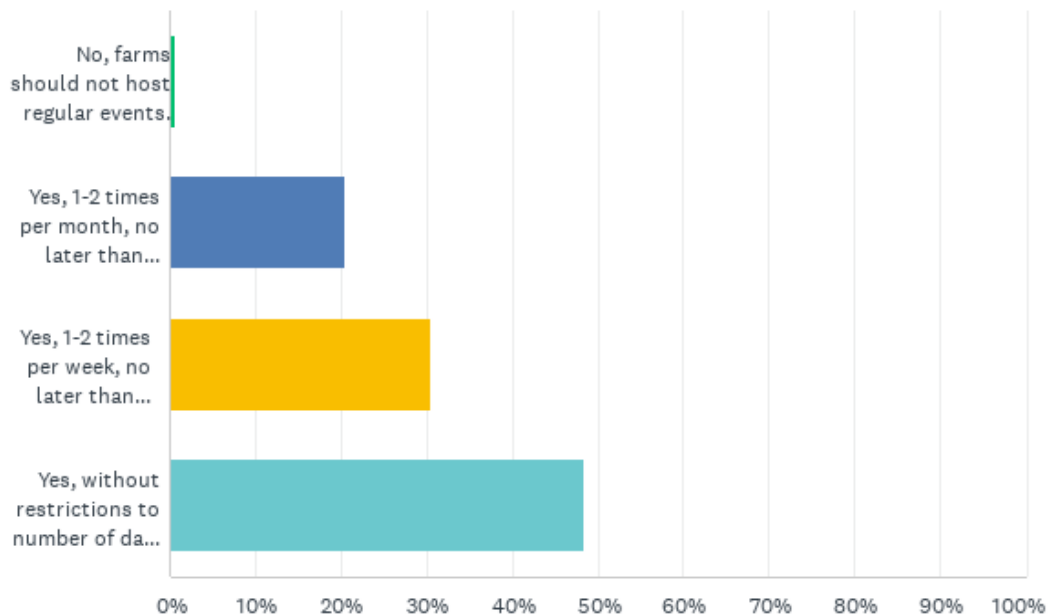
Survey Results (Farmers)

Q12 Agree/Disagree with the following statement: I am hopeful about the future of farming in the region and my farm is heading in the right direction.



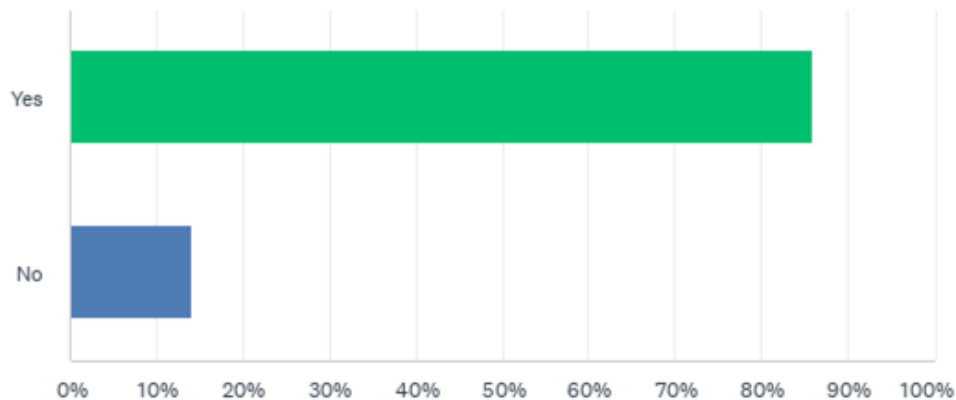
Survey Results (Residents)

Q17 Should farms be able to host regular events (given enough parking is available)? Which statement do you most agree with?



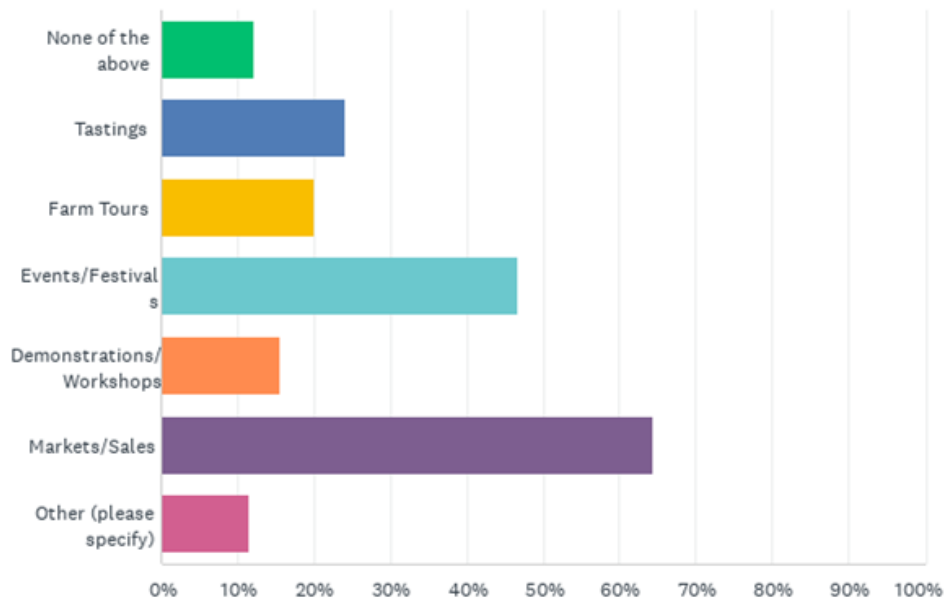
Survey Results (Residents)

Q18 In the past year, have you visited a farm in your municipality (or nearby municipality) to purchase food, take a tour, or engage in other agritourism activities?

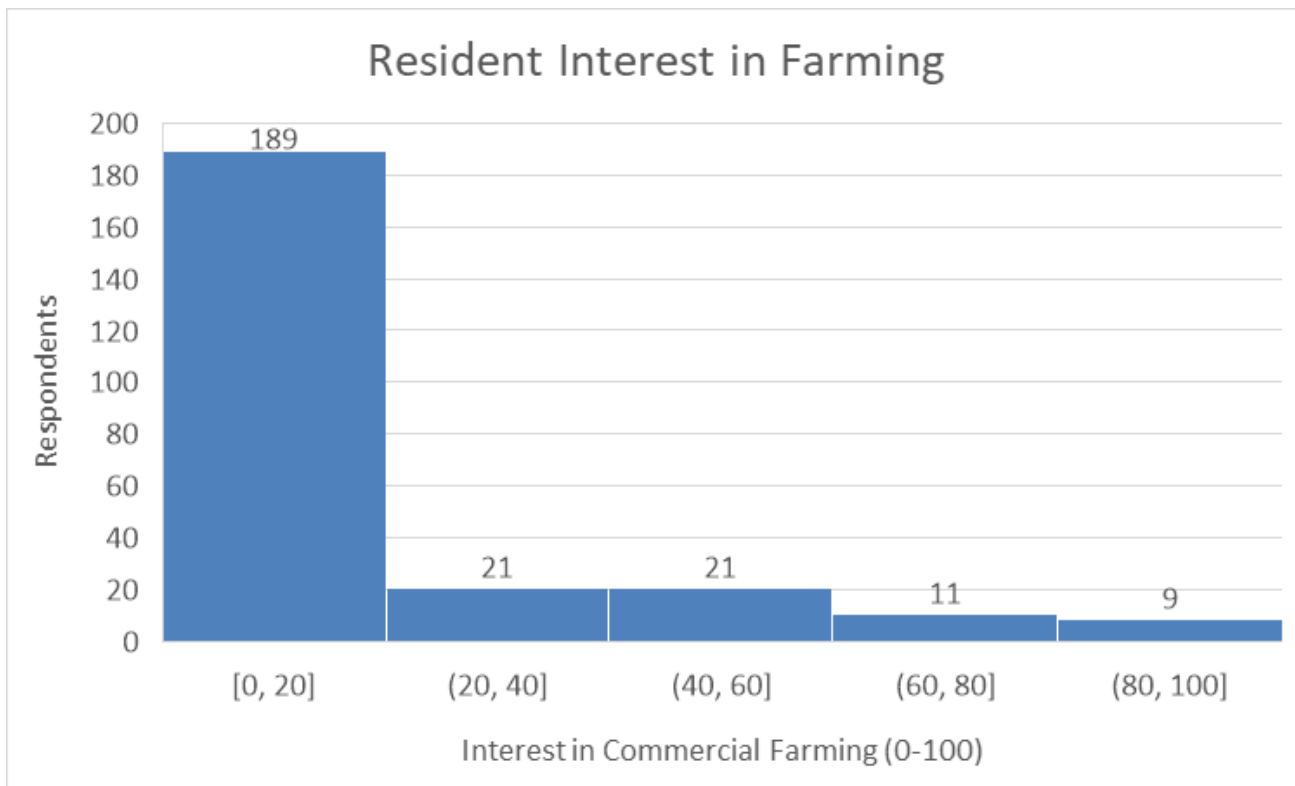


Survey Results (Residents)

Q19 If yes, what activities did you engage in? Select all that apply.



Survey Results (Residents)



Survey Results Summary

Farmers (n=16):

- Very optimistic about market opportunities
- Moderate amount of code/zoning interaction and obstacles
- Moderate experience with Agritourism

Residents (n=315):

- Newtown, New Milford, Greenwich most respondents
- Very supportive of farms, farm events, financing
- Very engaged demographic - sampling bias
- Some interest in commercial farming - 20/331



Feedback from Interviews & Code Review

- 25 – One-on-One Interviews with Farmers, Planners, Regulators and Industry Professionals
- Town Employees mostly helpful and friendly
- Regulations outdated (dairy farming, no CEA)
- Minimum lot size for farms slowing pipeline of new farmers
- Event Permitting time and expense is a burden
 - Municipal (Health) and State (Alcohol)
- Farmers Markets often saturated, especially vegetables
- PA 490 tax abatements helpful, not enough



Technical Code Review

Code Review Process:

- Planning Documents Reviewed (Zoning Regulations, Code of Ordinances, POCD)
- Critical Definitions Identified
- Strengths and Challenges Identified
- Recommendations for New Language and Statutes

Bethel, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Adopting "Right to Farm" language in Town Ordinances would strengthen the support of agriculture. A few other minor shifts in Zoning Regulation language could also increase support.

Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Bethel Zoning Regulations](#) (12/1/2021)

[Town of Bethel Code of Ordinances](#) (9/6/2022)

[Bethel POCD](#) (12/12/2019)

Critical Definitions:

FARMING – *The growing of crops, hay, fodder, ensilage, pasturage, orchards, gardens, nursery stock and related agricultural production, including the raising of domestic animals and poultry, and the sale of agricultural products directly resulting from such cultivation, within limits prescribed by these regulations. The term "farming" shall not include the growth, sale, preparation, or distribution of marijuana or marijuana, products.*

Strengths:

- Subdivision Regulations consider agriculture an acceptable open space use
- Agricultural use is allowed without a permit in all residential zones (most rural land is designated low density residential)
- Agricultural use is allowed in all zones other than the Village Center
- On-site farm product sales are allowed (even in residential districts)
- Farming definition is relatively inclusive
- No minimum farm size

Challenges:

- Bethel POCD speaks little to agriculture
- On-site retail sale of agricultural goods requires residence on the sales site
- Greenhouse requirements are fairly prohibitive
- Poultry requirements are quite prohibitive (far too proscriptive)
- No consideration of agritourism

Recommendations:

1. Adopt Right to Farm language in Town Ordinances (see New Milford)
2. Include more support for agriculture in the POCD
3. Remove residence requirement for on-site sales

Feedback from Code Review

- **Some Municipalities don't refer to Agriculture**
 - If not expressly approved, it may be prohibited
- **Some zoning regulations can be overly restrictive**
 - Requirements for paved parking spots, permanent bathrooms, setbacks
- **Farming not always allowed as an accessory use**
 - Goal: By Right in all zones as primary and accessory
- **POCDs set up for preserving existing business, not developing new ag. businesses**
 - Need new businesses regularly

Regional Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION			
Description	<div>1. Update and Streamline Agriculture Regulations</div> <div>2. Improve Interaction with State and Federal Government</div> <div>3. Establish or Expand Collaborative Communication</div>		
Solutions & Initial Actions			
Who Leads/ Who Supports			
Success Metrics/ Indicators			

RECOMMENDATION 1: Update and Streamline Agriculture Regulations

1

2

SOLUTIONS

Support Implementation of Eighteen Municipal-Specific Recommendations

Reduce Barriers to Event Permitting

1. Distribute Briefing Sheets to Relevant Town Officials
2. Identify and Resolve any issues with Code Updates in terms of local statutes or public preference
 - a. Consult with stakeholders if needed
3. Consult with Farmers to Measure Progress

1. Convene Town Planners and Farmers to Identify Onerous Permitting Processes
 - a. “Limited Duration Special Use Permit” - Redding -
 - b. “Temporary Event Permit” - New Milford
2. Distribute Sample Language and Forms to Standardize Event Permitting
 - a. Similar to WestCOG’s role with affordable housing

INITIAL ACTIONS

WestCOG | Town Planners | Stakeholders

Town Planners | WestCOG | Farmers

WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS

RECOMMENDATION 2: Improve Interaction with State and Federal Government

1

2

SOLUTIONS

Consider the inclusion of farm residence in property tax abatement if farming is the primary land use

Consider Grants for Land Acquisition Costs for New and Beginning Farmers

INITIAL ACTIONS

1. Speak with the owners and farmers of Worroff's Farm to understand the context and need for this policy
2. Facilitate discussions between farmers, state legislators, and local officials on implementing a pilot program
3. Consider mechanisms to prevent misuse by hobby farms and homesteads
4. Launch pilot with 3-10 farmers and measure impact on economic viability

1. Establish a “state or local policy consistent with the purposes of ALE” that supports municipalities in their procurement of development-prone farmland in CT
 - a. Importance of protecting local farmland for food security, climate change mitigation, and social and environmental wellbeing
2. Speak with CT NRCS representatives to ensure policies align with the national ALE program

WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS

WestCOG | Farmers | State Legislature

WestCOG | Chief Elected Officials | Municipal Economic Development Officials

RECOMMENDATION 3: Establish or Expand Collaborative Communication

1

2

SOLUTIONS

Convene Land Use Planners, Conservation Officers, and Economic Development Specialists to Share Best Practices

Connect Farmers to Technical, Financial, and Workforce Assistance

INITIAL ACTIONS

1. Identify practitioners for collaboration (SAC)
 - a. Establish Quarterly Working Group
2. Share best practices for municipal purchasing of farmland development rights
3. Share best practices for land trust/municipal collaboration
4. Share best practices for farmworker housing
5. Share best practices for Agritourism, including farm stays and short-term rentals

1. Create a dedicated WestCOG webpage for new farmers
 - a. Inquire with municipalities to establish similar
2. Increase awareness of ag-education opportunities
3. Support municipal grants based on demonstrated interest in farm development
4. Promote pathways for youth internships and entrepreneurship
5. Increase awareness of farm-labor programs
 - a. Collaborate with NRCS and FSA to disseminate information about H2A

WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS

WestCOG | Municipal Planners | Stakeholders

WestCOG | Farmers

Continuing Efforts

Briefing Sheets sent out to municipal planners

- Targeted recommendations for each

Land Use Commissioner training (available on website)

Working with UConn Extension Urban Agriculture Program

- Vacant Lot Activation project
- Grant-funded (USDA)
- Expanding urban/peri-urban agriculture by connecting farmers with underutilized land.
- Various partners across southwestern CT
 - WestCOG, MetroCOG, NVCOG
 - UConn CLEAR
 - Aspetuck Land Trust, Connecticut Land Conservation Council
 - Ag Groups – CFT, Land For Good



Vacant Land Activation Project

Project Methodology

1. Identify viable vacant parcels across region
 - Municipal or land trust ownership
 - Consult with farmers to develop suitability criteria
 - GIS Analysis performed by COGs and student intern
 - Work w/ local planners to prioritize
2. Work with owners to develop leasing agreements
 - Support from Land For Good & COGs
3. Match parcels with new/prospective urban farmers



THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, CONCERNS?