

## Committed to Agriculture in Durham

Life is full of “Aha” moments both at work and at home. I personally experienced that feeling when I received a publication called “Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities” prepared by CCM and the American Farmland Trust. I opened it up with a bit of smugness because after all, this is Durham, home to dairy farms and the largest agricultural fair in the State; surely we are a model of agricultural success. I didn’t have to read too far into the guide before I realized that although we did have much to be proud of, we had much work to do as well. Does our governmental organization reflect our commitment? Do our taxing policies assist farming viability? Do our land use regulations hinder or support agricultural activities? In short, is the Town of Durham an agriculture friendly town?

With the support of the Board of Selectmen and our Town Planner, Geoff Colegrove, I set up a workshop with the American Farmland Trust and CCM that was very well attended and a working group from our agricultural community was formed. That led to a grant application for 25 hours of technical assistance from the good people at American Farmland Trust which was awarded last month. We are seeking assistance to achieve the following goals; to form an agriculture commission to provide an advocate for agricultural interests, to promote agricultural activities, to pursue farm friendly legislation, to study special taxation opportunities, to protect farmland, to encourage “buy local”, to further develop and promote the Farmers Market; to create an inventory and map of agriculture resources; to reclaim farmland lost to erosion and mismanagement. If you would like to get involved with the working group, please contact my office at 349-3625 for a schedule of the upcoming meetings.

At this point, we are not quite sure where our efforts will lead; however, there are a few things we know for sure. Supporting agriculture in Durham will have fiscal, economic, environmental and recreational benefits. Cost of community services studies have shown that farmland and open space generate more public revenue than they require in municipal services. Farms provide jobs and help support the local and state economy representing one of the only sectors experiencing growth. Because farmers depend on natural resources, they become good stewards of the land and environment. Our working farms provide rural character and attract tourists to our community. Our open space provides opportunities for recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, running, walking, etc.

Last week I attended Agriculture Day at the State Capitol. I was so proud to see so many of our residents representing so many different aspects of our agriculture community. A group of residents and I met with legislators as did Selectman Jim McLaughlin to discuss legislative issues related to agriculture. Also, please join us on May 7<sup>th</sup> when the Durham Farmer’s Market opens on our green. The Farmer’s Market committee has been busy all winter making improvements and recruiting new vendors to provide fresh locally grown products for your enjoyment.