



**Working Lands Forum II:
*“The Growing Local Challenge”***

Impediments to Local Agriculture

**THE DILEMMA OF
MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S
AGRICULTURAL RESERVE:
Competing interests of agricultural
and open space preservation**

12-4-09

**Public
Desires**

Disconnect

**Economic and
Regulatory
Environment**

Disconnect

**Agriculture in
the County**

Public Recommendations and Desires

The nonfarm community:

- Wants the Benefits of Agriculture Without the Sacrifice: Noise, Dust, Odors, Traffic
- Wants to Reduce Rooftops/Housing to Preserve Viewsheds
- Wants More Farmers Markets
- Wants More Opportunities to Buy Local, and from CSAs
- Wants More Locally Grown Organic Products
- Is willing to Pay a Premium Price for Fresh/Local Products (according to 2007 Policy Choices Survey: http://scpp.ubalt.edu/pdfs/SCPP_Fall_07_12607.pdf)
- Has interest in the Environment and Sustainable Agriculture
- Has a View of Farm Animals that is Incompatible with Modern Food Production

The public's desires are not being fulfilled because of...

The Economic Reality of Farming

Few people want to enter the direct agricultural marketing business because of:

- Availability/Cost of Land, Labor and Housing
- Excessive Federal, State and County Regulations
- Hard Work - Disillusionment
- Low Return on Investment, Meaning that Farmers Seek Off-Farm Income
- Rising Cost of Production – Fuel, Fertilizer, Insurance, Taxes
- Weather Constraints and access to water
- Cost of Pests/Disease/Deer Control
- Difficult Organic Certification Process
- Demand for New Technical Assistance, Education/Outreach for Direct –Market Products
- Demand for Support Structures – RS Service Zone and Housing

Because of these challenges, the County's agricultural industry has difficulty attracting new farmers. There is a conflict between open space preservation and agricultural preservation. Open space will only be preserved if agriculture remains economically viable.


The Current Agricultural Environment

Montgomery County has:

- An Aging Demographic – Average Age of County Farmers is 57 years old
- 14 Farmers Markets – Downcounty/Not on Farms (see reverse)
- 15 Farm Markets – Upcounty/On Farms
- 4 CSAs
- 50 total fruit/vegetable producers
- 10 direct-market livestock operations

The County does not have enough producers to support its current farmers markets. Many of the County's 50 direct producers have reached production capacity and cannot participate in farmers markets.

General Observations

- Regional Food Production will require thinking differently about local agriculture
 - Regional Food Production does not necessarily mean it must compete at the expense of traditional agriculture
 - Fruit and Vegetable production tends to attract a younger demographic and mostly women
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A New Way of Thinking Presents New Kinds of Challenges

- An increase in regional food production will require some innovative thinking and approaches as well as and buy in from all vested parties.
- Water Supply – Need to Identify ways to encourage on farm water storage – **Challenges** – Buy in from Regulatory/Environmental Community
- Smaller/Intensive farming operations will require need for on farm worker housing. **Challenges** - Current Climate is for less rooftops in Ag Reserve, as well as access to farm labor including documented migratory labor that will reflect new immigration policies.

A New Way of Thinking Presents New Kinds of Challenges

- Seasonal Agriculture – To go beyond the limitations of our current growing season will require developing and gaining acceptance of food production infrastructure needs (Greenhouses and Green energy Production)
- **Challenges** – Need for Ag Friendly Zoning: Green houses are considered commercial structures and usually require special exceptions. Tax assessment policies consider green houses as commercial structures.
- **Greatest Challenge** - Must bring together the different philosophies associated with open space preservation vs agricultural land preservation

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Successful Approaches

- Local Farmers Markets – As Farmers expand their customer base they migrate from Local Farmers Markets, to CSA's and their own on Farm Markets.
- Farm Incubator initiatives – Look at public lands in agricultural areas as the medium to begin start up ag enterprises through long term lease agreements. http://www.gazette.net/stories/04142010/poolnew190628_32564.php
- Identify ways to create incentives for long term lease agreements for fruit and vegetable production.

