

Section 9

Agriculture

Agriculture played an important role in the settlement and history of the town of Middlefield. It remains a strong element of the town's character and continues to enhance the quality of life for our residents. From the planting of grain, hay and orchards in the mid-1700's to the large dairy and poultry farms in the mid-1900's, to the present-day dairy farms, orchards, Christmas trees and hay, the town's name is synonymous with agriculture. This identity is exemplified through the participation of Middlefield business, residences and civic organizations in the annual agricultural fair in Durham.

Agriculture links our present with the past through a landscape of fields and pastures, stone walls and weathered barns; it has been shaped by generations of Middlefield's hard-working families. This landscape, cherished by so many, is often taken for granted. Some of its benefits are obvious: the bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables in the spring and summer months, pumpkins, hay, Christmas trees, boarding and training of horses and maple syrup in the spring; as well as milk and dairy products year-round. Other benefits are less obvious: the local revenue and jobs that these farms provide, the recreational and tourism opportunities that they create and the wildlife habitat and other environmental benefits that they offer.

- Preserves the town's heritage
- Contributes to our town's scenic character
- Provides opportunities for economic development
- Provides local produce and other agricultural products to residents and others
- Provides local employment and diversifies our economy
- Offers educational experiences and tourism benefits
- Adds value to our tax base.

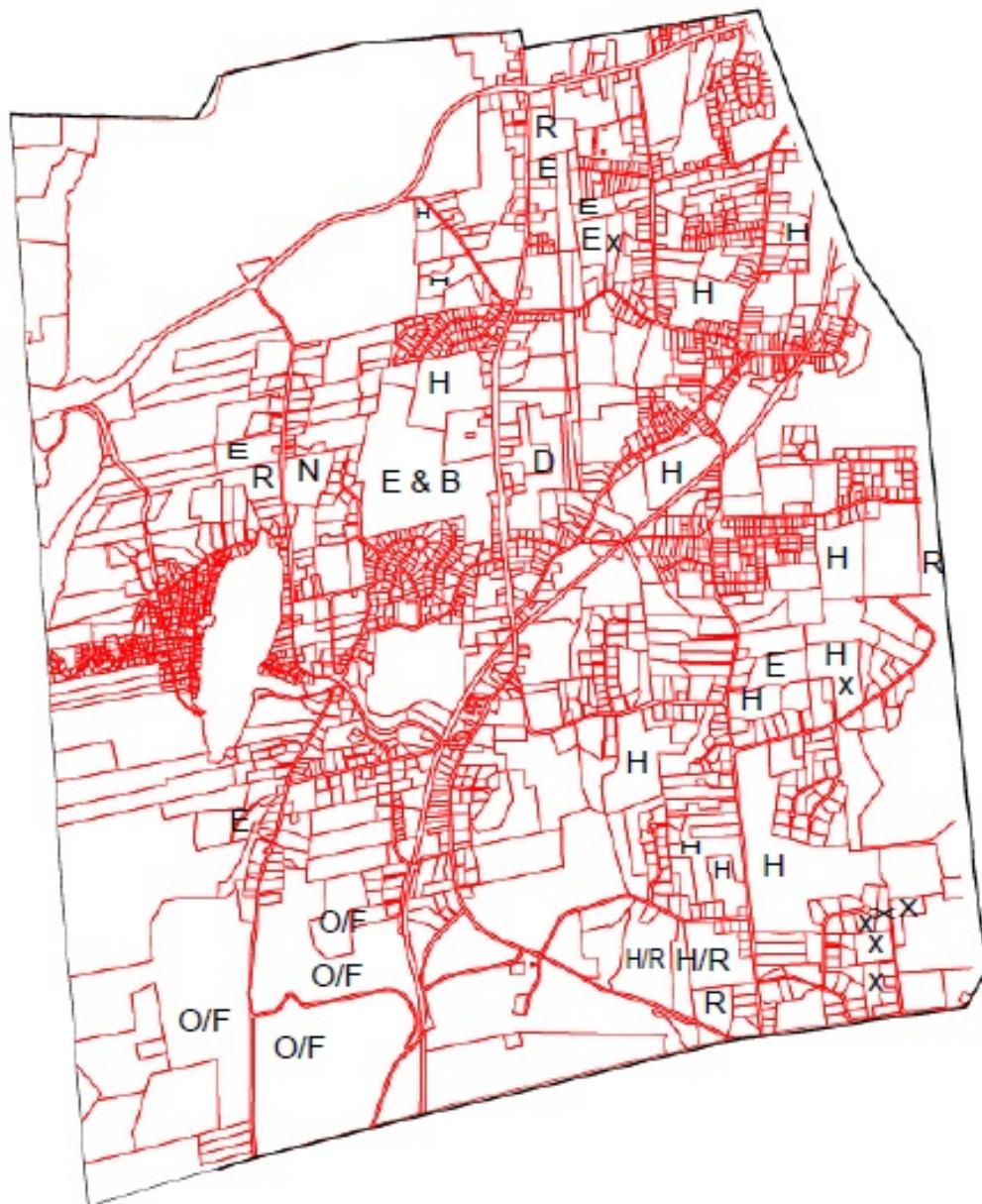
AGRICULTURAL PROPERTIES THIRTY ACRES OR LARGER

Property Owner	Crop	Acreage
Connwood Forester Inc.	Christmas Trees	30
Zygo	Hay	31
Tom Dumas	Christmas Trees	36
CT Light & Power	Hay	41
George & Dorothy Pogmore	Hay & Row Crops	103
Triangle A Ranch, LLC and Triangle Stables, LLC	Beef and Equestrian	146
Town of Middlefield	Hay	157
Lyman Farms Inc.	Orchard & Fruit	460
TOTAL ACREAGE		1004*

*This total represents the acreage of the parcel and not the actual cultivated or farmed area which is less.

The total acreage noted above constitutes approximately 8 percent of the total land area of Middlefield. Properties which exceed seven acres and have an identified agricultural activity on them are depicted on the following map showing the existing use.

Town Of Middlefield Connecticut



AGRICULTURAL AREAS

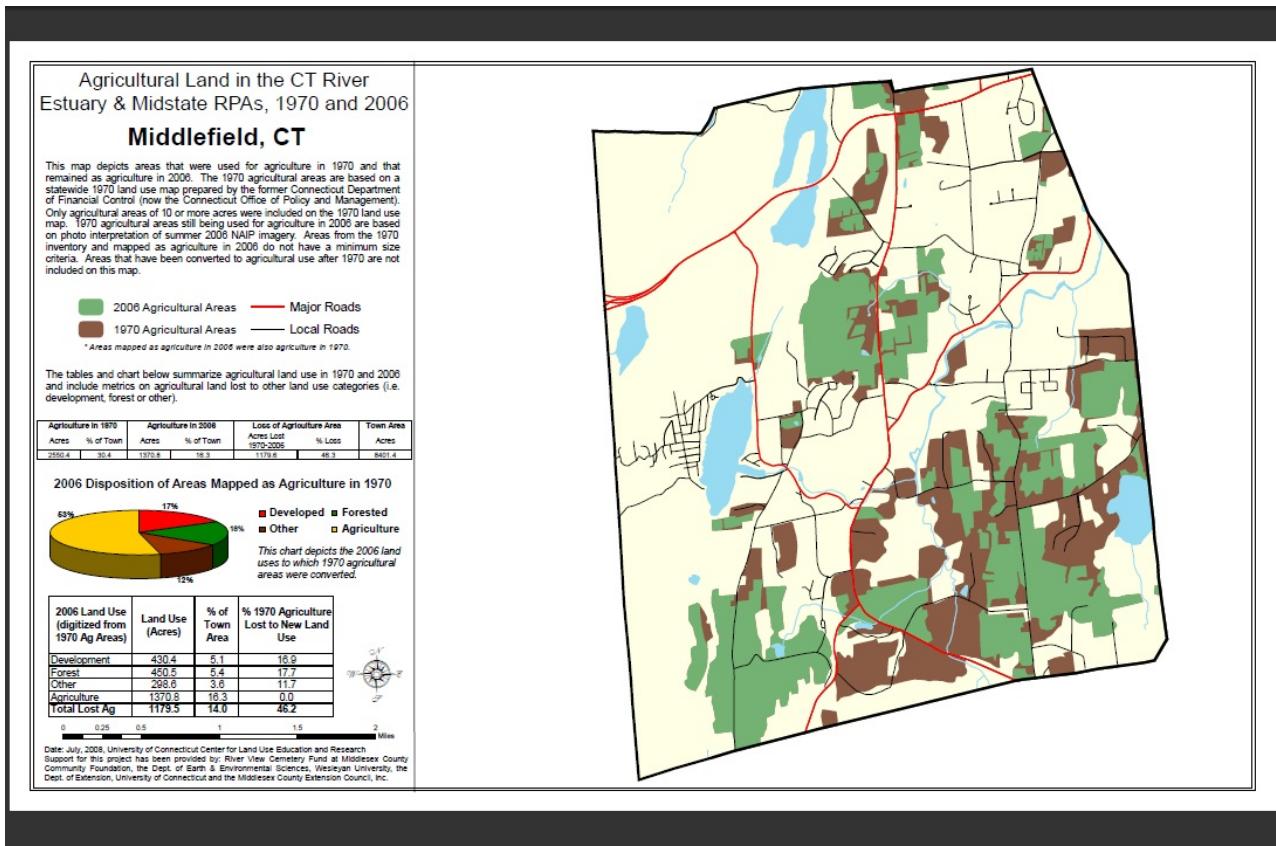
O/F = Orchard and Fruit D = Dairy
H = Hay N = Nursery
R = Row Crops B = Beef
X = Christmas Trees
E = Equestrian

1 inch = 2,000 feet

0 500 1,000 1,500 2,000 2,500



Middlefield's fertile farmland is one of the town's primary assets. According to the most recent land-use inventory, Middlefield has approximately 1,371 acres of agricultural land. This constitutes more than 16 percent (16.3 percent) of the total land area of the town.



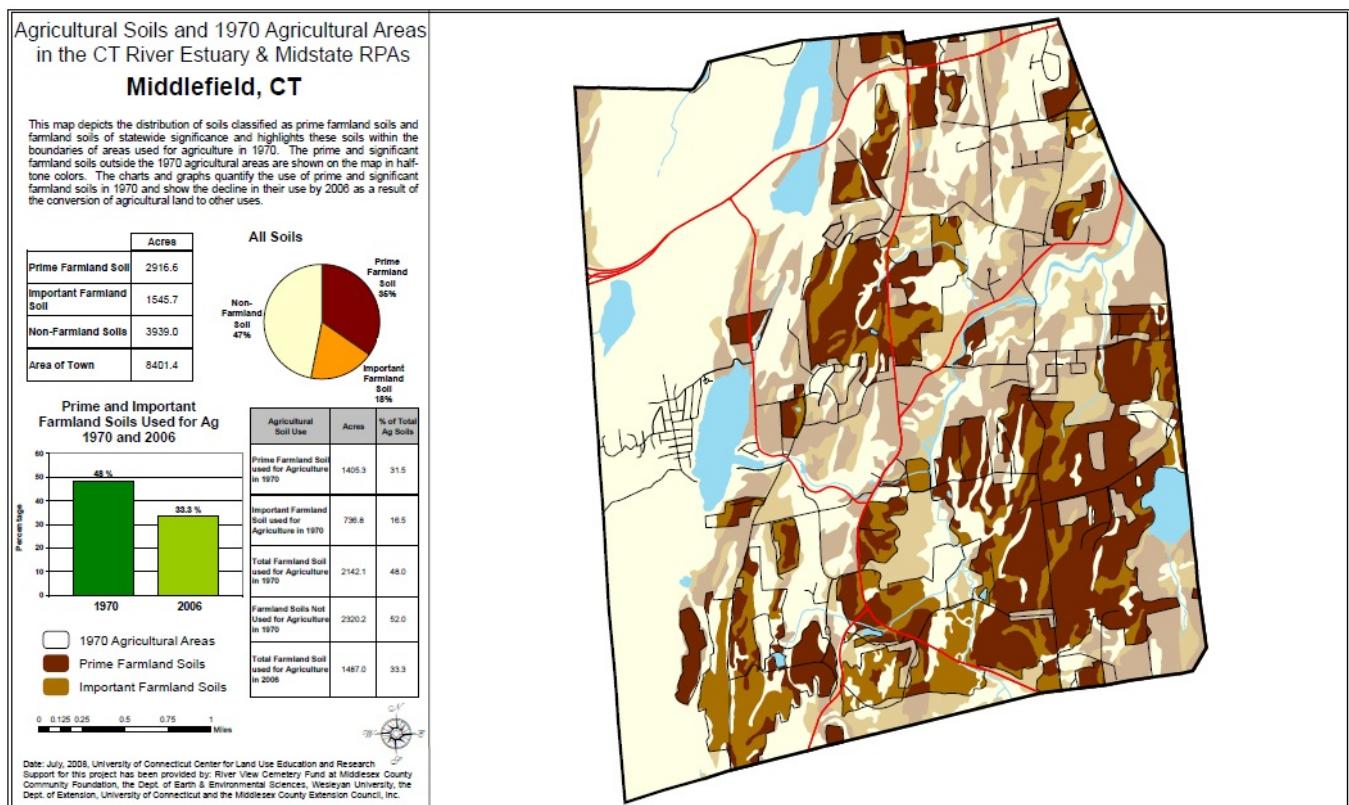
What Is Agriculture?

Connecticut General Statutes, Sec. 1-1 (q) except as otherwise specifically defined, the words "agriculture" and "farming" shall include cultivation of the soil, dairying, forestry, raising or harvesting any agricultural or horticultural commodity, including the raising, shearing, feeding, caring for, training and management of livestock, including horses, bees, poultry, fur-bearing animals and wildlife, and the raising or harvesting of oysters, clams, mussels, other molluscan shellfish or fish; the operation, management, conservation, improvement or maintenance of a farm and its buildings, tools and equipment, or salvaging timber or cleared land of brush or other debris left by a storm, as an incident to such farming operations; the production or harvesting of maple syrup or maple sugar, or any agricultural commodity, including lumber, as an incident to ordinary farming operations or the harvesting of mushrooms, the hatching of poultry, or the construction, operation or maintenance of ditches, canals, reservoirs or waterways used exclusively for farming purposes; handling, planting, drying, packing, packaging, processing, freezing, grading, storing or delivering to storage or to market, or to a carrier for transportation to market, or for direct sale any agricultural or horticultural commodity as an incident to ordinary farming operations, or, in the case of fruits and vegetables, as an incident to the preparation of such fruits or vegetables for market or for direct sale. The term "farm" includes farm buildings, and accessory buildings thereto, nurseries, orchards, ranges, greenhouses, hoop houses and other temporary structures or other structures used primarily for the raising and, as an incident to ordinary farming operations, the sale of agricultural or horticultural commodities. The term "aquaculture" means the

farming of the waters of the state and tidal wetlands and the production of protein food, including fish, oysters, clams, mussels and other molluscan shellfish, on leased, franchised and public underwater farm lands. Nothing herein shall restrict the power of a local zoning authority under chapter 124.

The map shows the loss of 1,179.5 acres of farmed areas from 1970 to 2006. Sixteen percent was lost to development, and the remaining 29 percent was lost forest or other which includes conversion of farmed areas to recreational uses.

Middlefield has 4,462 acres or 53 percent of the area of the town as prime and important farmland soils. As of 2006, 1,487 acres were used for agriculture, 655 acres less than in 1970. The following map depicts the prime and important agricultural soils, their use and change of time.



Environmental Benefits of Agriculture

Few property owners understand their land or its natural workings better than farmers. Without healthy water and soil, agricultural production ceases. Therefore, most farmers take exceptional care of their land, water sources, forests and the environment.

Economic and Employment Benefits of Agriculture

Connecticut agriculture is a \$3.5 billion industry, based on a 2010 study by UConn's Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics. It provides more than 20,000 jobs and generates \$1,000 in sales per Connecticut resident. Connecticut is the third smallest state in the nation; farmland accounts for 405,616

acres, slightly more than 13 percent, of the state's 3.18 million acres; and Connecticut's 4,916 farms rank first in New England regarding market value per farm and acre. Based on various economic models, the total agricultural industry in Middlesex County in 2007 had a total output impact of \$99 million which ranked fifth of the eight counties. The highest county was Fairfield at \$1,084 million, and the lowest was Tolland at \$69 million. For agricultural forest production category, the highest output impact was greenhouse, nursery, floriculture and sod at \$461 million, hay and miscellaneous crops at \$59 million. Fruit farming (including strawberries) was at \$56.9 million, horses and other equine production \$6.8 million, and cut Christmas trees \$6.6 million.

Lyman Farms, Inc. is in the top five employers and taxpayers in the town, which includes all of the activities that are owned by the company, not just the agricultural component of the company.

Farmers' Market

A few years ago, a farmers' market was tried on the grounds of the Middlefield Community Center. Due to conflicts with other markets, it was discontinued. The concept is a viable way to promote the produce generated within the town. Currently, there are 10 farmers' markets in towns within the River COG region. They are located in Cromwell, Chester, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Higganum, Ivoryton, Lyme, Middletown (two markets) and Old Saybrook. It would seem appropriate to create an agricultural commission, join the River COG Agricultural Council and work with the other towns in the region to create regional markets without conflicting hours of operation and maximize the opportunity to expose our agriculture resources.

Land-Use Practices that Support Agriculture and Farming

Middlefield's zoning regulations are relatively "farm-friendly," allowing farming activities to be conducted in most zoning districts. Farm stands are permitted for the sale of products grown or raised on the premises. A "Right-to-Farm" ordinance should be considered for adoption by the legislative body of the Town. Many of Middlefield's farms are located on its rural roads and can be difficult for potential patrons to locate. The P&Z Commission should consider allowing a limited number of small, off-premises directional signs (with the permission of property owners) that would direct potential patrons to these farms. Farmers can also participate in the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (ConnDoAG) and their "*Connecticut Grown*" program that offers standardized DOT-approved directional signs. These signs can help lead patrons from the state highways that run through Middlefield to these farms (i.e., Routes 66, 147, 157 and 217).

Repositioning Middlefield's Agriculture for the Future

Connecticut is a state of small farms. With an average farm size of 73 to 85 acres, depending on the source you use, only two other states have smaller averages. Middlefield's average farm size for the eight largest farms is 126 acres and the average-sized farm identified on a previous map is probably in the 40- to 50-acre range. To remain viable, some of these farms supply "niche" markets or produce specialty crops. Some have moved to "direct-to-consumer" retail sales or have changed the products they produce. Middlefield's smaller farms are ideal for the breeding of high-quality poultry, rabbits, fruits and vegetables.

Middlefield's reputation as an agricultural community is one of the town's primary assets and should be promoted aggressively. With its nearly 30 farms, the town has the potential to benefit further from agri-tourism. There is still further potential to promote all of the town's agricultural resources. The town should consider expanding its "*Middlefield Grown*" campaign to reach persons across the state. Many residents and families across the state already travel to our centrally-located town to spend a day enjoying a program of

agriculturally-related activities. The program might include visits to different farms, participation in farming and related educational activities or meals prepared on the farm using products picked or produced by the participants. Visitors would likely patronize Middlefield's other businesses during their visit as well.

It is accepted that the first few years spent establishing a new farm can be very difficult. To nurture new and different agricultural investment, the P&Z Commission should consider implementing regulations that accommodate the difficulties associated with the establishment of new agricultural enterprises. What might be considered, for example, is the establishment of a new farming operation that can take several years to achieve its business model. In the interim, the business may wish to rely on other farms to supply the majority of their product.

The farm may wish to supplement its agricultural activities with events, educational classes or the sale of ancillary farm products. It may also wish to construct dining areas where patrons can taste and purchase their products.

This modern agricultural business model can create both opportunities and challenges for municipalities as they differ from the traditional farming model. By sensitively accommodating these new business models, Middlefield can expand its agricultural base.

Agricultural Commissions

Middlefield does not currently have an Agricultural Commission. Agricultural Commissions serve as an advocate for farming and agricultural issues. It can raise the profile of agriculture in town, helps other town boards and commissions understand the economic and land-use issues that farmers face and works to preserve farmland. Agricultural Commissions are authorized under Public Act 11-188, "An Act Authorizing Local and Regional Agricultural Councils and Concerning Consideration of Agriculture in Local Plans of Conservation and Development and Zoning Regulations." The Act encourages the formation of commissions or councils to bring agricultural concerns to the forefront of discussions on planning and zoning within municipalities. The Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (River COG) established the first regional agriculture council. Middlefield is not a member of the council.

One of the first activities of a commission is to draft and recommend a "*Right to Farm*" ordinance to the Board of Selectmen and support it when it comes to a vote of the legislative body of the town. As development continues to encroach on farming activity, complaints regarding noise, dust, manure odor, pesticide application, escaped livestock and other nuisances could increase. In 2013, the town adopted a "*Right to Farm*" ordinance that:

- Recognizes the importance of agriculture to the community,
- Recognizes that the farms existed before the residential development, and
- Protects farmers from nuisance claims arising out of the normal (reasonable) operation of their farms.

Preserving Farmland

The town should continue to support programs that preserve farmland. Section 12-107 of the Connecticut General Statutes (often referred to as Public Act 490) authorizes communities to assess farmland at a lower value when it is actively farmed. P.A. 490 helps farmers by lowering their assessment; this helps maintain the viability of farms under what can be difficult economic conditions.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture's *Farmland Preservation Program* purchases the development rights to farms, with a goal of preserving 130,000 acres of farmland statewide. By selling their development rights under this program, farmers receive an infusion of cash to support continued farming and, in return, surrender their ability to develop the property in the future. In addition to purchasing the development rights, the town can protect threatened farmland and ensure its continued agricultural use through the following methods:

- Purchase outright and lease farmland back to the owner or a tenant
- Purchase outright and sell the development rights under the Farmland Preservation Program
- Negotiate for agricultural conservation easements with the assistance of the Connecticut Farmland Trust
- Resell the land to another farmer, without the development rights
- Convey to organizations, such as food cooperatives or community gardens
- Continue to offer local tax incentives for preserving farmland.

For decades, the town has used almost all of the options at various times to preserve farmland. Also, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's *FarmLink* program serves as a clearinghouse for the transition of agricultural lands between generations of farmers; with the goal of keeping farmland in production. The *FarmLink* registry connects farm owners with farm seekers.

Horses

Horses are beneficial to municipalities in a variety of ways. Regarding land use, horse farms and boarding facilities are considered to be relatively low impact. Regarding aesthetics, neatly-fenced and maintained horse farms lend a pleasant vista to residents and visitors alike. Regarding tourism, many who board their horses in Middlefield live outside the community and travel to Middlefield on a regular basis where they purchase goods and professional services from our local businesses. Owning and caring for a horse requires a great deal of compassion, time, effort and money, much of which goes back to our community.

Middlefield has some equestrian-related facilities for boarding, training, and breeding. Some of these facilities are for personal use only and others involve the public. There are provisions in the Connecticut General Statutes to allow municipalities to exempt all horses (not just those used exclusively in farming) from property taxes. Because of the many benefits associated with the care of horses, the town should promote itself as a preferred location for the boarding and care of horses and consider revising its regulations to encourage this activity.

Tax Exemptions for Farms and Agriculture

To help improve the financial viability of Middlefield's farms, the town should consider exempting mechanical farming equipment, such as tractors and implements, from property taxes, regardless of farm status or size. Also, the town should consider implementing the property tax exemptions allowed by Connecticut General Statutes 12-91© for agricultural buildings.

Public Act 490 and Farmland Preservation

This involves ensuring that the Middlefield Board of Selectmen, the Office of the Tax Assessor, Boards and Commissions actively endorse and implement the goals of these State programs. Quoting the CT Department of Agriculture: "*When the legislature passed Public Act 490 in 1963, it included (and continues to this day) in the law's wording that 'it was in the public interest to encourage the preservation of farm, forest, and open*

space land'." It is clearly in Middlefield's interest as well. The goals set forth by Public Act 490 (now CGS 12-107a through 12-107f) should be strongly supported by all Boards and Commissions of the Town of Middlefield.

Agriculture-friendly Policies in All Town Departments

This will require ongoing participation by an agricultural advocate in the Town's Administrative practices. This role can best be handled by an agricultural commission. Middlefield Zoning Regulations are already relatively farmer-friendly as evidenced by the existence of farm stands and some favorable signage regulations.

The establishment of an animal response team to provide assistance to animal owners in the event of any animal emergency, evacuation, or natural disaster should be considered. While it would provide a good foundation; there may still be further improvements that would benefit existing farming operations as well as future ones, with the ultimate goal of stimulating the growth of agricultural activities in Middlefield and therefore strengthening the overall economy of Middlefield.

Middlefield should also consider amending current zoning regulations regarding on-farm sale of products. Many existing farms would economically benefit if they could broaden their outreach to the public by offering their own and similar agricultural products for sale at their premises. A Middlefield Agricultural Commission could be actively involved with the Planning and Zoning Commission regarding any changes in regulations affecting agriculture.

Consideration should be given to allowing farms to place signs on town roads directing tourists to farm locations that welcome visitors.

Adopting State Initiatives Regarding Taxes on Farm Operations

In 2014, the Town adopted a portion of Public Act 14-33 (now CGS 12-91a), which exempts all horses from Property Tax. Many other towns in Central Connecticut have not taken this action. Also, in 2016, the Tax Assessor determined that hay, grain and bedding for horses would not be subject to Property Tax. These policies make Middlefield more attractive to horse farmers and horse owners and may stimulate additional equine business in Middlefield.

Middlefield has not yet adopted, and could consider, another provision in 14-33 which allows all agricultural entities to receive additional tax exemptions on their buildings. ("Any municipality, upon approval by its legislative body, may provide an exemption from property tax for any building used actually and exclusively in farming . . ." (CGS 12-91c). The Board of Selectmen could consider incorporating this additional tax exemption as policy and actively seeking additional opportunities to demonstrate Middlefield's farm-friendliness.

Tax Incentives Directed at Agricultural Start-ups

It is well known that State and Municipal governments commonly offer tax incentives to attract new business to their locations. As part of our agricultural initiatives, we recommend that the Board of Selectmen considers the development of an incentive program specifically targeted to agricultural start-ups and relocations.

Agricultural Education

To encourage and develop the next generation of farmers, the Town of Middlefield, as well as Regional School District 13, could actively pursue the development of agricultural education programs for youths and adults, including farming-career programs. Middlefield and Regional School District 13 could consider funding for the creation of, or participation in, regional and state agricultural classes and programs.

The Agricultural Commission could actively support local mentoring or internship programs in all parts of the agricultural community in conjunction with our schools and other community and agri-business organizations. Also, the Agricultural Commission could develop relationships with local farmers to facilitate the implementation of these programs.

Advertising and Promotional Programs

Middlefield can make farm-friendly improvements, but if the Connecticut and regional business community do not know about them, they will have no impact on Middlefield's economy. While initiatives like the "Middlefield Grown" program are commendable, in today's highly competitive business environment, it will take considerably more effort to be heard, far and wide, by established businesses, entrepreneurs and consumers.

As the Town continues to make further improvements in its agricultural policies and practices, it could consider forming a relationship with a professional advertising group so that the benefits of establishing an agricultural business in Middlefield become widely known. Similarly, it might require professional advertising capability to attract more families and individuals to visit Middlefield to experience the pleasure of its agricultural landscape, products, and services.

Goals

- Protect existing farms and encourage new ones by actively supporting the policies and actions of Public Act 490 (Connecticut's Land Use Value Assessment Law for Farm Land, Forest Land, and Open Space Land – now CGS 12-107a through 12-107f) and the CT Farmland Preservation Program.
- Review, and revise if necessary, policies and regulations in all town departments, boards and commissions to ensure that they are agriculture-friendly so that the town's present agricultural activities are encouraged to expand and new agricultural ventures see Middlefield as a welcoming place in which to reside.
- Consider state initiatives to reduce further taxation on farm equipment and buildings to encourage additional investment by farmers. (For example, Public Act 14-33.)
- Develop new Middlefield initiatives, such as business tax incentives for new agri-businesses, to attract both start-ups and relocations to Middlefield.
- Create a Middlefield Agricultural Commission to be actively involved in working with other town boards and commissions to develop an aggressive advertising program that creates awareness of Middlefield's agricultural- and equine-friendly policies to attract new agricultural entities to Middlefield. Simultaneously, promote Middlefield as a great place for families to visit because of its agricultural activities.

- Middlefield should be aggressively pursuing funds at all levels of government – federal, state and local – for the purchase of development rights or outright purchase of open space/agricultural lands.