

**Report by the Albany County
Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
Pertaining to the Eight Year Review of Agricultural District #2**

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The following recommendations by the Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board pertain to proposed modifications to Agricultural District #2 following a review of the District pursuant to NYS Agriculture and Markets Law 25AA Section 303(a).

Members of the Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Include:

Mr. Tom DellaRocco	Farmer, Chairman AFPB
Ms. Laura DeGaetano	Albany County Department of Economic Development, Conservation and Planning
Mr. Thomas Gallagher	Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County
Hon. Chris Smith	County Legislator
Mr. Michael McGuire	Albany County Real Property Tax Service
Mr. Ed Kleinke	Soil and Water Conservation District Board, Chairman
Mr. Mike Zakens	Farm Bureau
Mr. Gary Kleppel	Farmer
Mr. Erin Bradt	Farmer
Mr. Harold Hahn	Farmer
Mr. John O’Pezio	Agribusiness

In fulfilling its responsibility on behalf of the Albany County Legislature, the Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board has completed a review of staff recommendations pertaining to the eight-year review of Albany County Agricultural District #2 located in the towns of Westerlo and Rensselaerville. Based on this review the following comments are presented for consideration.

The review of Agricultural District #2 was performed in conjunction with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County and the Albany County Office of Natural Resource Conservation. Resources utilized in this review included analysis of aerial photographs, field assessment, state and local maps, tax maps and tax rolls for the respective municipalities, the extensive knowledge of Cooperative Extension agents and Board members, and feedback from local farmers. In addition, Agricultural District #2 boundaries were adjusted using updated 2023 digital tax map data.

Applications from landowners seeking inclusion in the District make up all of the acreage proposed for addition. Proposed additions to the District include approximately 463 acres of active farmland and related adjacent areas in addition to the 343 acres that have been added through the annual review process under 303B from 2017-2024. A number of additions are parcels that were wholly or partially already included in the Ag District but the parcel number had changed due to a subdivision, merger or lot line adjustment of the parcel.

Approximately 505 acres were found to be either developed or otherwise not in agriculture and, therefore, proposed for removal from the District. Lands removed from the district consisted primarily of residences and forested land that were originally included as part of the adjacency requirement or have been developed.

After the previous 8-year review, Agricultural District #2 totaled approximately 18,707 acres. The resulting District in 2024, after modifications, includes 19,008 acres of predominantly viable farmland.

Specific factors considered by the Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board as identified in Circular 1150 on Article 25AA-Agricultural Districts are as follows:

The nature of farming and farm resources within the district.

Farming continues to be the dominant land use throughout Albany County Agricultural District #2. Open, contiguous, active and productive land keeps farming a viable industry in the District.

The majority of the land in the District is comprised of productive prime soils (mostly in Westerlo) or soils of statewide importance (Rensselaerville). Farmers reported a total of 1644 acres cropped in the District and five farms reported growing vegetables as their primary or secondary enterprise. There is also a good deal of open land available for hay and for grazing.

Based on the Agricultural District Worksheets returned, hay is the most prevalent principal farm enterprise (16). Many farmers also reported that livestock was their principle (7) enterprise. There is one large-scale dairy operator who has the highest annual gross farm sales in the District. Other types of farm enterprises include beef, vegetables, vineyard, horticulture, poultry, orchard, hops, and bees. Most producers identified more than one principal and secondary farm enterprise. This is most likely because the District is characterized by small family farms that have had to diversify and rely on income from multiple products.

Rental land is very important in this district with 1021 acres rented by farmers. There are many downstate landowners in Ag District #2 who have elected to keep their land in the District to support agricultural uses. Some also let farmers use land free of charge.

The recent resurgence of local craft brewing has led to an interest in growing crops to support this industry. Cornell Cooperative Extension has been working with several farmers to experiment with different varieties to see what grows best here. Crops to support craft brewing may be an emerging new market in the county with one farm in the district already renting land for hops production. There was also a vineyard reported.

The overall status of farming, the farming economy and farm investments within the district.

Agricultural District Review worksheet RA-113 was used to evaluate the farming economy. While not all worksheets included complete information on gross sales, the following summary is useful for estimating the health of the agricultural economy in the district.

Est. annual gross farm sales	# of farms
Below \$10,000	14
\$10,000-\$39,000	5
\$40,000-\$99,999	1
\$100,000-\$199,999	1
\$200,000-\$499,999	0

The highest reported annual gross farm sales were from a dairy and a cattle operation. Farms in the \$10,000-\$99,000 range are generally livestock and hay operations with one large CSA producer. The remainder of farms that reported gross sales were below \$10,000.

There were fewer worksheets returned than in the past. The summary of number of farms according to the returns were full 9 and part-time 15

A testament to the economic success and community support of District farms are the efforts toward promoting local products and the increased interest in purchasing locally grown food. There are farms in the District offering CSA shares for vegetables, meats, and other farm products and delivering throughout the Capital Region. In addition, Helderberg Hilltowns organization also organizes periodic events and farmers markets to promote local products.

All types of agricultural businesses are permitted by right in all zones in Rensselaerville except in the Hamlet, where they are allowed by special use permit. The Town's Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2007, is strongly supportive of agricultural districts, agricultural businesses and preserving large blocks of farmland.

The Town of Westerlo adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2021 and includes goals and recommendations to preserve and enhance the agricultural community in the Town by fostering the protection of farmland, encouraging sustainable family farms, and promoting agricultural related activities. It specifically

encourages participation in the Agricultural District and Ag Value Assessment Programs The zoning is supportive of agricultural uses and is generally consistent with the Agricultural Districts program.

The extent to which the number of district farms and farm acres further the purposes for which it was originally established.

The District, as modified, is made up of predominantly viable, active farmland and related adjacent areas. Much of the District is still made up of contiguous parcels. By maintaining these areas as primarily agricultural, the number of conflicts with potentially non-compatible land uses can be avoided. In addition, the proximity of farms to each other and the availability of land to rent within the District remains important to many farmers who rely on rental land for hay, for growing corn for feed, and for manure management.

The extent to which the district has achieved its original objectives.

The District, as proposed achieves its original objectives specifically, encouraging the continued use of land for farming and protecting and enhancing agriculture in Albany County.

The status of any county agriculture and farmland protection planning or implementation efforts made pursuant to article 25-AAA of the Agriculture and Markets Law.

Since completion of the last review, Albany County has adopted an updated Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. The plan focuses on targeted economic development and farmland protection strategies. The county's partnership with Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corp. gives Albany County Farmers access to their support services.

Recommendations to continue, terminate or modify the district.

Based on this review, the Albany County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board finds that the continuance of Agricultural District #2 is consistent with the provisions and intent of Article 25-AA of the New York State Agriculture and Markets Law and should be approved with the proposed modifications.
District