

Annual Report
of the
Agricultural Advisory Committee
Town of Knox, New York

January 1 – December 31, 2021

Committee Members

The Town of Knox's Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) was established by resolution of the Town Board on January 10th, 2019. The composition of the AAC during 2021 was:

Gary Kleppel, Chair
Jay Francis, Member
Jessica Gage, Member
Joshua Rockwood, Member
Brian Wilson, Member
Ken Saddlemire, ex-officio, Town Board
Betty Ketcham, ex-officio, Planning Board

During 2021, members Jessica Gage and Joshua Rockwood resigned from the committee because they moved away from Knox. The committee nominated Evan Taylor to fill the seat vacated by Ms. Gage, and Earl Barcomb to fill Mr. Rockwood's seat. The Town Board approved these nominations and appointed Mr. Taylor and Mr. Barcomb for terms of 2 years and 1 year respectively, on January 1, 2022.

Activities and Accomplishments of the Agricultural Advisory Committee

The AAC met in August 2021, after a long break necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our discussions in August and at subsequent monthly meetings have focused on developing and beginning to act on an agenda for the next 12 months.

Agenda: The principal issues that the AAC agreed to address over the next 12 months are:

1. Raising awareness of agriculture in our community
2. Attracting and retaining farmers in Knox.
3. Erecting traffic calming signage on certain roads in Knox to increase safety for farmers moving equipment.
4. Improving access to processing facilities for farmers in Knox and beyond.

1. Raising awareness of agriculture in our community:

Two residents of Knox who are not members of the AAC but who are regular attendees at AAC meetings and participants in many AAC activities, Amy Pokorny and Pam Kleppel, will lead efforts to report on AAC activities and help Knox residents to become familiar with resources that the committee has to offer town. They are currently preparing an article describing the AAC's activities for the Town of Knox

Newsletter. They will also serve as liaisons to local media, prepare outreach materials of various kinds for the public-at-large, and work to make residents aware of technical assistance and information available on the AAC page of the Town of Knox Website.

2. Attracting and retaining farmers in Knox.

Committee members were interested in creating an event or program to follow the successful Farm Transition Workshop that was held in February 2020. The committee decided to develop agriculture-based programs aimed at keeping young people in the Hilltowns and attracting young families interested in farming to Knox.

To that end the committee has met on two occasions with the principal, faculty of agriculture, and a career counsellor at Berne-Knox-Westerlo High School. The meetings resulted in the following decisions:

a. We will work together to test the idea of having student interns on farms in Knox. BKW has several well-organized internship programs in which student interns are compensated with course credits. Dr. Gary Kleppel, a retired university professor and farm owner agreed to supervise a “trial” internship. If successful, we will seek additional farms in town willing to work with interns.

b. BKW students in the Agriculture Program will visit several farms in Knox during the school year.

c. The AAC, BKW and the Institute for Rural Vitality at SUNY Cobleskill are working together to host an Agribusiness Panel in April 2022. The panel will be composed of people who own or work in various agribusiness disciplines in the region. Potential participants include:

- i. New Holland Tractors, Schoharie
- ii. Kelly’s Agway, Cobleskill
- iii. Tri-Valley Seed and Service, Sprakers
- iv. N.C. Tommel Cattle Co., Knox
- v. Nutrina Grains and Feed, Cohochtan
- vi. John Deer Apprenticeship Program, SUNY Cobleskill

In addition, the AAC chair met with representatives of the National Young Farmers Coalition to ask for their help making young farmers aware of opportunities in Knox. He has also been in touch with the Hudson Valley Farm Link Program of the American Farmland Trust to improve transactional opportunities between farm owners in Knox who may be putting their properties on the market and potential buyers looking for agricultural land.

3. Erecting traffic calming signage on roads in Knox used to move farm machinery.

A majority of AAC members have experienced dangerous situations on Knox’s roads, due, for the most part, to impatient drivers caught behind slow-moving farm equipment. In addition, blind curves and intersections, and narrow shoulders resulting from guardrails being located very near of the road on both sides of a two-lane (one in each direction) highway create dangerous conditions for both farmers and drivers who are using those roads when farm equipment is moving on them.

In October and November of 2021, the AAC conducted a study in which they identified 13 roads and intersections in the Town of Knox, where either changing the locations of traffic signs or the deployment of traffic calming signage would, in the opinion of AAC members, improve the safety of the highway for both farmers moving their equipment, and drivers. The committee will present their findings to the Town Board at the February 2022 Town Board meeting, with a request that the town consider modifying some existing signage, installing several traffic calming signs, and requesting that the New York State DOT move guardrails back from the roadbed. The AAC will also ask the Board to consider installing signage recognizing that Knox is a “Right to Farm” community. The chair of the AAC will begin working with the Knox Planning Board on these issues in January or February 2022.

4. Improving access to processing facilities for farmers in Knox and beyond.

During 2020 and 2021 public interest in local food, particularly in local meat increased. One would expect that this would be very good for livestock producers, not only in Knox, but throughout the region. In fact, many farmers found it extremely difficult to get appointments at USDA-inspected and even custom (uninspected) facilities. Considerable income was lost as a result, contributing, in one case, to a farm family in Knox losing their farm. The AAC considered the issue of access to processing facilities as it affects farmers in our town and throughout New York State. In October 2021, the chair began working with the Livestock Unit of the Albany County Branch of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Service to scope out the problem and consider solutions to it. In November the AAC supported a suggestion that the chair contact the office of New York State Senator Michelle Hinchey (SD-46), our representative in the NYS Senate and Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, to arrange a meeting to consider solutions to the issues of access to livestock processing and food supply chain security during emergencies for New Yorkers. A virtual meeting with Senator Hinchey and her staff is scheduled for January 14th.

Respectfully submitted to the Town Clerk on January , 2022

By

Gary S. Kleppel, PhD
Chair

Transition Resources will be posted on the AAC page of the Town of Knox website.