

Knox Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting of February 15th, 2022
Knox Town Hall
Summary

present: Jay Francis, Gary Kleppel, Brian Wilson
absent: Earl Barcomb, Betty Ketchum, Evan Taylor

Old business

Traffic calming on farm roads – The chair reported on the presentation that he and Evan Taylor made to the Town Board re: the need for traffic calming signage on roads trafficked by farm vehicles, and other modifications (e.g., guard rails) to improve safety on the roads for both farmers and other road users. There was a lively conversation involving board members, members of the Knox DPW and the public. There was generally support from the Town Board. Mr. Schanz, of DPW, was concerned about having too many road signs, essentially “sign pollution.” Some members of the public pointed out that people do not obey signs. One resident pointed out that the sorts of traffic calming signs that would be put up do not require obedience. They merely alert drivers to the potential presence of farm equipment on the road, much like Amish signs alert drivers to slow moving horse drawn buggies. The Committee suggested that by stacking signs (if legal), sign pollution could be reduced. The Committee also suggested moving ahead with meetings with State DOT and the County.

The NY meat crisis – Improving access to processing plants – The Chair reported that the virtual meeting with Senator Hinchey and her staff (NY Sen. Hinchey represents the Town of Knox and is Chair of the Agriculture Committee) went very well. The meeting was attended by the Knox Town Supervisor, Council member Saddlemire, and AAC member Jay Francis, Cornell Cooperative Extension staff, and several Knox residents. The Senator was interested in our concerns and agreed to look consider our arguments for expansion of processing plant capacity and workforce. She mentioned that her staff was working on several pieces of legislation to address these concerns and that she would keep the AAC in the loop as those pieces of legislation develop and progress. The Chair also reported that he was hoping to provide testimony re: the need for expansion of processing capacity to the 2022 Budget Forum that the Senator and Assembly member Fahy here convening on February 22nd. The chair noted that he had met with Ag & Markets Commissioner Ball in late January. The Commissioner was supportive of expanding USDA processing capacity (though skeptical about whether custom exempt processors would move forward with that), and with expanding the meat processing workforce. He was not supportive of restoring the State Meat Inspection Program that the AAC had agreed would expedite the certification process for marketing meat within NY State.

Attracting & keeping farmers in Knox - BKW Collaborations – The chair reported that he had not heard back from BKW High School re: the proposed Agri-business panel for students. It was noted that BKW has a very strong Future Farmers of America Club.

New Business

Ric Energy solar project at Thompsons Lake Rd – The chair attended the February Planning Board meeting which was dominated by a hearing re: the proposal by Ric Energy to create a solar project at Thompsons Lake Rd. He noted that he spoke (on his own behalf) to suggest that if approved, the project consider using livestock to manage the vegetation at the site. It was also pointed out that some residents opposed the project because of its interference with the scenic qualities of the area, which is why many people come to Knox to live.

