

Town of Lincoln
Minutes of the Agriculture Commission Meeting
Held on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 via Zoom teleconference

Members Present:

Voting: Louise Bergeron (co-chair), Ari Kurtz (co-chair), Nancy Bergen,
Alternate Voting: Karen Seo

Members Absent:

Voting: Ellen Raja, Lynn Bower
Alternate Voting: Corey Nimmer

Visitor

Jim Henderson (former longtime member of Conservation Commission)
Sherry Haydock (Ag Comm candidate – awaiting Selects approval)
Linda Emanuel

7:36 pm – Meeting commenced

Minutes

Minutes for 12/14/2021 approved (unanimously)

What do new commercial farmers need to start and establish farms in Lincoln?

The Ag Comm mission is:

“The purpose of the Agricultural Commission is to preserve, protect, and promote agriculture in Lincoln: to provide leadership, technical guidance, vision, planning, and coordination to help support, define, promote, and enable new agricultural opportunities, stability, and enhancement of ongoing operations as well as foster strong community and regional support that will work to create a sustainable agricultural community in Lincoln.

The Commission will also seek further protections for existing agricultural lands, the identification of new lands for agricultural use, both public and private, and work to assist in natural resource management that is consistent with sustainable agricultural practices.”
(This paragraph is not on the Ag Comm web page. Perhaps it should be added.)

The Ag Comm’s charge is:

“The work of the commission is to pursue all initiatives appropriate to the mission. This would include working closely with all town boards and commissions promoting agriculture to the town and with regional and state agencies to ensure that all initiatives are consistent with promoting a sustainable agricultural community.”

So, what can we do to support farms and attract new farmers? Jim Henderson was invited to report at this meeting on his efforts in this direction. He is a longtime former member of the Lincoln Conservation Commission. He and his wife run a business maintaining/managing hundreds of acres of conservation and farmland in the area. He

has found that sustainability of farmland is a key issue. There have been and are lots of different kinds of farms in the area and different kinds of individuals who grew into those endeavors. They've needed lots of support. Some try and fail – don't have adequate funding, run into infrastructure problems. Jim has experience and equipment like tractors and has been working to help establish young farmers at a commercial scale (vs backyard family garden). In particular, he has been working with Mohammed (pro bono) to assist him and using this as an opportunity to gather information on how to best help beginning farmers. Challenges/barriers/problems for beginning farmers include

- Equipment – Tractors and attachments like seeders, harrows, field mowers, balers, etc. are very costly. No till techniques might reduce the need for such equipment. Would Codman be willing/able to share its equipment? If yes, who would they allow to use it? Would they supply an operator?

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Sherri to talk with Codman re: sharing farm equipment with other Lincoln farms.

- Land preparation – clearing trees/rocks/etc, tilling, removal of invasive plants
- Infrastructure -- water for irrigation, water for washing vegetables to meet food safety requirements, electricity, accessory structures for storage of tools/etc., refrigeration, hoop houses/greenhouses, trash disposal, parking, place from which to sell produce
- Marketing – how to get the word out about when/what/where the farmer's produce is available
- Grants (funding) -- how to find out about grants, how to write a winning grant proposal. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (<https://www.nesfp.org>) has staff that is very good at winning grants; maybe they could help.
- Changing climate – The weather is becoming less predictable and more challenging. Farmers may need to transition to high-value crops (tomatoes, corn, ethnic vegetables) grown in greenhouses and change to using no-till techniques.
- Farming technique – Even without climate change issues, there is a need to evaluate what farming techniques are “best” to use in Lincoln and for which locations/crop/etc. For example, when should one use no-till rotational grazing vs haying for management of pastures? At present, “best” means things like sustainable, ecologically sound, economically feasible, etc.
- Fields without street addresses -- Problems with deliveries because fields have no address.
- Permits and inspections -- Permitting is needed for trenching, plumbing, electrical work, building, etc. Inspections/approvals are needed before new installations can be used.
- Non-native English speakers -- It can be difficult to understand regulations and requirements and to appropriately fill out the needed forms to obtain approvals if English isn't one's first language.
- Housing – It's expensive in and near Lincoln and unless housing happens to come with the land being farmed, finding affordable housing presents a challenge for both the farmer and any employees or interns.
- Invasive plants – We need to improve road edge management, train people on this topic (observe them, direct them to people who can provide information (Con

Comm, Jim Henderson), and direct them to resources, e.g., New Entry, for finding grants.

- Deer – The current density of deer has resulted in significant financial losses for local produce farmers. Deer-resistant fencing (7-8 feet high) is very expensive but has been installed for a small amount of acreage. Other options, e.g., netting laid over plants, can help. Weston allows hunting on conservation land.
- Lack of experience and insufficient planning – Beginning farmers are frequently under-funded, have minimal equipment, not enough time and no fallback plans/resources in case of insect/crop disease problems, farmer illness/injury, bad weather, labor shortages, equipment failure, the problems listed above, etc. Con Comm requires an informal business plan from anyone applying to license land for farming. [My 2 cents -- Maybe they should fill out a questionnaire indicating which of the issues above applies to their farming activity and how they intend to address them. Or maybe that happens in a friendly supportive conversation ☺]]

There was a discussion of “How can the Ag Comm best coordinate with other town boards/commissions.” to support farming.

- Con Comm has been in charge of issuing licenses for town land and for setting policies for the land it licenses to farmers.
- Ag Comm could monitor state laws and grants, promote/market farm activities, educate the public about farming and the above issues, encourage people to be pro-active about adapting to climate change, generate videos publicizing farms.
- Ag Comm and Con Comm could coordinate on mosquito control, land acquisition, use of licensing fees, watershed protection with regard to composting. The 2 commissions could meet together regularly, say quarterly.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item – Is there an action item for Ari or Louise to set up quarterly meetings with the Con Comm?**

Established commercial farms:

- Non-profit farms -- Many/most of these issues don't apply to the non-profit farms in Lincoln (Drumlin, Codman, The Food Project). These organizations are long established and appear to have the resources (funding, equipment, labor) needed to support their farms and address the above issues.
- For-profit farms – There are a number of established for-profit farming activities, (e.g., Lindentree, Matlock Farm, Raja Farm, etc.) which could benefit from solutions to some of the above problems, e.g., a shared equipment resource, how to address invasive plants, etc.

Backyard farming:

- Some of these issues apply and some don't to backyard farming efforts aimed primarily at producing food for the home owner and his/her family (vs for sale/profit).
- The Ag Comm web page has home gardening (for food) information
- ** 1/11/2022 Action Item – Louise to let us know what we could do to spruce up the Ag Comm web site with regard to home gardening for food.**
- Codman has been thinking of holding a lecture series

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Sherri to talk to Codman folks about having home food gardening as a topic for their lecture series. It would be good chance to educate folks about the economics of home food gardening.

Membership

Board of Selects have to “appoint” new members to the Ag Comm.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Ari to send Sherry’s bio to Louise

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Louise to take care of submitting Sherry’s bio to the Selects for approval as a new member of the Ag Comm.

Annual report

Louise has generated a draft of the Agricultural Commission’s Annual Report for 2021. This report will be included in the “Town of Lincoln 2021 Annual Town Report.”

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – All to review the draft copy of the Ag Comm’s 2021 annual report and send edits to Louise. Please do this before the next meeting.

Open Space plan

Ag Comm is supposed to attend the review for the Lincoln Open Space Plan. (When will this be?)

Updating the Ag Comm farm brochure

Ari has distributed a draft list of Lincoln farms. The next step is to contact the farmers to ask if they want to be included in a list that will be published on the Ag Comm web page. We could send a single email to all farms or for farms already in the brochure, we could send individual emails with the info in the brochure. There are some of the needed emails in the Ag Comm farm brochure. Stacy Carter (Conservation Dept) will have emails for any farm licensing land from the town. Brochure currently lists the following info:

- Name of Farm
- Date Established
- Address:
- Products
- Services
- Contact information: person’s name, email, phone number, other
- Website

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – All to look at the draft list of farms distributed by Ari and provide feedback to Ari, Karen, Louise, and Sherry so that they have an agreed upon list of Lincoln farms to contact

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Karen, Louise, and Sherry to take agreed upon list of farms and get email addresses for all of them.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Karen, Louise, and Sherry to contact Lincoln farms asking if they wish to be included in the list on the Ag Comm website and in the Ag Comm brochure and asking for up-to-date information.

Farm Bureau membership

Municipal Ag Comms are offered free memberships by the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF). Members of an Ag Comm can “seek counsel from MFBF on various farming issues such as state laws and regulations pertaining to agriculture. This is limited to matters related to the Ag Comm not personal farms. In order to take advantage of this offer, we have to send them the names of the members who wish to join.

All members of the Ag Comm present at this meeting agreed to have Ari submit their names to MFBF.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Ari to check with Ellen, Lynn, Corey as to whether they want their names sent to the Mass Farm Bureau take advantage of offer of free membership.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Ari to send names of Lincoln Ag Comm members to the Mass Farm Bureau to take advantage of offer of free membership.

Conservation Commission report

Ari reported that :

- Ellen’s Con Comm license – All issues have been addressed. Land stewardship policy requires soil testing – annually for row crops, bi-annually for pasture. Ari volunteered to help Ellen take soil samples.
- Con Comm has been focussing on updating rules for trail use – horses, dogs, bicycles, hikers, etc.
- Deer issue will probably be addressed by new Conservation Director (Michelle). She was the Conservation Director in Weston and at some point, handled the deer issue in Weston.
- Lindentree’s Field of Greens program – Food raised/collected goes to the Food for Free Committee which distributes it to food pantries in Cambridge and Somerville. In 2021, Lindentree donated 8428 lbs of food.

Presentation on No Till Farming

The Ag Comm together with the Lincoln Garden Club is having a talk this spring on no till farming/gardening. Ag Comm is handling the publicity. We may organize a follow-on event of a panel of farmers who’ve tried no-till farming.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Louise to distribute to the Ag Comm members the flyer and Garden Club’s writeup about the upcoming talk on no-till farming.

**** 1/11/2022 Action Item** – Ari send pointer to a video on how to do no-till for vegetable farming.

9:30pm – Meeting adjourned.

Old Action Items

** 11/8/2017 Action item – Karen to check the Food Corps website and see if perhaps they could help with promoting more education about farming in the Lincoln schools. For example, would they be able/willing to help establish and care for a garden in Lincoln’s school(s).

** 1-16-2018 Action item -- Lynne to add link on Ag Comm web page for New Entry Farming Project.

** 3/12/2019 Action Item -- Lynne to talk to Patrice about creating a central link “Buy Local”

** 4/9/2019 Action Item -- Lynne to put the list of agricultural books on the Ag Comm web site.

** 2-11-2020 Action item – Karen to continue to participate in the LCG’s Conservation and Environment committee meetings.

** 4-21-2020 Action item -- Sarah to circulate a draft on the need for the Ag Comm to take a pro-active role in ensuring that Lincoln’s land and water use are looked at from the viewpoint of supporting agriculture. All to provide feedback.

** 4-28-2020 Action item – Ari to provide pointers to sources of information re: organic pesticides/herbicides

** 4-28-2020 Action item -- Ari to talk to Peter Von Merton re: what they did for their commemorative bench(es) – costs, who did the work, etc.

** 7-14-2020 Action item – Lynne to contact Nancy Bergen and the photographer (has received a retainer of \$2K+) to arrange for pictures of Flint farm. It would be nice if there could be pictures from all seasons.

** 7-14-2020 Action item – Lynne to talk to Sara to get her input and that of the Lincoln Historical Society on the Lincoln barn book.

** 7-14-2020 Action item – Lynne to add a link to The American Chestnut Foundation to the Ag Comm web page

** 7-14-2020 Action item – Lynne to add a link to the video “The Chestnut Tree: Bringing Back and American Icon – William Powell” to the Ag Comm web page.

** 2/9/2021 Action item – Corey to ask a relative to help with agricultural videos.

** 2/9/2021 Action item – Lynne to put together a list of “potential” agriculture activities that could be filmed for educational purposes.

- ** 2/9/2021 Action item – Lynne to introduce Corey to Heather Murray re: supporting the Ag Comm Instagram account.
- ** 2/9/2021 Action item – All to send Corey the names of any plants they know of in Lincoln that are poisonous to livestock and to ask other people if they know of additional plants.
- ** 3/9/2021 Action item – Louise to publish the form one uses to request that one's land NOT be sprayed for mosquitoes and send it to Karen for inclusion in minutes
- ** 3/9/2021 Action item – Louise to contact Lynne to ask where things stand with efforts on the Barns of Lincoln project -- what the photographer has done, the plan for the future – and report at the next meeting.
- ** 4/13/2021 Action item – Ari to check with Stacy for AgCom current funding
- ** 6/8/2021 Action Item – Louise to forward to everyone an example of a Right-to-Farm-Law disclosure form used by Berkshire realtors.
- ** 6/8/2021 Action Item – All to review the example of a Right-to-Farm-Law disclosure form used by Berkshire realtors. Louise will seek feedback from everyone.
- ** 6/8/2021 Action Item – Lynne to follow up with Berkshire County to find out what they had to do to put in place a requirement for a Right-to-Farm-Law disclosure form to be used by Berkshire realtors.
- ** 6/8/2021 Action Item – Ari to touch base with Dr. Kanner to confirm his willingness to provide \$500 of fruit to the local food pantry.
- ** 6/8/2021 Action Item – Lynne will arrange to get the checks cut by the town for the 3 farms who've agreed to provide food to the local food pantry.
- ** 7/13/2021 Action Item -- Corey to put notice on Ag Comm website re: farmers' market
- ** 7/13/2021 Action Item -- Ari to check with Selects about consulting Town Counsel and Sara Mattes about requiring disclosure of Lincoln's RTF bylaw to prospective buyers.
- ** 7/13/2021 Action Item -- Michelle is checking on Weston, which requires disclosure RTF at sale of a home. Michelle to send link with this info to the Ag Comm.
- ** 7/13/2021 Action Item -- Louise to follow up with Garden Club re: speakers for the no-till gardening event – Doug (last name?) and his partner, maybe Ari Kurtz, maybe Pete Lowy
- ** 7/13/2021 Action Item -- Corey to contact Heather about Instagram account
- ** 8/10/2021 Action Item -- Ari to contact the Food Project re: what/when food they'll be delivering to the food bank.

** 8/10/2021 Action Item -- Lynne to work with Ari to find out how Weston's right to farm law disclosure was established.

** 8/10/2021 Action Item -- Ari to contact Michelle to see if she has a name of someone in Weston whom he can contact to find out about Weston's right to farm law disclosure.

** 8/10/2021 Action Item -- Ari to check on how and to whom the RFP for the Umbrello land was distributed.

** 8/10/2021 Action Item – Karen to draft message for recruiting members for the Ag Comm..

** 11/9/2021 Action Item – Karen to ask Margie Brown about the equipment Minute Man Park purchased for pasture improvement.

** 11/9/2021 Action Item – Louise to add updating farm brochures to next mtg

** 11/9/2021 Action Item – Karen to contact Jim Cunningham about the fate of videotapes of Ag Comm's past talks/workshops and about broadcasting them and future ones on local TV.

** 12/14/2021 Action Item – Lynne to find out to whom the check was cut for the Food Project (\$2600) and whether it was cashed . Lynne to report back to the Ag Comm.

** 12/14/2021 Action Item – Ari to put on January agenda to discuss how to spend this year's Ag Comm funding and possibly next year's.

** 12/14/2021 Action Item – Ari to create an online list of Lincoln farms, products, contact information etc like the one in the Ag Comm brochure.

8:58pm -- Meeting adjourned.