



**Working Lands Forum II:**  
***“The Growing Local Challenge”***

**Impediments to Local Agriculture**

**THE DILEMMA OF  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S  
AGRICULTURAL RESERVE:  
Competing interests of agricultural  
and open space preservation**

12-4-09

**Public  
Desires**

*Disconnect*

**Economic and  
Regulatory  
Environment**

*Disconnect*

**Agriculture in  
the County**

**Public Recommendations and Desires**

The nonfarm community:

- Wants the Benefits of Agriculture Without the Sacrifice: Noise, Dust, Odors, Traffic
- Wants to Reduce Rooftops/Housing to Preserve Viewsheds
- Wants More Farmers Markets
- Wants More Opportunities to Buy Local, and from CSAs
- Wants More Locally Grown Organic Products
- Is willing to Pay a Premium Price for Fresh/Local Products (according to 2007 Policy Choices Survey: [http://scpp.ubalt.edu/pdfs/SCPP\\_Fall\\_07\\_12607.pdf](http://scpp.ubalt.edu/pdfs/SCPP_Fall_07_12607.pdf))
- Has interest in the Environment and Sustainable Agriculture
- Has a View of Farm Animals that is Incompatible with Modern Food Production

**The public's desires are not being fulfilled because of...**

**The Economic Reality of Farming**

Few people want to enter the direct agricultural marketing business because of:

- Availability/Cost of Land, Labor and Housing
- Excessive Federal, State and County Regulations
- Hard Work - Disillusionment
- Low Return on Investment, Meaning that Farmers Seek Off-Farm Income
- Rising Cost of Production – Fuel, Fertilizer, Insurance, Taxes
- Weather Constraints and access to water
- Cost of Pests/Disease/Deer Control
- Difficult Organic Certification Process
- Demand for New Technical Assistance, Education/Outreach for Direct –Market Products
- Demand for Support Structures – RS Service Zone and Housing

**Because of these challenges, the County's agricultural industry has difficulty attracting new farmers. There is a conflict between open space preservation and agricultural preservation. Open space will only be preserved if agriculture remains economically viable.**

**The Current Agricultural Environment**

**Montgomery County has:**

- An Aging Demographic – Average Age of County Farmers is 57 years old
- 14 Farmers Markets – Downcounty/Not on Farms (see reverse)
- 15 Farm Markets – Upcounty/On Farms
- 4 CSAs
- 50 total fruit/vegetable producers
- 10 direct-market livestock operations

**The County does not have enough producers to support its current farmers markets. Many of the County's 50 direct producers have reached production capacity and cannot participate in farmers markets.**

# General Observations

- Regional Food Production will require thinking differently about local agriculture
- Regional Food Production does not necessarily mean it must compete at the expense of traditional agriculture
- Fruit and Vegetable production tends to attract a younger demographic and mostly women



# A New Way of Thinking Presents New Kinds of Challenges

- An increase in regional food production will require some innovative thinking and approaches as well as and buy in from all vested parties.
- Water Supply – Need to Identify ways to encourage on farm water storage – **Challenges** – Buy in from Regulatory/Environmental Community
- Smaller/Intensive farming operations will require need for on farm worker housing. **Challenges** - Current Climate is for less rooftops in Ag Reserve, as well as access to farm labor including documented migratory labor that will reflect new immigration policies.

# A New Way of Thinking Presents New Kinds of Challenges

- Seasonal Agriculture – To go beyond the limitations of our current growing season will require developing and gaining acceptance of food production infrastructure needs (Greenhouses and Green energy Production)
- **Challenges** – Need for Ag Friendly Zoning: Green houses are considered commercial structures and usually require special exceptions. Tax assessment policies consider green houses as commercial structures.
- **Greatest Challenge** - Must bring together the different philosophies associated with open space preservation vs agricultural land preservation

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# Successful Approaches

- Local Farmers Markets – As Farmers expand their customer base they migrate from Local Farmers Markets, to CSA's and their own on Farm Markets.
- Farm Incubator initiatives – Look at public lands in agricultural areas as the medium to begin start up ag enterprises through long term lease agreements. [http://www.gazette.net/stories/04142010/poolnew190628\\_32564.php](http://www.gazette.net/stories/04142010/poolnew190628_32564.php)
- Identify ways to create incentives for long term lease agreements for fruit and vegetable production.

