



# Regional Agriculture Viability Study

## Western Connecticut Council of Governments

### Draft Final Report

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## Executive Summary

Agriculture in Western Connecticut is deeply rooted, ecologically diverse, and widely seen as an integral part of the local historical identity. To retain this cherished place, however, it needs additional regulatory and financial support to compete with globalizing supply chains, increased market consolidation, and worsening climate change. While these trends are not unique to Western Connecticut, there are both opportunities and challenges that the local context poses. Acknowledging the high local land prices and density of wealthy customers, the Project Team interviewed over thirty farmers and food system stakeholders and fielded a survey of local residents with over 340 responses. This stakeholder engagement provided crucial insights that informed the recommendations to both WestCOG and each of its eighteen constituent municipalities. These recommendations are intended to improve the viability of commercial farming in the region, reconnect residents with agriculture, and inspire the next generation of farmers, chefs, and food system activists.

This study found that Western Connecticut has a diverse array of production methods, crop types, and consumer engagement strategies. Newer farmers often start with direct-to-consumer distribution, especially on-farm sales, to optimize margins on limited production volumes while larger and more established farms (especially orchards) have developed relationships with retailers to provide truckloads of fresh food beyond Connecticut's borders. The high density of wealthy consumers provides many opportunities for agritourism, including seasonal events, farm-to-table dinners, and larger events such as festivals and weddings. These on-farm events not only provide economically competitive opportunities for farmers, but also offer residents the chance to connect with where their food comes from. Given the limited quantity of large, contiguous, farmable parcels in Western Connecticut, agritourism represents one of the more viable ways for farmers to remain in operation. Certain events and markets can take place on just a few acres and can earn more in several days than an entire year's worth of produce sales. Challenges exist however when farmers try to secure the necessary temporary event permits, alcohol permits, and farmstand construction permits that facilitate this economically competitive sales channel. It was evident through interviews with farmers and local food system stakeholders that these state and municipal processes are slowing the growth of farming in Western Connecticut. These interviews and survey responses directly informed the recommendations in this study.

WestCOG and the region's municipalities are generally supportive of agriculture. Western Connecticut farmers reported positive relationships with their local municipal planners and economic development officials. While most farm types exist at some scale throughout the region, certain types, especially those that engage the public directly, are most common. Development of controlled environment agriculture (CEA) facilities, such as greenhouses, is technically possible but logistically challenged by the high land prices and lack of contiguous, appropriately sized parcels. Competition from



more rural areas of CT and NY is likely to outcompete CEA facilities at wholesale scales, however some niche production opportunities have been successful. Aquaculture has historically been successful in Western Connecticut but was excluded from this study given the limited role municipalities and WestCOG play in regulating the industry. Instead, this Study aims to address challenges that local farmers currently face such as reducing the time and expense for obtaining event permits, reconsidering relevant parking regulations where appropriate, and revising the minimum acreage requirements for farming as a primary land use.

The farmers of Western Connecticut are resilient and determined to find new markets, use sustainable production methods, and engage the next generation of farmers. WestCOG and its municipalities can support these growers by considering the following three overarching recommendations, with specific action items and relevant stakeholders detailed later in the report:

- 1. Update and Streamline Agriculture Regulations**
- 2. Improve Interaction with State and Federal Government**
- 3. Establish or Expand Collaborative Communication**

At the municipal level, specific code updates were identified for each of the eighteen municipalities that can reduce the barriers to all types of commercial farming. These recommended code updates are laid out within individual briefing sheets for each of the eighteen municipalities (Appendix A). They contain actionable language that, if implemented, will help reduce the barriers to starting and scaling agricultural operations in Western Connecticut. The recommendations are directly informed by stakeholder interviews with local farmers, municipal planners, and conservation organizations. Certain municipalities with more undeveloped land, a recent history of farming, and protected pastoral identities have more frequent interactions regulating and defining agriculture and therefore have more code recommendations than municipalities with largely developed, urban land. Urban agriculture is considered throughout the project, but the limited land available and extreme prevailing land prices make commercial urban production exceedingly difficult.

By reducing barriers to agriculture of all types, it is the intention of this project to help increase the number and diversity of farms in Western Connecticut so that all residents may engage in, be inspired by, and help foster a more sustainable world.

## ACTIVITY 1: EXISTING CONDITIONS & MARKET ANALYSIS

### Current Agricultural Landscape

Western Connecticut presents a diverse agricultural landscape characterized by a mix of production techniques, distribution methods, and customer engagement strategies. The region faces unique challenges due to its proximity to urban areas, high land values, and inconsistent regulatory environment. This analysis examines the current state of farming in Western CT, identifies active commercial farms and potential new farmland, and reviews micro- and macroeconomic challenges they face. Topics of particular focus include agritourism trends, regulatory challenges, and technical assistance.

In terms of scale, there are vast differences in operation and distribution models between smaller and larger farmers. Smaller farms tend to focus on direct-to-consumer (D2C) distribution, such as CSAs, farm stands, and farmers markets, while larger farms are more likely to have sufficient scale to engage in wholesale distribution through co-ops, food hubs<sup>1</sup>, specialty retailers, or national chains. The key difference in these distribution models, not unique to agriculture, is the scale and margin associated with third-party distribution. Smaller operations rely on the higher margins of D2C distribution, while larger operations can accept the lower unit price offered by wholesalers because they are moving significantly larger volumes.

In Western Connecticut, contiguous parcels of farmable land are at a relative premium, whereas further north, especially in the Middletown area and Connecticut River Valley, there are much larger parcels of flat, tillable land. As such, farms in Western Connecticut tend to be smaller and focus on D2C distribution. This is a boon to local farm-friendly consumers, as there are numerous opportunities to engage with the fresh food, open green space, and ecological connections that local farms offer. The challenges arise, however, when local regulations are not written to prioritize farming, access to farm activities, and on-farm sales. As discussed before, direct to consumer distribution is one of the only feasible ways for small farms to stay in business, and as such action is necessary to support their access to viable markets.

### Farm Types, Viability and Distribution

The region hosts a diverse range of viable agricultural operations including both traditional and innovative production models. Growers are finding success using both conventional and organic practices, marketing through a variety of distribution channels including farmers markets, on-farm sales, and wholesalers. The most common farm typologies are captured below, with representative examples from the region:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/sr73.pdf>

***Traditional row crop operations, including fodder production for livestock, such as town-leased farmland in New Milford, CT.***

These farms are most viable where access to mechanized equipment is easily available and large parcels are contiguous or co-located. New farmers are unlikely to break into farming using this typology given the significant capital expense and relatively low labor requirements, which limit opportunities to gain experience. Viability of row crop farming is challenged by the limited availability of large, open parcels in Western Connecticut and limited returns per acre for these crops.



***Specialty crop producers, such as vegetables, fruits, flowers, herbs, such as Warrups Farm in Redding, CT.***

These farms require relatively less startup capital than row crop farms but require vastly more labor. At small scales, these farms are viable through various forms of direct marketing to consumers, while at larger scales mechanization can allow smaller margins on larger volumes of produce. Labor is by far the largest expense for fresh fruit and vegetable production (ie. specialty crops).





***Organic specialty and row crop farmers, such as Fort Hill Farm in New Milford, CT.***

Certified Organic farmers enjoy significant price premiums, although their input costs are accordingly higher due to the restricted use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides. To control pest and weed pressure, organic farmers must use more time and labor-intensive methods compared to conventional farmers. Despite these challenges, there are numerous examples of viable organic farms producing both row crops and specialty crops in Western Connecticut.



***Livestock operations (dairy, beef, small ruminants), such as Stuart Family Farm in Bridgewater, CT who raises high-quality, animal-welfare-certified beef.***

Depending on the size and type of herd, livestock operations can have significant capital startup requirements. This limits entrants to family farms who inherit animals, or experienced operators who have worked on other ranches and acquire capital through public or private channels. These farms are viable in Western Connecticut where producers can earn higher margins on direct-to-consumer distribution. Rotational grazing (as practiced by Stuart Family Farm) can have tremendous ecosystem benefits in terms of carbon sequestration, water quality, and biodiversity.





*Vineyards and wineries, such as Aquila's Nest Vineyard in Newtown, CT, which was recently named one of Connecticut's "Most Unique Places to Propose".*

These farms are viable in Western Connecticut because of their ability to interact with the public and earn favorable margins through on-farm sales or local distribution. These farms provide amazing opportunities for local recreation, food and art festivals, and tourism.



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*Emerging business models such as hydroponics, aquaponics, and controlled environment agriculture (CEA), such as High Ridge Hydroponics in Norwalk, CT that focuses on microgreens for restaurants and farmers markets.*

CEA is an exciting production typology for urban environments given the denser, more secure growing environment that increases yields and reduces the risk of environmental contamination significantly. Hydroponic production allows for at least 80% more efficient water use compared to outdoor agriculture, although energy use is much higher. Startup and labor costs for CEA farms are often higher than traditional farms, although they are often able to earn local or sustainability-related price premiums.

When all these factors are balanced in a favorable way, they can be viable, especially if earning higher margins from direct marketing to restaurants and other customers.



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*Educational and community farms, such as Ambler Farm in Wilton, CT, host town and YMCA summer camps for youth.*

These farms are incredibly impactful in terms of educating and motivating young people to pursue careers or hobbies in agriculture. They almost always rely on some external funding but can generate significant revenue through summer or after school programs for youth. They are viable throughout Western Connecticut when well-run organizationally and supported by enough students.



*Freeimages.com*

## Map of Existing Farms

As part of the Existing Conditions analysis, the project team inventoried active commercial farms in the Western CT region. Prospecting for this inventory included multiple data sources, such as land cover GIS data, farmers market registries, Google Maps, CT Grown website, and UCONN Extension.



Figure #1: Map of Active Commercial Farms in Western CT

## Inventory of Active Commercial Farms in Western Connecticut

Farm Name	Municipality	Farm Typology
Blue Jay Orchards	Bethel	Orchards (Specialty Crops)
Bob's Tree Farm	Bethel	Specialty Crops
Holbrook Farm	Bethel	Livestock Operation
Maywood Farm	Bridgewater	Specialty Crops
Nature View Farm	Bridgewater	Dairy and Livestock
Stuart Family Farm	Bridgewater	Livestock Operation
Sunny Meadow Farm	Bridgewater	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Thistledown Farm	Bridgewater/Roxbury	Livestock Operation
Halas Farm Market	Danbury	Specialty Crops
Versailles Farms	Greenwich	Specialty Crops
Centerbrook Farm-Hipp Farm	New Milford	Livestock and Specialty Crops
Clatter Valley Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops
De Hoek Farm	New Milford	Livestock Operation
Deerefield Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops
Finnegan's Farm, West	New Milford	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Fort Hill Farm	New Milford	Organic Specialty Crops
Boardman Bridge Farmers Market at Maryland Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops
Harris Hill Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops
Kimberly Farm	New Milford	Dairy, Livestock, and Specialty Crops



Lappala Christmas Tree Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops
Roxbrook Farm	New Milford	Row Crop and Specialty Crops
Sullivan Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops and Educational Farm
Village Farm	New Milford	Organic Specialty Crops
Windswept Tree Farm	New Milford	Specialty Crops
Appleberry Farm	Newtown	Specialty Crops
Aquila's Nest Vineyards	Newtown	Vineyard and Winery
Bellie Acres Farm	Newtown	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Castle Hill Farm	Newtown	Specialty Crops
Farming 101	Newtown	Organic Specialty Crops
Great Ring Farm	Newtown	Specialty Crops
Powers Farm	Newtown	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Rowanwood Farm	Newtown	Livestock
Sepe Farm	Newtown	Livestock
Shortt's Farm	Newtown	Organic Specialty Crops
Bucciarelli Farm	Norwalk	Specialty Crops
High Ridge Hydroponics	Norwalk	CEA
Farm Jibe-iT	Redding	Educational Farm, Livestock
Little Gray Barn Farm	Redding	Livestock
New Pond Farm Education Center	Redding	Educational Farm and Dairy
Stietzel Family Farm	Redding	Specialty Crops and Livestock

Warrup's Farm	Redding	Specialty Crops
Henny Penny Farm	Ridgefield	Educational Farm and Livestock
The Hickories	Ridgefield	Organic Specialty Crops and Livestock
Horseshoe Farm	Ridgefield	Organic Specialty Crops
Veronica's Garden	Ridgefield	Specialty Crops
Happy Acres Farm	Sherman	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Strawberry Fields Farm	Sherman	Specialty Crops
White Silo Farm & Winery	Sherman	Vineyard and Winery
Fairgate Farm	Stamford	Educational Farm and Specialty Crops
Heckscher Farm	Stamford	Educational Farm
Lachat Town Farm	Weston	Educational Farm
Viv's Veggies at Chestnut Farm	Weston	Organic Specialty Crops
Wells Hill Farm	Weston	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Zadie's Farm	Weston	Specialty Crops
Belta's Farm	Westport	Specialty Crops
Gilbertie's Herb and Garden Center	Westport/Easton	Educational and CEA
Wakeman Town Farm	Westport	Specialty Crops and Educational Farm
Ambler Farm	Wilton	Educational Farm
Millstone Farm	Wilton	Specialty Crops and Livestock
Offinger Farm on Chestnut Hill	Wilton	Specialty Crops

## **Potential Farmland Maps**

To demonstrate the potential impact of more farm-friendly policies, several maps were generated that analyzed Western Connecticut land parcels for the suitability of both commercial and hobby (secondary) farming.

### **Potential Commercial Farmland Methodology**

To calculate Potential Commercial Farmland, we began by identifying farmable land of at least 3 acres. Farmable land was defined as land at least 2 miles away from a registered Superfund site, not classified as wetlands or water bodies, not containing buildings or other permanent structures, not state forest land or tree canopy covered area, or having a slope exceeding 10%. These exclusions were applied using GIS to remove unsuitable lands. Next, the remaining area of farmable land was refined by intersecting it with the USDA Prime Farmland Soil layer in GIS. This selected tracts of land that had any percentage of prime soil. If a property had more than 3 acres of farmable land it was chosen as a potential commercial farm.

### **Potential Secondary Farmland Methodology**

To calculate Potential Secondary Farmland, we began by identifying farmable land of at least 1 acre. Secondary farmable land was defined as land within residential zones and at least 2 miles away from a registered Superfund site, not classified as wetlands or water bodies, not state forest land, nor that has a slope exceeding 10%. Next, the remaining area of secondary farmable land was refined by intersecting it with the USDA Prime Farmland Soil layer in GIS. This selected tracts of land that had any percentage of prime soil. If a residential property had more than 1 acre of secondary farmable land it was chosen as a potential secondary farm.

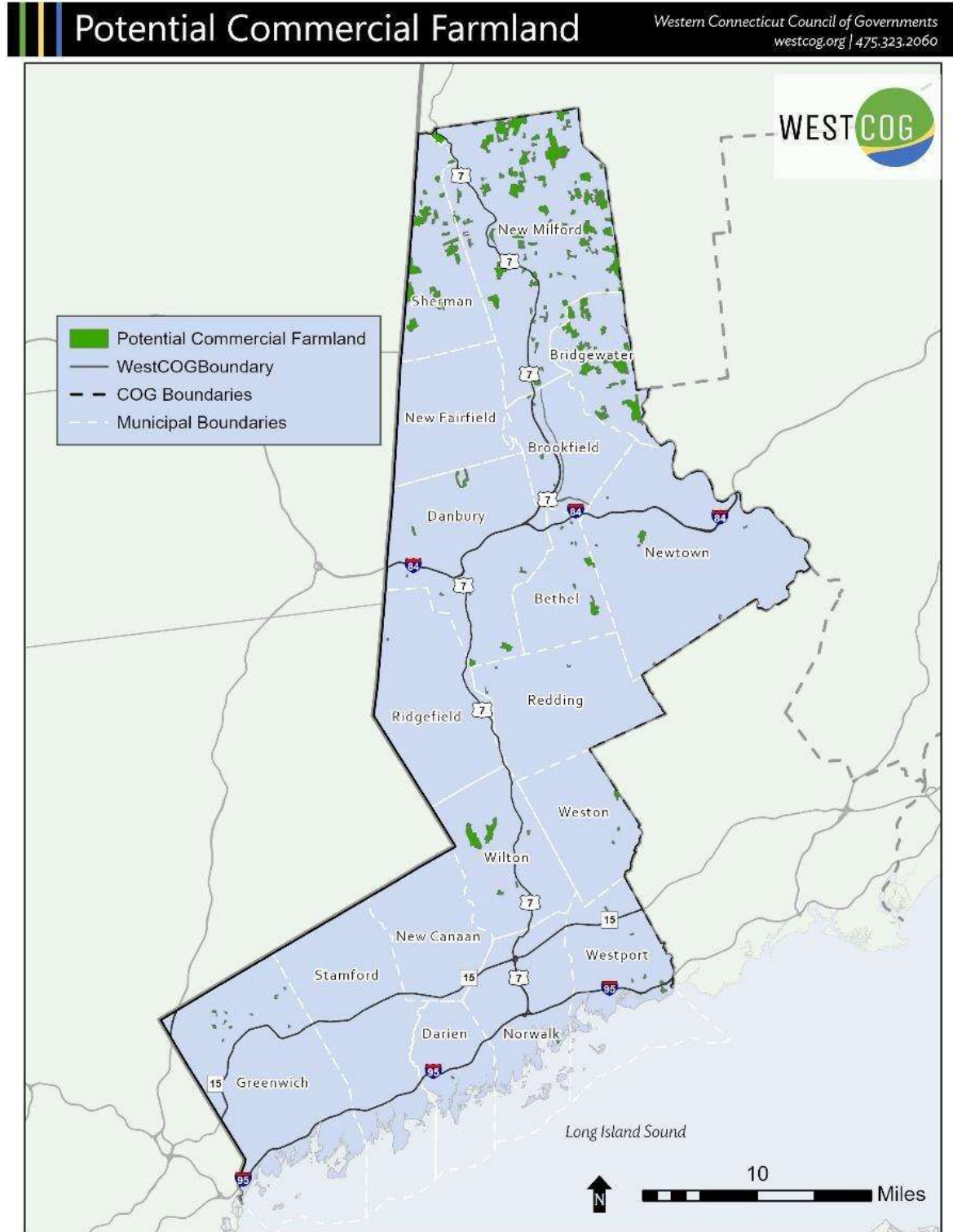


Figure #2: Map of Potential Commercial Farmland in Western CT



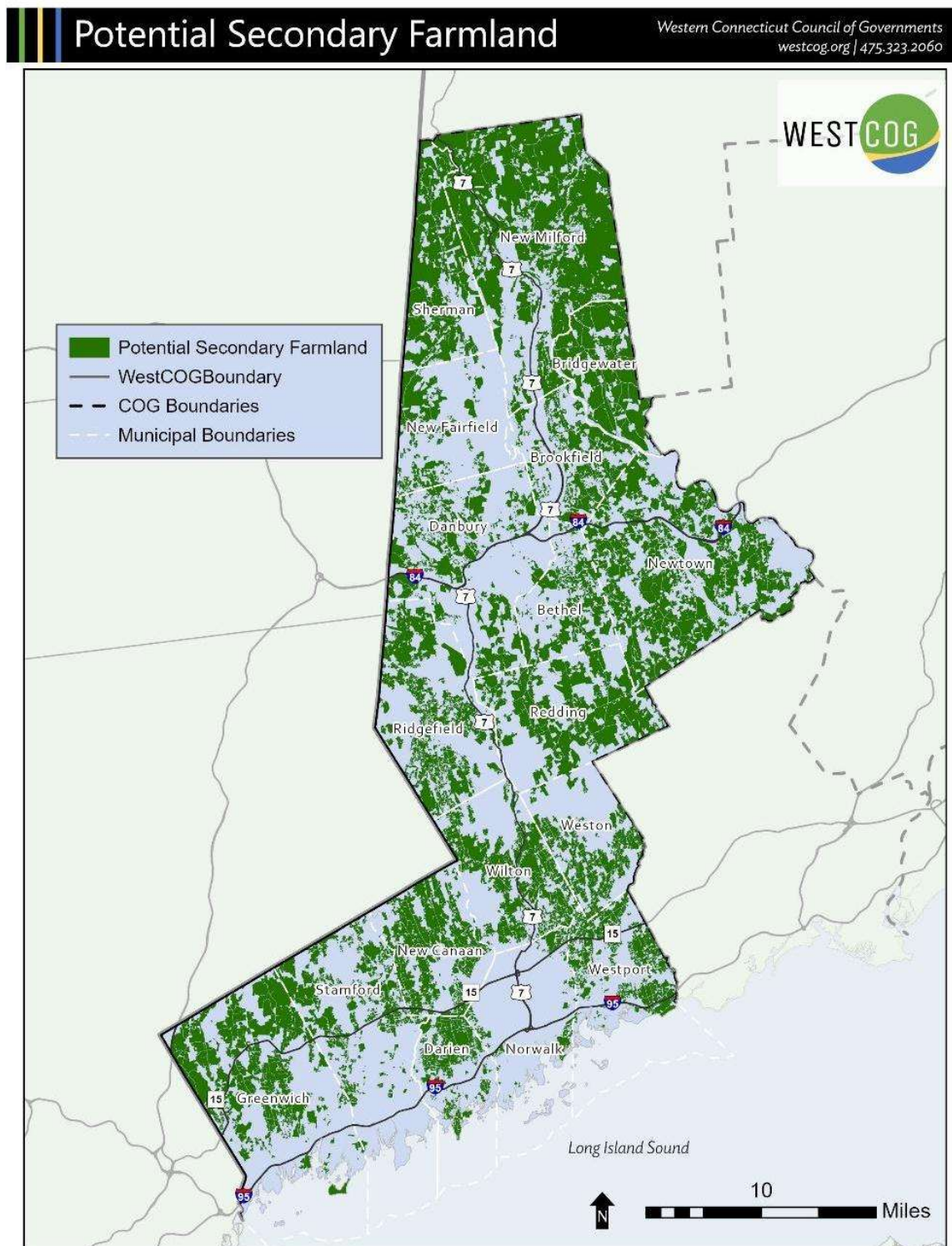


Figure #3: Map of Potential Secondary Farmland in Western CT

## Land Use Patterns

Farmers, land stewards, and planning officials located across the Region were interviewed to understand their experiences. Several themes emerged regarding the use and availability of farmland:

1. Significant amounts of farmland have been preserved through various conservation programs, including the Nature Conservancy, municipalities, and local land trusts.
2. Fragmented parcels are common, making achieving economies of scale difficult.
3. Leased farmland, which makes investing in building soil health or long-term conservation projects more risky
4. Competition from residential development which farms will never be able to compete with economically.
5. High proportion of hobby farms and part-time farming operations. Often leading to more nuisance complaints, as part-time and hobby farmers have less experience with proper waste handling practices, such as manure composting.

## State and Local Agriculture-Related Programs

Below is a summary of the State and Local policies and programs that directly affect agriculture in Western Connecticut. It includes both legislative definitions and statutes, as well as community and non-profit led programs to support the viability of local farming.

### State Programs:

1. **Public Act 490 Program**<sup>2</sup>- This statute describes the state definition of agricultural land use and provides the associated property tax reduction. It allows municipalities to assess properties based on use rather than their fair market value providing crucial property tax benefits for agricultural land, improving viability in both the short and long term. Municipalities set their own acreage requirements in order for a property to qualify for the reduced assessment.
2. **State Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)**<sup>3</sup>- This effective mechanism reduces the development value of farmland by preventing sales for non-agricultural uses. It functions to protect farmland that might otherwise be pressured by residential or commercial development. This significant capital investment helps reduce the future investment costs that farmers will have to make, enabling new farmers to access high-quality farmland that they otherwise may not be able to afford. Municipalities and the State of Connecticut have exercised this mechanism numerous times in the past, preserving at least 350 farms in perpetuity<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/doag/commissioner/commissioner/public-act-490---the-basics>

<sup>3</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/doag/adarc/programs/farmland-preservation-overview/information-for-pdr-easement-holders>

<sup>4</sup> <https://workinglandsalliance.org/five-farms-preserved-with-state-support/>

### **CT Farm Energy Program<sup>5</sup>**

The CT Farm Energy Program represents a \$32 million investment in agricultural sustainability, with a multifaceted approach to energy management and efficiency. Comprehensive energy audits provide agricultural facilities with detailed assessments of their current energy consumption and potential improvement areas. The initiative also offers funding for energy-efficient equipment upgrades that enable farmers to modernize their operational infrastructure.

Solar installation support is a critical component, empowering farmers to transition towards renewable energy sources. This aspect of the program not only reduces operational costs but also contributes to broader sustainable energy goals. The program also provides comprehensive energy management consulting, ensuring farmers receive guidance throughout their sustainability improvements. This has been an effective mechanism to increase the number of farms generating their own renewable power in Western Connecticut.

### **CT Grown for CT Kids School Nutrition Grant<sup>6</sup>**

This Connecticut Department of Agriculture program modifies traditional procurement approaches, providing higher reimbursement rates for locally sourced agricultural products. This creates a direct financial incentive for both schools and local farmers. The program mandates a minimum 20% local food purchasing requirement, ensuring a meaningful commitment to regional agricultural support.

Professional development activities include comprehensive training for food service professionals and teachers so that local foods are incorporated in the classroom as well as the lunchroom. These educational resources provide deep insights into local food systems and their broader economic and environmental implications. Direct financial incentives for school districts serve as a powerful motivator, encouraging systemic changes in institutional food purchasing strategies and supporting the state's agricultural ecosystem.

### **Farm Transition Grants<sup>7</sup>**

Recognizing the complex challenges of agricultural transition and succession, these grants provide a holistic support framework for emerging farmers. Limited microgrants of \$5,000 temporarily support new agricultural entrepreneurs, while larger grants of \$25,000 are available for established farms to buy necessary equipment. Additionally, business planning assistance and mentorship connections provide valuable knowledge transfer from experienced agricultural professionals.

### **Climate Smart Agriculture Initiatives**

The Climate Smart Agriculture Program through the Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Office provides funding for farms to improve their soil health or energy sustainability,

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ctfarmenergy.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/doag/adarc/adarc/grants/ct-grown-for-ct-kids-grant>

<sup>7</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/doag/adarc/adarc/grants/farm-transition-grant>

thereby reducing their carbon emissions. Meanwhile, climate adaptation funding enables farmers to develop resilient agricultural systems capable of withstanding increasingly variable environmental conditions.

Soil health improvement technologies receive dedicated attention, recognizing the critical role of ecological systems in sustainable agriculture. Water conservation technique support addresses growing concerns about resource management, while renewable energy integration assistance provides farmers with tools to diversify their energy portfolios. The program's commitment to carbon sequestration project funding underscores their approach to addressing climate change through agricultural improvement.

## **Municipal Farm Support**

Municipal programs play a vital role in supporting local agriculture and fostering community engagement with farming and food production. One example is municipal-owned farmland leasing programs, such as those in New Milford, where the town leases public land to farmers for agricultural use. In addition, community gardening initiatives are gaining traction in various municipalities, providing residents with space to grow their own food. Several WestCOG municipalities, including Darien and Bethel, offer community gardening programs that strengthen community ties and increase fresh food access.

Municipalities also support farmers' markets which serve as a direct link between producers and consumers. Municipalities facilitate farmers' markets by offering public spaces, such as town greens or downtown areas, for market use. Some municipalities, like New Milford, provide organizational support through municipal departments or commissions, such as their Parks and Recreation Department, which helps coordinate activities and operations. Furthermore, municipalities extend social service support to farmers' markets, as seen in Bethel's senior voucher program, which assists low-income residents in accessing fresh, locally grown produce.

Beyond food access, municipalities also support local educational programs related to agriculture. For example, Ambler Farm in Wilton and Sullivan Farm in New Milford offer summer camps and other educational activities for children, fostering a connection to farming and sustainability.

## **Land Trust Partnerships**

Land trust partnerships play a significant role in conserving farmland and protecting it from future development. One of the most effective strategies is the use of conservation easements, which reduce the development value of land by restricting its future use to farming. Since agricultural land rarely competes with the economic value of residential development, these easements are crucial for ensuring the long-term protection of farmland. Best practices for farmland conservation often include long-term leases—ranging from five to ten years or more—offered at below-market rates to make farming financially viable. In many cases, these leases may also include provisions for housing and temporary infrastructure, supporting the operational needs of the farm. Additionally, municipalities may provide support for permanent infrastructure improvements, such as wells or drainage systems, to enhance the sustainability and productivity of the farmland.



Land Trust Case Study: Sunny Valley Preserve (The Nature Conservancy)	
Location: Bridgewater and New Milford	Size: 1850 acres total, 450 in active production
History: Originally owned by Pratt Family, who created the Sunny Valley Foundation. In the 1970s, the Nature Conservancy acquired the land after a period of financial difficulty for the Foundation. The focus is now on maintaining over 13 miles of hiking trails and supporting the four working farms on the land.	<p>Current Operations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stuart Family Farm<sup>8</sup> (grass-fed beef) - Animal Welfare Certified <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lease includes the farmhouse</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Fort Hill Farm<sup>9</sup> (organic CSA) - 20 acres in vegetables and 30 acres of hay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure cost shared between farm and land trust depending on permanence</li> <li>• Solar panels (removable) - farmer-owned</li> <li>• Poles for solar panels (permanent) - land trust-owned</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Nature View Farm (raw milk dairy) - 12 cows <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmlink<sup>10</sup> facilitated new farmer search</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Sunny Valley Farm (original) - Switched from dairy to silage/hay/sweet corn</li> </ol>
<p>Financial Model:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Farmers have a recurring 5-year lease with a 5-year exit clause.</li> <li>2. The Nature Conservancy requires \$1M in liability insurance from farmers, a standard level of coverage for foodservice or independent farms.</li> <li>3. The Nature Conservancy charges approximately 7% of the prevailing farmland value, equating to \$100-200/acre.</li> <li>4. Farmers are allowed to build temporary structures (greenhouses).</li> <li>5. Housing is offered as part of some leases.</li> </ol> <p>Best Practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separation between the farmer (tenant) and the land trust (landlord) in terms of joint business entities. Challenges arise when land trusts form operational partnerships with specific farms rather than operating solely as landlords.</li> <li>• Land trusts that have increased their internal farming expertise are better prepared to negotiate farmland leases.</li> </ul>	

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.stuartfamilyfarm.com/about-us/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.forthillfarm.com/farm-history>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ctfarmlink.org/>

## Common Challenges to Viable Farming in Western CT

For farms to be economically viable, they must balance production costs with obtainable revenues at their scale of operation. In practice, farms with inherited land and infrastructure are at an advantage relative to new entrants who must cover not only their production costs but also make payments against the cost of the land itself. While grants and loans are available from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, and others to help cover the cost of irrigation and cold-chain equipment, it is certainly preferable for new farmers to acquire land with these critical pieces of infrastructure already in place. Several local entities, such as land trusts, are working to provide this necessary support to their tenants. Given the worsening impacts of climate change, one land trust manager said that irrigation equipment is now essential for all his farmers. One of the aims of this Study is to help provide policy makers with a nuanced understanding of the requirements and challenges that Western Connecticut farmers face.

In addition to the national challenges that farmers face from corporate consolidation<sup>11</sup>, climate change, and limited labor availability<sup>12</sup>, farmland prices in CT average over \$13,700/acre making it the fourth most expensive state in which to buy farmland<sup>13</sup>. Various programs exist to help farmers install infrastructure, including the CT Farm Energy Program, but relatively few exist to help farmers acquire land in the first place. CT Farmlink is an active example of an organization bridging the gap between landowners and prospective farmers, and was an important contributor to one of the Sunny Valley Preserve Farms described in the case study above.

Based on interviews with over 15 farmers from Western CT, common challenges to economic viability in local farming include:

1. Land Access & Costs
  - Some of the highest land prices in the country
  - Difficulty finding land with proper infrastructure/utilities
  - Inability to compete with housing or commercial use valuations
  - Limited availability of contiguous parcels of farmable land
2. Labor Issues
  - Difficulty finding workers
  - Shortage of worker housing
  - Inconsistency and liability of volunteers
3. Regulatory Challenges
  - Varying definitions of "farming" across municipalities
  - Complex agritourism/event permitting
  - Minimum acreage requirements to meet municipal farming definition
4. Limited Financial Viability

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ipes-food.org/\\_img/upload/files/Concentration\\_FullReport.pdf](https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Concentration_FullReport.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/27/1190476628/americas-farms-are-facing-a-serious-labor-shortage>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays\\_Reports/reports/land0822.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/land0822.pdf)

- High operating costs, including labor and ecological farming inputs (fertilizer, pest control, etc.)
- Limited profitability from farming alone
- Need for off-farm income - According to the USDA, 96% of farm families nationwide have off-farm income and for small farms (<350k in annual revenue) most of their income comes from off-farm sources<sup>14</sup>

5. Market Access

- Saturated farmers markets, including long waiting lists to earn a spot
- Difficulty accessing larger retail channels, based on limited production scale
- Competition for limited customer base

The time and expense of participating in farmers markets can diminish their profitability, given that farmers need to send a trusted representative of their farm who can both safely handle finances and articulate the value of their products to local customers. Between packing in the morning, setting up, operating the market, cleaning up and driving back to the farm, they typically consume an entire day.

6. Infrastructure & Facilities

- Building maintenance costs
- Requirements for proper facilities (bathrooms, parking)
- Utility access
- Cold storage needs

7. Neighbor Relations

- Noise complaints
- Traffic concerns
- Smell/nuisance issues

8. Technical Support

- Fragmented support services
- Need for business planning assistance
- Lack of coordination between service providers
- Need to identify credible agricultural education resources

9. Climate/Environmental Challenges

- Extreme weather events (floods, droughts) are much more common
- Need for irrigation on almost every farm
- Increased pressure from invasive species (weeds, insects, diseases)
- Need for regenerative soil management

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2021/september/off-farm-income-a-major-component-of-total-income-for-most-farm-households-in-2019/#:~:text=Off%2Dfarm%20income%E2%80%94such%20as,income%20for%20U.S.%20farm%20households.>

## Agritourism Trends

Both traditional and novel approaches to agritourism have been successful in the region, including:

### 1. Traditional Activities

- Pick-your-own apples, berries, Christmas trees, etc.
- Farm stands with produce from one or multiple farms
- Seasonal events (pumpkin patches, corn mazes)
- Educational programs, including youth summer and afterschool programs

### 2. Emerging Trends

- Wedding venues are becoming increasingly popular, however the time and cost required for permitting from local municipalities can be an obstacle.
- Farm-to-table events, which can often make more money in a handful of events than a year's worth of produce sales.
- Farm stays and short-term rentals, including educational or culinary programming
- Wine tastings, such as Aquila's Nest in Newtown, which was recently named "One of the most unique places in CT to propose"
- Value-add products and crafts, such as lavender and floral wreaths





## Summary of Existing Conditions

Western Connecticut's agricultural sector is in a state of transition as older operations contend with farm consolidation, the demand for organic products increases, and the entrance of new enterprises like agritourism and controlled environment agriculture offer innovative business models. Traditional market channels like wholesale dairy and row cropping are losing profitability while direct market channels are increasing in popularity. Although farmer support systems exist through both public and private initiatives, challenges remain in areas of land use regulation, land access, and overall economic viability.

The region maintains active agricultural operations ranging from traditional farms (like Stuart Family Farm and Fort Hill Farm) to newer ventures in hydroponics, wineries, and cut flowers (such as High Ridge Hydroponics, Aquila's Nest Vineyard and Great Ring Flower Farm). While many municipalities claim to be "farm-friendly" and have right-to-farm ordinances, farmers still face significant challenges with land costs, complex regulations, and housing costs. Most operations require off-farm income to remain viable and many farmers are adapting by diversifying their revenue streams.

Agritourism is growing "gangbusters" and represents an increasingly important income stream for farms in the region, though it often creates tension with neighbors and local regulations. Common agritourism activities include farm stands, farm stays, wine tastings, weddings, seasonal events (like hayrides and pumpkin patches), and educational programs. However, municipalities struggle to balance supporting these activities with managing their impact on residential areas, particularly around noise, traffic, and parking. Challenges remain in farmstand regulation, land use definitions, and hoophouse construction permitting.

Successfully maintaining and growing the agricultural sector will require a coordinated effort across municipalities and WestCOG, continued financial and technical support, and adaptive regulatory frameworks that support both traditional and innovative agricultural practices.

## ACTIVITY 2: REGULATORY REVIEW

The regulatory review process followed a structured methodology to evaluate and improve agricultural regulations in each of the eighteen WestCOG municipalities. This involved a comprehensive review of planning documents including Zoning Regulations, Code of Ordinances, and Plans of Conservation and Development, followed by identification of critical definitions within these documents. The Project Team also assessed both strengths and challenges in the current regulatory framework, culminating in specific recommendations for new language and statutes to better support agricultural development at both the individual municipality and COG level.

As part of the review process, we also created and distributed a survey with sections for both farmers and consumers, garnering over 340 responses. Sixteen farmers responded, which provided insight on their experience with local regulations, municipal officials, and agritourism. A full list of the questions and responses can be found in [Appendix B](#).

### Survey Results Summary

Farmers:

1. Very optimistic about market opportunities.
2. Faced only a moderate amount of code/zoning interaction and obstacles
  - a. Most farmers had either spoken with a municipal planning official or knew who they could speak to if they needed to
3. Local farmers reported only having moderate experience with agritourism.

Residents:

1. Newtown, New Milford, and Greenwich had the most respondents.
  - a. Responses were received from residents in 15 of the 18 municipalities in WestCOG
2. Very supportive of farms, farm events, and financing
  - a. Local desire for farmer support systems to improve financial viability
  - b. Supportive of weekly or monthly farm events as long as parking is available and activities do not disrupt traffic
3. Very engaged demographic. More than 80% had visited a farm in the past year
4. Above national average interest in commercial farming
  - a. 6% of respondents had more than a 60% interest in pursuing commercial farming
  - b. Larger than the national proportion of people working in agriculture (less than 2%)

### Summary of Event and Market Regulations

1. Common Permit Types:
  - a. "Limited Duration Special Use Permit" (used in Redding)
  - b. "Temporary Event Permit" (used in New Milford, based on an old traveling circus law)
  - c. Some municipalities use seasonal permits vs. single day permits
2. Key Permit Considerations:
  - a. Parking requirements were consistently mentioned as obstacles by farmers

- b. Unpredictable neighbor relations regarding noise and traffic
  - c. Food service requires health department approval
  - d. State alcohol permits are prohibitively expensive
  - e. For events with tents over 700 square feet, a building permit and inspection are often required
- 3. Common Challenges:
  - a. Pushback on multiple or frequent events from neighbors
  - b. Municipal employee interpretations of what constitutes "agritourism" vs. outdoor event venues, which are often prohibited in residential areas
  - c. Requirement for paved parking and permanent bathroom facilities, both of which cost a minimum of several thousand dollars
- 4. Opportunities
  - a. Streamline and standardize agritourism regulations around parking, bathrooms, farmstands, and related infrastructure.
  - b. Follow the example of WestCOG's work with other zoning topics to disseminate standardized best practice language. Municipal planners mentioned they would welcome this kind of support and guidance.

## **Agritourism Regulatory Framework**

Currently, municipalities in Western CT are struggling to balance agritourism growth with residential concerns, often working with outdated laws that were not designed for agriculture or were designed for a very different type of agriculture than exists today. Many municipalities proclaim themselves as "farm-friendly", with some even having right to farm laws which protect against certain nuisance complaints from neighbors for regular farm activities, however many of their farming definitions and statutes were last updated decades ago when dairy was the predominant output of the region. Today, dairy farms have significantly consolidated, making it difficult for small farmers to compete. This illustrates one of the most common challenges of farming: being required to accept the prevailing market price for your crops. Also described as being a "price-taker", this phenomenon is especially pronounced in dairy, where it has caused generational family farms to sell their herds, adjust distribution strategies, or leave farming altogether. Livestock farms (and orchards) are inherently slower to shift to changing market demands because adjusting the size of your herd or orchard is a several years long process. Fluctuations in the market, changing consumer preferences, and extreme weather events can be difficult to tolerate for these farmers with significant "sunk costs".

**Providing opportunities for farmers to become "price-setters" by creating their own markets via agritourism and on-farm sales would greatly alleviate these macroeconomic challenges** which plague small and medium-size farms across the country. Creating these market opportunities requires straightforward access to construction permits for farmstands and other crucial infrastructure to produce high-value fruits and vegetables for sale to the public. This includes hoophouses and simple greenhouse structures that drastically reduce crop loss to pest and disease pressure and extend the season

into more valuable “shoulder seasons” where competition from other farms is reduced. Currently, municipal codes often prohibit hoophouse and farmstand construction by not specifically including them in their definitions of agricultural land use.

Similarly, a lack of explicit permission for farm stays and other lodging can create undue barriers to local farms wishing to diversify their revenue streams. Farmhouse rentals were observed as a viable and potentially lucrative form of agritourism, however greater attention needs to be paid to the regulation of this type of short-term rentals on farm properties. Municipalities should speak with farmers who host farm stays to understand the challenges and opportunities for this type of farm engagement.

Food processing is an important aspect of a thriving, diverse food system. Unfortunately, there was very little interest observed in food processing, especially on a commercial scale. In terms of regulatory needs, cottage food laws<sup>15</sup> already protect at-home hobbyists who wish to preserve and sell certain low-risk food items, like jellies and preserves. As the quantity of locally grown farm products increases, it is likely that additional business will form around processing and distribution. As that happens, local policy makers will need to increase their attention towards these areas.

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<sup>15</sup> [https://portal.ct.gov/dcp/food-and-standards-division/cottage-food/cottage-food-home?language=en\\_US](https://portal.ct.gov/dcp/food-and-standards-division/cottage-food/cottage-food-home?language=en_US)



## Agricultural Zoning Takeaways

1. Some municipalities do not refer to agriculture at all, a significant obstacle as the code is structured such that if activities are not expressly permitted, then they are prohibited. This de facto ban on farming or construction of essential farm buildings and infrastructure is a hindrance to overall agricultural sector growth.
2. Farming is not always allowed as an accessory use which limits hobby farms and small-scale operations where farming is not the primary use. Code is generally structured to favor other uses over farm development.
3. Farmstand definitions often require paved parking spots or permanent bathrooms, an exorbitant cost (\$10,000+) for a small- or medium-size farm enterprise.
4. Plans of Conservation and Development (POCDs) prioritize preserving existing agricultural businesses, not encouraging agricultural innovation or new businesses. It is essential to have a pipeline of new businesses to foster a strong agricultural ecosystem.
5. Outdated zoning categories overcomplicate farm development, for example “Farm-Residence” Zones have the perception of limiting farming only to those zones. Allow farming as a permitted use in all residential zones rather than only a “Farm-Residence” zone.



**Best Practice: allow farming as a primary and accessory land use “By Right” in all zones**

### Example of Municipal-Specific Code and Zoning Approaches: Newtown

Newtown uses zoning permits that stay with the farm until ownership changes. Depending on farm size, farms are allowed to host events by-right or must apply each time.

- a. Farms under 3 acres must register for "Activities"
- b. Larger farms are allowed to host events by right
- c. Larger events/weddings must come before the commission

#### Takeaways:

- Several municipalities expressed interest in standardizing and replicating regulatory language. Newtown and New Milford would serve as best practices for replicating land use definitions, in addition to farm events and construction permitting procedures.

In Western Connecticut, where farming has historically been a vital part of the landscape and local economy, current agricultural regulations are creating barriers to both existing operations and new farming ventures. The regulatory framework, largely unchanged since the era of widespread dairy farming, fails to accommodate modern agricultural innovations like controlled environment agriculture (CEA) and contemporary farming business models like agritourism.

New farmers face challenges due to restrictive minimum zoning sizes, while established farms struggle with burdensome event permitting processes that limit their ability to diversify income. Municipal-level variations in regulations further complicate the situation - some municipalities have overly restrictive rules, while others lack any agricultural provisions altogether, effectively prohibiting farming by omission. Infrastructure requirements such as mandatory paved parking and strict setbacks drive up property costs. Current Plans of Conservation and Development (POCD) tend to focus narrowly on preserving existing farms rather than creating an environment that encourages new agricultural enterprises and innovation.

## ACTIVITY 3: SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

The sustainability of local farming practices has implications for drinking water quality, air quality, and biodiversity. More broadly, agricultural sustainability is implicated in both mitigation and adaptation efforts to respond to global climate change. Myriad aspects are involved in agrifood sustainability including fertilizer production, waste management, soil health, pest management, global shipping patterns, and geopolitical pressures. This brief but holistic assessment examines the critical intersections of food systems, climate change, and agricultural sustainability in Western Connecticut. By analyzing key environmental impact factors, procurement strategies, and ecological potential, the assessment provides strategic insights for regional stakeholders to support a more ecologically sustainable and economically just food system in Western Connecticut.

### Global Food Systems and Emissions Landscape

Transportation, food waste, and dietary choices are three of the most significant and actionable aspects to modern food production, consumption, and systems management.

Recent research from the University of Sydney<sup>16</sup> reveals that approximately one-fifth of global food-related greenhouse gas emissions stem directly from transportation processes. Of this, cold-chain and frozen foods have the biggest energy demand and associated carbon emissions. This finding underscores the importance of developing localized food systems and reducing supply chain distances.

Food waste presents another significant challenge in sustainability efforts. According to ReFED<sup>17</sup>, a leading food waste research organization, the economic and environmental implications of food waste are profound. The United States wastes approximately 38% of all food produced, representing not only a substantial economic loss but also a massive environmental burden. Instead of returning nutrition to the soil, food waste emits harmful methane gas when disposed of in landfills. The waste associated with producing, transporting, and disposing of food waste generates approximately 8% of the total global greenhouse gas emissions. If food waste were a country, it would be the third largest emitter behind the US and China<sup>18</sup>. The EPA provides comprehensive tools to help reduce food waste at both pre- and post-consumer levels<sup>19</sup>. Avoiding food waste not only reduces GHG emissions but also presents a meaningful opportunity to feed hungry people with safe and nutritious food. Many food rescue organizations are working locally and globally to realize this achievable and much-needed impact, including Food Rescue US<sup>20</sup> and Food Recovery Network<sup>21</sup>.

Dietary choices represent a critical lever for emission reduction. Research from the World Resources Institute<sup>22</sup> provides compelling evidence of the environmental impact of food production

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2022/06/21/fifth-of-global-food-related-emissions-due-to-transport.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://refed.org/articles/refed-releases-new-food-waste-estimates-and-calls-for-increased-action-by-food-system/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/ecosystems-resources/data-point-the-dirty-truth-about-wasted-food>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/wasted-food-scale>

<sup>20</sup> <https://foodrescue.us/northwest-ct/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.foodrecoverynetwork.org/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.wri.org/insights/how-sustainably-feed-10-billion-people-2050-21-charts>

choices. Beef production, for instance, requires 20 times more land and generates 20 times more greenhouse gases per gram of protein compared to bean production. The potential for systemic transformation is significant. A single dietary shift—replacing beef with beans—could potentially achieve nearly 50% of the United States' greenhouse gas reduction goals. This finding underscores the importance of dietary education and policy interventions that promote plant-forward nutrition where possible.

## **Projected Regional Climate Impact and Disruptions**

UConn climate scientists<sup>23</sup> have developed detailed projections for Western Connecticut's environmental future, revealing significant potential transformations by 2050. The anticipated changes present both challenges and opportunities for regional agricultural adaptation strategies.

Temperature dynamics indicate an expected average increase of approximately 5°F, with potential implications for crop selection, growing seasons, and agricultural planning. This temperature shift will necessitate greater use of irrigation equipment and potentially require the introduction of heat-resistant varieties.

Precipitation patterns are projected to change substantially, with an anticipated 8% increase in average annual rainfall. This change has complex implications, including increased risks of flooding, potential soil erosion, and shifts in water management strategies for agricultural operations.

Coastal regions face particularly acute challenges. Areas currently experiencing periodic flooding may encounter multiple flooding events annually by 2050, potentially rendering some agricultural lands unsuitable for traditional farming practices. These projections demand proactive adaptation strategies and potentially significant infrastructure investments.

## **Local School Food Procurement: A Strategic Sustainability Intervention**

School food procurement emerges as a powerful mechanism for driving systemic change in agricultural sustainability, with far-reaching implications for environmental, economic, and social outcomes. The Common Market's<sup>24</sup> comprehensive research demonstrates that educational institutions can serve as critical catalysts for transforming regional food systems through strategic purchasing decisions. By reimagining school food procurement as a holistic sustainability strategy, districts can simultaneously address multiple interconnected challenges. This approach goes beyond traditional nutritional considerations, positioning school meal programs as agents of environmental and economic transformation. Local school districts can create meaningful impact by developing robust local food purchasing policies that prioritize proximity, sustainability, and community resilience.

The economic potential of such strategies is significant. By redirecting institutional purchasing power towards local and regional producers, schools can generate substantial economic opportunities for small and mid-sized farmers. These procurement approaches create a direct market pathway, helping to stabilize agricultural economies and reduce the financial vulnerabilities often experienced by local farming operations.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/focus-areas/resilient-communities/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.thecommonmarket.org/blog/benefits-of-farm-to-school-programs>  
<https://www.thecommonmarket.org/who-we-work-with/food-for-schools>



Environmental benefits are equally compelling. Localized food procurement dramatically reduces transportation-related emissions, shortens supply chains, and supports agricultural biodiversity. By prioritizing seasonal, locally produced ingredients, school districts can create a tangible model of sustainable food systems that extends beyond institutional boundaries.

Nutritional outcomes represent another critical dimension of this approach. Locally sourced, fresh ingredients not only provide superior nutritional value but also offer students direct connections to their regional agricultural landscape. These procurement strategies can serve as powerful educational tools, helping students understand the intricate relationships between food production, environmental sustainability, and community health.

### **Soil Health and Carbon Sequestration**

Soil organic matter (SOM) emerges as a crucial element in climate adaptation and agricultural resilience. Each percentage point increase in soil organic matter can retain approximately 20,000 gallons of water per acre, providing critical buffers against changing precipitation patterns and drought conditions.

Ecological farming practices offer promising pathways for SOM enhancement. Reduced tillage techniques, strategic cover cropping, integrated livestock management, and targeted organic matter supplementation can dramatically improve soil health, water retention, and carbon sequestration capabilities.

### **Recommendations for Stakeholders**

1. Develop comprehensive local food procurement policies that favor proximity, social impact, and sustainable production practices<sup>25</sup>.
2. Invest in sustainable agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation, hoopouses, and cold storage.
3. Create youth and adult educational programs on food system sustainability, including dietary choices.
4. Implement carbon accounting in institutional food systems.

### **Sustainability Assessment Conclusion**

The climate adaptability of Western Connecticut's agricultural sector represents a dynamic, interconnected challenge. By focusing on key factors such as dietary choices, energy consumption, and food waste, policymakers can reduce the GHG impact of the region's food and agricultural systems. This holistic approach, considering both production and consumption patterns, is essential for creating a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector in Western Connecticut.

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<sup>25</sup>More information and best practices at: <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/>

## Regional Recommendations

The culmination of this study offers three overarching recommendations for the Western Connecticut Council of Governments to consider for improving the viability of farming in the region:

1. **Update and Streamline Agriculture Regulations**
2. **Improve Interaction with State and Federal Governments**
3. **Establish or Expand Collaborative Communication**

Each recommendation has a series of actions and designates stakeholders to take leading and supporting roles. Success metrics have been included to gauge progress. These recommendations are designed to be actionable and impactful to the local farming community and are based on the unique macro and microeconomic challenges that Western Connecticut farmers face.

## Recommendation 1 - Update and Streamline Agriculture Regulations

<b>SOLUTION 1</b>	<b><i>Support Implementation of the Eighteen Municipal-Specific Recommendations</i></b>
<b>DESCRIPTION/ RATIONALE</b>	The Municipal Code Recommendations are the initial actions needed to reduce barriers to commercial farming in Western Connecticut. These will hopefully catalyze the development of more farms serving more consumers fresh, healthy, and local food. Each of the Municipal Briefing Sheets has been intentionally crafted to reflect the specific local conditions, ex: housing density.
<b>WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS</b>	<b>WestCOG  Municipal Zoning Commissions   Stakeholders</b>
<b>INITIAL ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Distribute briefing sheets to relevant municipal officials</li> <li>(2) Identify and resolve any issues with the code updates in terms of local statutes or public preference               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Consult with stakeholders if needed</li> </ol> </li> <li>(3) Consult with farmers to measure progress</li> </ol>
<b>SUCCESS METRICS/ INDICATORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code changes implemented</li> <li>• Positive feedback from farmers and municipal planners</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION 2</b>	<b><i>Reduce Barriers to Event Permitting.</i></b>
<b>DESCRIPTION/ RATIONALE</b>	Agritourism, or “Agtivities” is by far the fastest-growing sector of agriculture in Western CT. Over 80% of our survey respondents visited a local farm to buy products, take a tour, or enjoy an event in the past year. Farmers need consistent, low-complexity ways for customers to visit their farms and purchase their products, however, restrictions around parking and noise are often barriers. On-farm sales are significantly more profitable than direct-to-consumer distribution as logistics and marketing costs are greatly reduced. Agritourism is beneficial to farmers, consumers, and the natural landscape of Connecticut, and should be protected by local policies accordingly.
<b>WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS</b>	<b>Municipal Planners   WestCOG   Farmers</b>
<b>INITIAL ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Convene municipal planners and farmers to discuss streamlining permitting processes. Two examples of processes that could be updated are:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) “Limited Duration Special Use Permit” - Redding</li> <li>(b) “Temporary Event Permit” - New Milford</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(2) Review permitting processes for short-term rentals and accessory dwelling units on farms</li> <li>(3) Distribute model language and forms to standardize event permitting               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Similar to WestCOG's role with other zoning topics</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>SUCCESS METRICS/ INDICATORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in on-farm events</li> <li>• Increase in the diversity of farm products and services available in Western Connecticut</li> </ul>



## Recommendation 2- Improve Interaction with State and Federal Governments

<b>SOLUTION 1</b>	<b><i>Consider the Partial or Total Inclusion of Primary Farm Residence in Property Tax Abatement if Farming is the Primary Land Use</i></b>
<b>DESCRIPTION/ RATIONALE</b>	PA 490 allows agricultural land to be assessed lower than the market value to help recognize that farming may not be as profitable as other land uses but provides a great service to our communities and state. In Western Connecticut, land prices are often the highest in the state and in some cases the highest in the country. This extreme pressure on agricultural land for development into housing or commercial areas in this region necessitates an even greater level of support. A partial or total abatement for the primary farm residence would greatly ease the burden on farmers trying to survive economically.
<b>WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS</b>	WestCOG   Farmers   State Legislature
<b>INITIAL ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Speak with the owners and farmers to understand the context and need for this policy</li> <li>(2) Facilitate discussions between farmers, state legislators, and local officials on implementing a pilot program <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Consider mechanisms to prevent misuse by hobby farms and homesteads</li> <li>(b) Launch pilot program with 3-10 farmers and measure impact on economic viability</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<b>SUCCESS METRICS/ INDICATORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussions between lawmakers and farmers initiated</li> <li>• Launching a pilot program</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION 2</b>	<b><i>Consider Grants for Land Acquisition Costs for New and Beginning Farmers</i></b>
<b>DESCRIPTION/ RATIONALE</b>	Currently, USDA grants are only allowed to be used on physical infrastructure and equipment, not land purchases outright. New federal programs, however, enable local municipalities to purchase development-prone farmland and transfer stewardship to a qualified farmer under a conservation easement. Eligible land must be defined as “Prime, Unique, or Other productive soil”, be enrolled in a USDA conservation program, or “further a state or local policy consistent with the purposes of ACEP-ALE.”- Agricultural Land Easements   Natural Resources Conservation Service
<b>WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS</b>	WestCOG   Chief Elected Officials   Municipal Economic Development Officials
<b>INITIAL ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Establish a “state or local policy consistent with the purposes of ALE” that supports municipalities in their procurement of development-prone farmland in CT</li> </ol>

	<p>(a) This could relate to the importance of protecting local farmland for food security, climate change mitigation, and social and environmental wellbeing.</p> <p>(2) Speak with CT NRCS representatives to ensure policies align with the national ALE program</p>
<p><b>SUCCESS METRICS/ INDICATORS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of a “policy consistent with ALE”</li> <li>• Support of local NRCS representatives</li> <li>• Acquisition of development-prone farmland by local municipalities</li> </ul>

### Recommendation 3- Establish or Expand Collaborative Communication

<b>SOLUTION 1</b>	<b><i>Convene Land Use Planners, Conservation Officers, and Economic Development Specialists to Share Best Practices to Support Agriculture and Agritourism</i></b>
<b>DESCRIPTION/ RATIONALE</b>	Given WestCOG's role as a connector and convenor, it seemed prudent to focus one recommendation on the critical importance of communication and coordination. The goal here is to enable WestCOG to help disseminate best practices relating to agricultural regulation and development to local planning officials to reduce undue barriers to farming.
<b>WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS</b>	<b>WestCOG   Municipal Planners   Stakeholders</b>
<b>INITIAL ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Identify practitioners for collaboration <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Stakeholder Advisory Committee can serve as a starting place</li> </ol> </li> <li>(2) Establish Quarterly Working Group</li> <li>(3) Share best practices for municipal purchasing of farmland development rights</li> <li>(4) Share best practices for land trust/municipal collaboration</li> <li>(5) Share best practices for farmworker housing</li> <li>(6) Share best practices for agritourism, including farm stays and short-term rentals</li> </ol>
<b>SUCCESS METRICS/ INDICATORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Group established and meeting regularly</li> <li>• Feedback from municipal planners about usefulness</li> <li>• Feedback from local farmers about impact</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION 2</b>	<b><i>Connect Farmers to Technical, Financial, and Workforce Assistance</i></b>
<b>DESCRIPTION/ RATIONALE</b>	Viable farms only exist within a thriving, diverse ecosystem of agrifood system stakeholders, including financial and technical service providers, adequate labor availability, and competitive market access. WestCOG can help farmers find these resources by publicizing them online, providing another entry point to a trusted network of credible information. This will help new farmers find viable business models, avoid common mistakes, and ensure new generations of farmers continually enter the system.
<b>WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS</b>	<b>WestCOG   Farmers</b>
<b>INITIAL ACTIONS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Create a dedicated WestCOG webpage for new farmers in Connecticut <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Inquire with relevant municipalities to establish similar webpages</li> </ol> </li> <li>(2) Increase awareness of ag-education opportunities</li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Publicize opportunities for garden-based learning</li> <li>(b) Support municipal grants based on demonstrated interest in farm development</li> <li>(c) Promote pathways for youth internships and entrepreneurship</li> <li>(3) Increase awareness of farm-labor programs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Collaborate with NRCS and FSA to host workshops or disseminate information about how to utilize the H2A program<sup>26</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>SUCCESS METRICS/ INDICATORS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in new farmers and farms</li> <li>• Decrease in number of failed new farms</li> <li>• Feedback from farmers on the usefulness of resources</li> <li>• Increase in farm labor availability</li> </ul>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/h2a-visa-program>





## Appendix A: Municipal Briefing Sheets

# Bethel, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Adopting "Right to Farm" language in Town Ordinances would strengthen the support of agriculture. A few other minor shifts in Zoning Regulation language could also increase support.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Bethel Zoning Regulations](#) (12/1/2021)

[Town of Bethel Code of Ordinances](#) (9/6/2022)

[Bethel POCD](#) (12/12/2019)

## Critical Definitions:

**FARMING** – *The growing of crops, hay, fodder, ensilage, pasturage, orchards, gardens, nursery stock and related agricultural production, including the raising of domestic animals and poultry, and the sale of agricultural products directly resulting from such cultivation, within limits prescribed by these regulations. The term "farming" shall not include the growth, sale, preparation, or distribution of marijuana or marijuana, products.*

## Strengths:

- Subdivision Regulations consider agriculture an acceptable open space use
- Agricultural use is allowed without a permit in all residential zones (most rural land is designated low density residential)
- Agricultural use is allowed in all zones other than the Village Center
- On-site farm product sales are allowed (even in residential districts)
- Farming definition is relatively inclusive
- No minimum farm size

## Challenges:

- Bethel POCD speaks little to agriculture
- On-site retail sale of agricultural goods requires residence on the sales site
- Greenhouse requirements are fairly prohibitive
- Poultry requirements are quite prohibitive (far too proscriptive)
- No consideration of agritourism

## Recommendations:

1. Adopt Right to Farm language in Town Ordinances (see New Milford)
2. Include more support for agriculture in the POCD
3. Remove residence requirement for on-site sales

4. Amend greenhouse and poultry requirements to be less restrictive
5. Add agritourism to definition of Farming

# Bridgewater, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are generally supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Minimum farm sizes stand as a barrier to the sorts of small farms that fit into the fabric of a rural town. Allowing farming in all Zoning Districts also supports a wider range of locations for agriculture. The Right to Farm language from the Town Ordinance is a strong step towards preserving and developing farms in Bridgewater.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Bridgewater Zoning Regulations](#) (9/16/2021)

[Town of Bridgewater Code of Ordinances](#) (5/21/2010)

[Town of Bridgewater POCD](#) (11/17/2022)

## Critical Definitions:

***Farm:** A tract of land containing five (5) acres or more, with a minimum of three (3) acres used principally for agricultural purposes.*

## Strengths:

- On-site farm product sales are allowed (even in residential districts)
- Farming is allowed as a primary use in all residential zoning districts
- Right to Farm language adopted

## Challenges:

- Farm definition requires minimum of 5 acres, with 3 acres in active production
- Livestock building setbacks are relatively restrictive
- POCD speaks little to methods of farmland preservation
- Farming is not allowed in any zone other than residential

## Recommendations:

1. Amend farm definition to remove (or drastically reduce) acreage requirements
2. Allow Farming as a primary and accessory use in all Zoning Districts



# Brookfield, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Allowing farming in all Zoning Districts supports a wider range of locations for agriculture. Farmstands can be a key source of revenue for small farms and the Town's definitions and limits are prohibitively restrictive.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Brookfield Zoning Regulations](#) (5/1/2024)

[Town of Brookfield POCD](#) (3/17/2016)

## Critical Definitions:

none

## Strengths:

- By-right farming adopted for residential areas, with limited livestock standards
- On-site farm product sales are allowed (even in residential districts)
- Agriculture allowed in most zoning districts

## Challenges:

- Farmstand definition is too restrictive (40sf and only on-premise produced goods)
- Commercial livestock/poultry production requires a minimum of 5 acres in residential zone
- No farm or agriculture definitions
- POCD speaks little to agriculture

## Recommendations:

1. Allow farming as a primary and accessory use in all Zoning Districts
2. Expand farmstand definition to 100sf and allow 20% of off-site goods
3. Remove distinction between commercial livestock and personal enjoyment; use standards for personal enjoyment
4. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinance (see New Milford)

# Danbury, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The City's regulations are not supportive of agriculture. Allowing farming in all Zoning Districts (with no minimum farm size) supports a much wider range of locations for urban agriculture. Farmstands can be a key source of revenue for small farms and the City's definitions and limits are prohibitively restrictive.

## Documents Reviewed:

[City of Danbury Zoning Regulations](#) (6/1/2024)

[City of Danbury Code of Ordinances](#) (7/22/2024)

[Danbury POCD](#) (2013)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farm.** *A tract of five (5) acres or more used for agriculture, forestry, nursery or truck gardening, or for raising of animals for laboratory use or for fur.*

## Strengths:

- Ordinances include some health code exemptions for farms

## Challenges:

- 5 acre farm minimum is excessive
- Agricultural roadside stand parking requirements are excessive
- Agriculture not allowed by right in any zoning districts (allowed in General Commercial zone if in conjunction with animal petting zoo)
- Farm uses allowed by special exception permit (in R-80 only) are vague ("truck gardening" not defined)
- Swine not permitted
- New farmstands not allowed
- POCD speaks little to agricultural preservation or development

## Recommendations:

1. Remove or significantly reduce farmstand parking requirements
2. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
3. Remove minimum farm size
4. Allow new farm stands as an accessory use
5. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to City Ordinances (see New Milford)

6. Amend Farm Uses definition to the following:

*The raising of field and garden crops, vineyard and orchard farming, the maintenance of nurseries and greenhouses, Controlled Environment Agriculture (including vertical farms, hydroponics and aquaponics) and the keeping of livestock that are incidental and auxiliary to any such use and necessary thereto.*

*\*\*Special Note\*\* To effectively approve Controlled Environment Agriculture, further review of building regulations may be required.*

# Darien, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. On-farm sales (roadside stands) are critical for small farm success and currently act as a significant roadblock to increasing agriculture in Darien. Allowing farming as a permitted use (accessory and primary) provides the best opportunity for an increase in farming.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Darien Zoning Regulations](#) (8/25/2024)

[Town of Darien Code of Ordinances](#) (4/9/2023)

[Darien POCD](#) (2016, currently being updated)

## Critical Definitions:

*Farming: Farming shall include the use of a lot, either as a principal use or an accessory use, for the purpose of producing agricultural, horticultural, floricultural, vegetable, and fruit products of the soil, and may include the raising of horses and other domestic farm animals. Riding academies, livery stables, dog kennels, the breeding, raising or habitation of furbearing animals, commercial poultry farms, stands for the sale of product or the commercial processing of the products of the farm, shall not be included.*

## Strengths:

- Farming allowed as an accessory use in all residential zoning districts
- Farming definition is relatively inclusive

## Challenges:

- Sales of farm goods are not allowed in conjunction with production
- Definition of Farming excludes poultry production
- Farming is not allowed as primary use in any zones
- Farming is not allowed as accessory use in any Commercial Zoning Districts

## Recommendations:

1. Amend Farming definition to include the sale of farm goods (farmstands)
2. Add Commercial Poultry Production as a separate, defined use. Allow as an accessory use in Commercial Zoning Districts
3. Allow Farming as a primary and accessory use in all Zoning Districts
4. Adopt Right to Farm Language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)



# Greenwich, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Allowing farming by right and in all Zoning Districts supports a wider range of locations for smaller agriculture.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Greenwich Building Zone Regulations](#) (7/14/2023)

[Town of Greenwich Code of Ordinances](#) (9/23/2024)

[Town of Greenwich POCD](#) (11/15/2019)

## Critical Definitions:

none

## Strengths:

- Commercial agriculture is allowed as a primary use by special permit in all single-family residential zones.
- Some Right to Farm language included in Town Ordinances, including noise, inland wetland and watercourses, and excavation exemptions.

## Challenges:

- Farming not allowed by right in all zones

## Recommendations:

1. Allow Farming as a primary and accessory use by right in all Zoning Districts
2. Consider moving the definition of agriculture into the Definitions section of the Zoning Regulations.
3. Consider adding Controlled Environment Agriculture as a permitted use in Industrial and/or Business Zones.

***\*\*Special Note\*\* To effectively approve Controlled Environment Agriculture, further review of building regulations may be required.***

# New Canaan, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Allowing farming as a permitted use (accessory and primary) in all Zones provides the best opportunity for a robust agricultural sector. Farmstands can be an important revenue source for small farms and it is recommended to allow them by right on all farms.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of New Canaan Zoning Regulations](#) (6/28/2024)

[Town of New Canaan Code of Ordinances](#) (5/17/2023)

[New Canaan POCD](#) (4/1/2016)

## Critical Definitions:

**FARMING** -- *The use of any tract of land or building, either as a principal use or an accessory use as outlined in §CGS 1-1 (q), except that gardens incidental to the dwelling on the premises shall not constitute a farm.*

## Strengths:

- Farming is allowed as a principal or accessory use by special permit in all residential districts
- Farming definition is inclusive
- No minimum farm size

## Challenges:

- Farming not allowed by right in all zones
- Farmstands are only allowed by special permit in residential districts
- No mention of agriculture in POCD

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
2. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# New Fairfield, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively unsupportive of agriculture. Allowing farming in all Zoning Districts (and removing the minimum farm size) supports a wider range of locations for smaller agriculture. Small livestock can be a key source of revenue for small farms.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of New Fairfield Zoning Regulations](#) (4/7/2021)

[Town of New Fairfield Code of Ordinances](#) (12/8/2022)

[New Fairfield POCD](#) (10/15/20224)

## Critical Definitions:

**FARM:** *A lot consisting of three (3) or more acres used for agricultural purposes, together with appurtenant farm buildings and/or a dwelling unit, but excluding the raising of pigs, furbearing animals and the maintaining of dog kennels.*

**AGRICULTURE:** *The cultivation of the soil, harvesting of crops, raising of livestock and/or dairying as defined in Sec. 1-1 (q) of the Connecticut General Statutes but excluding the raising of fur-bearing mammals for their pelts, goats, pigeons, poultry, or swine.*

## Strengths:

- Farming by right in R-88 and R-44 district as primary or accessory use
- Farmstand requirements are appropriate

## Challenges:

- Piggeries, pigeon coops, kennels, fur farms, goat farms, poultry farms, and similar uses are prohibited
- Minimum farm size
- Farming not allowed by right in all zones
- POCD mentions agriculture/farmland preservation, but without much specificity

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
2. Allow limited livestock production
3. Remove minimum farm size
4. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# New Milford, CT Code Review Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture. The Right to Farm language from the City Ordinance is a strong step towards preserving and developing farms in New Milford. Only a few minor edits are suggested beyond adopting the amendment related to agriculture currently being considered.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of New Milford Zoning Regulations](#) (2/15/2024)

[Town of New Milford Code of Ordinances](#) (6/13/2022)

[New Milford POCD](#) (8/23/2021)

-Proposed Amendments to New Milford Zoning Regulations Regarding Agriculture (Draft Internal Document, 5-29-24)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farm:** *A tract of land containing five (5) acres or more, used in part or wholly for agricultural purposes, excluding fertilizer manufacture. A "farm" may include premises used for keeping livestock and other domestic animals when permitted by these regulations. A "farm" may include as an incidental use, structures and facilities for slaughtering and processing of animals, as may be permitted by these regulations. (Amended Effective: June 8, 2018)*

**Farm Products Stand:** *In a commercial zone a temporary, moveable table, tent, or stand setup for the sale of locally grown produce in season may be permitted as an incidental use to the principal commercial use of the lot subject to the site plan approval in accordance with Chapter 175 of these regulations. Such a stand may be permitted where there is sufficient parking and circulation for both the principal and incidental use.*

**(PROPOSED 5-29-24) Agriculture and Farming:** *The terms agriculture and farming shall be defined as outlined in Connecticut General Statutes Section 1-1 (q).*

**Right to Farm Purpose and Intent:** *Agriculture is a significant part of the Town of New Milford's heritage and a vital part of the Town's future. It is therefore the declared policy of the Town of New Milford and legislative determination of the New Milford Town Council to conserve and protect agricultural land and to encourage agricultural operations and the sale of local farm products within the Town. It is the purpose and intent of this ordinance to promote and advance the Town's policy and reduce the loss of local agricultural resources by limiting circumstances under which any such operation may be considered a nuisance. It is hereby further legislatively*

*determined that whatever impact may be caused to others through normal agricultural practices, such impact is offset and ameliorated by the benefits of farming to the neighborhood, community, and society in general. Methods of farming that comport with generally accepted farming practices are also deemed to comport with community standards at large. This ordinance is not to be construed as modifying or abridging state law relative to the abatement of nuisances, but is to be used in the interpretation and characterization of activities and in considering and implementing enforcement of the provisions of the Code of the Town of New Milford and other applicable Town regulations, consistent with the provisions of Connecticut General Statutes § 19a-341. Additionally, the terms of this ordinance may be used in determining whether the methods and practices that may come under review conform to community standards.*

### **Strengths:**

- On-site farm product sales are allowed (even in residential districts)
- Cluster Conservation Neighborhood regulations call for agricultural conservation
- Right to Farm language adopted
- Farming allowed as accessory use in all residential zoning districts
- Farming definition is very inclusive

### **Challenges:**

- Farm definition requires a minimum of 5 acres (addressed in proposed amendment)
- Off-street parking spaces are required for sale of farm products
- $\frac{3}{4}$  acre minimum for agricultural use (addressed in proposed amendment)
- 100-foot setback in Farm Brewery Section (Section 025-120) would prohibit structures (including parking) on half of a 10 acre property
- Farming is not allowed as a primary use in any zones

### **Recommendations:**

1. Adopt proposed amendment to zoning regulations relating to agriculture (if not done so already)
2. Exempt farmstands of up to 100 square feet from off-street parking requirement
3. Reduce parking requirement to 2 parking spots per acre of Agritourism use (7 spots per acre suggested in proposed amendment 5-29-24)
4. Allow Farming as a primary and accessory use in all Zoning Districts
5. Reconsider setbacks for Farm Brewery Use



# Newtown, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with a few minor exceptions. Allowing farming in all Zoning Districts supports a wider range of locations for urban agriculture.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Newtown Zoning Regulations](#) (Feb 2024)

[Town of Newtown Code of Ordinances](#) (4/17/2024)

[Newtown POCD](#) (Draft Sept 2024)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farming-** *Essential activities on a farm including horticulture, crop raising, and the management of livestock but excluding operating a kennel or the raising of pelt bearing animals or wildlife.*

**Ag-tivities / Agro-tourism** - *Events of limited duration on a farm that are incidental to Farming uses where the public is invited, including hayrides, animal interactions, corn mazes, educational field trips/workshops, demonstrations, cooperative Farming programs, pick-your-own operations and other similar activities.*

## Strengths:

- Agro-tourism is defined
- Farming by right in residential zoning districts
- Farming definition includes livestock production
- No minimum farm size
- Code includes property tax exemption for farm buildings
- Farming definition is relatively inclusive

## Challenges:

- Farm stand parking requirements are excessive and prohibitive
- Conservation and Agriculture Special District doesn't allow agriculture by right
- Farming not allowed by right in all zones
- POCD speaks little to agricultural preservation or development

## Recommendations:

1. Remove or significantly reduce farmstand parking requirements
2. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
3. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# Norwalk, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The City's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with few exceptions.

## Documents Reviewed:

[City of Norwalk Zoning Regulations](#) (2/19/2024)

[City of Norwalk Code of Ordinances](#) (5/28/2024)

[Norwalk POCD](#) (12/5/2019)

## Critical Definitions:

***Agricultural Uses:*** the Use category which is a collective reference to Uses that create or preserve areas intended primarily for the raising of animals and crops, and the secondary industries associated with agricultural production.

## Strengths:

- POCD includes text that agriculture is a historical resource worth preserving
- Farming is allowed city-wide without a permit
- No required parking for agricultural uses

## Challenges:

- Indoor agriculture not specifically included in Farm Uses

## Recommendations:

1. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to City Ordinances (see New Milford)
2. Consider adding Controlled Environment Agriculture as a permitted use in Industrial and/or Business Zones.

***\*\*Special Note\*\**** To effectively approve Controlled Environment Agriculture, further review of building regulations may be required.

# Redding, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with a few minor exceptions. Adding agritourism to the definition of Farming will allow supporting streams of revenue for small farms.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Redding Zoning Regulations](#) (8/18/2020)

[Town of Redding Code of Ordinances](#) (5/6/2022)

[Redding POCD](#) (6/12/2020)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farming** - *The cultivation of open land for growing of crops, hay, fodder, ensilage, pasturage, orchards, gardens, nursery stock, and related agricultural production, including the incidental raising of domestic animals and the sale of agricultural products directly resulting from such cultivation, within limits prescribed by these Regulations (Sections 4.2.1, 5.14).*

## Strengths:

- Farming by right in all zoning districts
- POCD speaks strongly to preserving agriculture
- Livestock production is allowed in residential zones (with permit)
- Farming definition is relatively inclusive
- No minimum farm size

## Challenges:

- Must live on site to have a farmstand
- Non-native flower sales not allowed
- No consideration for agritourism
- Farming definition is ambiguous on livestock production

## Recommendations:

1. Define and allow agritourism
2. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# Ridgefield, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with one exception: Allowing farming as a permitted use (accessory or primary) in all Zones provides the best opportunity for a robust agricultural sector.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Ridgefield Zoning Regulations](#) (7/12/2024)

[Town of Ridgefield Code of Ordinances](#) (11/7/2023)

[Ridgefield POCD](#) (6/27/2020)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farm** – *A parcel or parcels of land, which need not be contiguous, under common ownership or leasehold located within the Town of Ridgefield, used for and in connection with agriculture and/or farming activities as defined in these regulations, and including associated buildings, structures and equipment.*

**Farming** - *Land and associated buildings used in connection with the raising and/or caring for agricultural, livestock, poultry or dairy products, but excluding the raising of fur bearing animals and excluding dog kennels.*

**Agriculture** - *The cultivation of the soil, and the raising and harvesting of crops, including but not limited to nursery gardening, horticulture, forestry, and the raising and/or caring for livestock or poultry.*

## Strengths:

- Significant support for preserving/developing agriculture in POCD
- Inclusive agricultural uses by right in all residential districts
- Good definitions
- Farming definition includes livestock production
- No minimum farm size

## Challenges:

- Farming is not allowed by right in all zones

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
2. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# Stamford, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The City's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with few exceptions.

## Documents Reviewed:

[City of Stamford Zoning Regulations](#) (7/10/2024)

[City of Stamford Master Plan](#) (12/16/2014)

[City of Stamford Ordinances](#) (6/10/2024)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farm Uses:** *The raising of field and garden crops, vineyard and orchard farming, the maintenance of nurseries and greenhouses, and the keeping of livestock that are incidental and auxiliary to any such use and necessary thereto.*

## Strengths:

- Farming by right in all districts
- Master Plan refers to supporting agriculture

## Challenges:

- All farmstands require off street parking
- Indoor agriculture not specifically included in Farm Uses

## Recommendations:

1. Amend Farm Uses definition to the following:

*The raising of field and garden crops, vineyard and orchard farming, the maintenance of nurseries and greenhouses, Controlled Environment Agriculture (including vertical farms, hydroponics and aquaponics) and the keeping of livestock that are incidental and auxiliary to any such use and necessary thereto.*

**\*\*Special Note\*\*** *To effectively approve Controlled Environment Agriculture, further review of building regulations may be required.*



# Sherman, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are somewhat supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Allowing farming as a permitted use (accessory and primary) in all Zones provides the best opportunity for a robust agricultural sector. The Town's "Farm" definition lacks detail and sets a very prohibitive minimum size. Adopting the State's farm definition would support a more inclusive farming environment.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Sherman Zoning Regulations](#) (10/22/2022)

[Sherman POCD](#) (5/31/2023)

## Critical Definitions:

**FARM:** *A tract of land containing 200,000 square feet of land or more, on which the principal use is farming. For the purpose of these Regulations such tract may be separated by a road.*

**Farming:** *The raising of crops or livestock and other domestic animals as permitted by these Regulations, excluding commercial dog kennels; commercial livery and boarding stables; commercial nurseries; commercial/industrial operations which do not directly relate to the production of raw unprocessed agricultural goods.*

## Strengths:

- Farming is allowed as a principal use in the Farm-Residence Zone by right
- Farming is allowed as principal use in all other zones by Special Permit
- Allows "Farm Related Events" (agritourism)
- POCD includes very strong language related to supporting agriculture

## Challenges:

- Farming is not allowed as an accessory use in any zone
- 200,000 square foot minimum lot size for farms with buildings
- Requirements for Farmstand applications are onerous
- Farm definition is restrictive
- Minimum farm size
- Farming is not allowed by right in all zones

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones as principal and accessory use
2. Remove minimum farm size
3. Adopt state farming definition
4. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinance (see New Milford)

# Weston, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Allowing farming and farmstands as permitted uses (accessory and primary) in all Zones provides the best opportunity for a robust agricultural sector. It is recommended to allow small livestock/poultry production as they can be an important revenue source for small farms.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Weston Zoning Regulations](#) (10/18/2021)

[Town of Weston Ordinance](#) (1/17/2019)

[Weston POCD](#) (7/1/2021)

## Critical Definitions:

**Farming:** *Farming shall include the use of a lot, either as a principal or accessory use, for the purpose of producing agricultural, horticultural, floricultural, vegetable and fruit products of the soil, and shall include the raising of horses, and other domestic farm animals. Riding academies, livery stables, animal kennels, the breeding, raising or habitation of fur bearing animals, pigs and goats, commercial poultry farms, stands for the sale of produce (except as otherwise expressly permitted by these Regulations) or the commercial processing of the products of the farm, shall not be included.*

## Strengths:

- Farming by right in one of two zoning districts
- Farmstand by right in one of two zoning districts
- Farmstand requirements are reasonable

## Challenges:

- Livestock/poultry production is prohibited in all zones
- Farming is not allowed by right in all zones
- POCD speaks little about agricultural preservation or development

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
2. Allow limited livestock production
3. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# Westport, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are very supportive of agriculture with some key exceptions.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Westport Zoning and Subdivision Regulations](#) (4/12/2024)

[Town of Westport Ordinances](#) (7/11/2023)

[Westport POCD](#) (10/22/2027)

## Critical Definitions:

none

## Strengths:

- Farming is permitted by right in all zones, with minimal exceptions
- Farmstands are permitted by right in all zones, with minimal exceptions
- POCD speaks significantly about preserving agricultural lands

## Challenges:

- Minimum farm size of 5 acres if animals or poultry are raised or kept for commercial purposes

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right as an accessory use in all zones
2. Adopt state farming definition
3. Reduce minimum farm size for commercial farms with animals or poultry
4. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

# Wilton, CT Code Review and Briefing Sheet

## Summary:

The Town's regulations are relatively supportive of agriculture with a few key exceptions. Allowing farming as a permitted use (accessory and primary) in all Zones provides the best opportunity for a robust agricultural sector. It is recommended to allow small livestock/poultry production as they can be an important revenue source for small farms.

## Documents Reviewed:

[Town of Wilton Zoning Regulations](#) (5/6/2022)

[Town of Wilton Ordinances](#) (11/6/2023)

[Wilton POCD](#) (10/1/2019)

## Critical Definitions:

**FARM:** *A parcel of land used for the purpose of producing agricultural, horticultural, floricultural, vegetable or fruit products of the soil, including the raising of horses and other domestic farm animals. Riding academies, livery stables, animal kennels, the breeding, raising or habitation of fur-bearing animals, pigs or goats, commercial poultry farms, stands for the sale of produce, or the commercial processing of the products of the farm, shall not be included.*

**LIVESTOCK:** *Animals kept, raised or offered for sale on a farm.*

## Strengths:

- Farming by right in most districts
- Farmstands are allowed by right as an accessory use in most districts
- Farmstand requirements are reasonable

## Challenges:

- Farming is not allowed by right in all zones
- POCD mentions agriculture/farmland preservation, but without much specificity
- Livestock production is prohibited

## Recommendations:

1. Amend zoning code to allow farming by right in all zones
2. Allow limited livestock production
3. Adopt "Right to Farm" language to Town Ordinances (see New Milford)

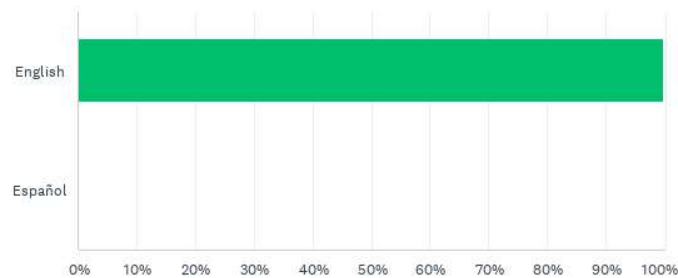
## Appendix B: Survey

A survey was conducted to understand the needs and concerns of both local farmers and residents who support these farmers. Farmer questions were designed to capture experiences with local planning and regulatory entities, gauge unmet demand for local farm products, and determine familiarity with Agritourism. Resident questions were tailored to gauge interest in supporting local farms, tolerance towards noise and traffic from farm events, and barriers to participation in farm activities.

The survey was offered in Spanish, in addition to English, however no responses were received in Spanish. The full translation can be found following the English survey results.

### General Survey Results

#### Q1 Would you like to take the survey in English or Spanish?

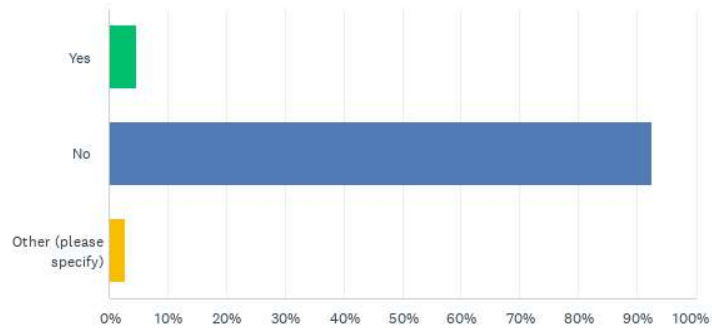




## Q2 What municipality do you live in?



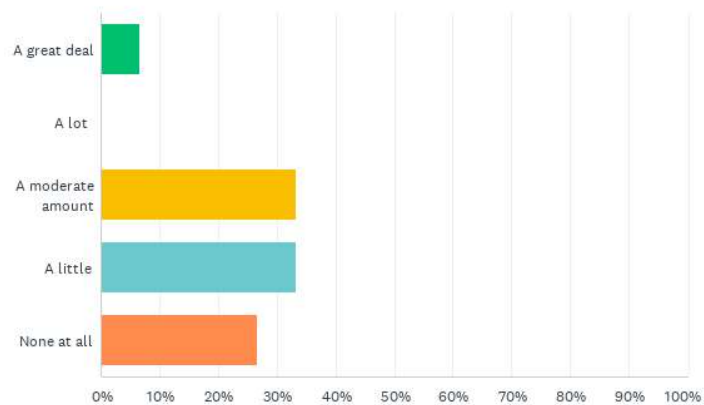
Q3 Are you an active commercial farmer in Western CT?



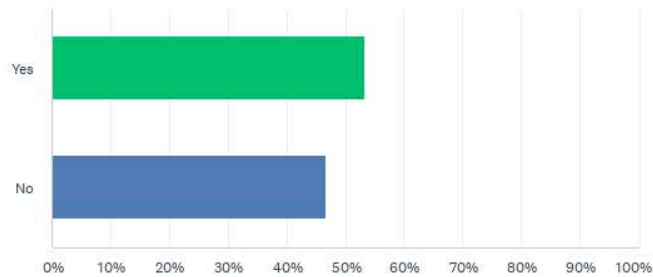
Questions 4 and 5 are translations of Questions 2 and 3 in Spanish

If respondents answered “Yes” to Question 3 the following questions were asked. If a respondent answered “No” they were directed to Question 15.

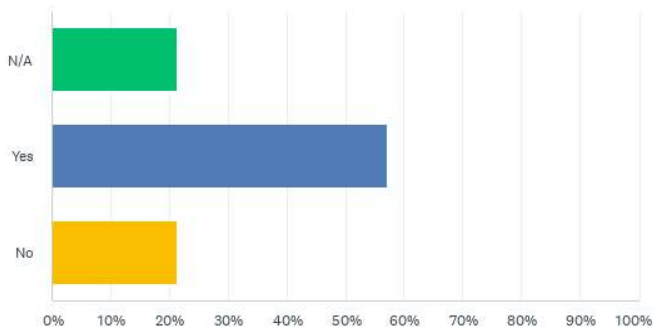
Q6 (Farmers) Are there zoning or permitting restrictions negatively affecting your farm?



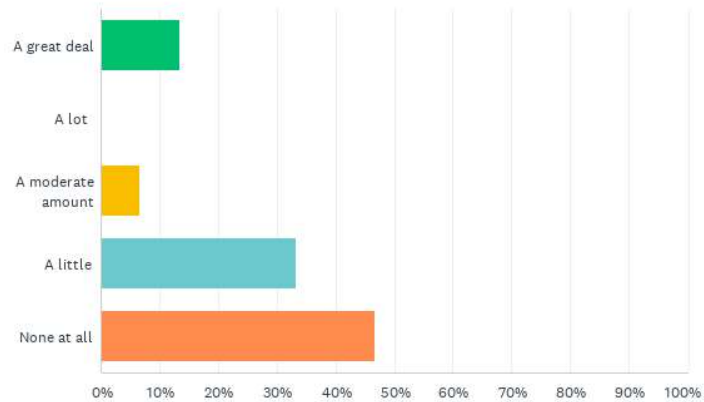
Q7 Have you spoken with your town about code, permit, or zoning issues before?



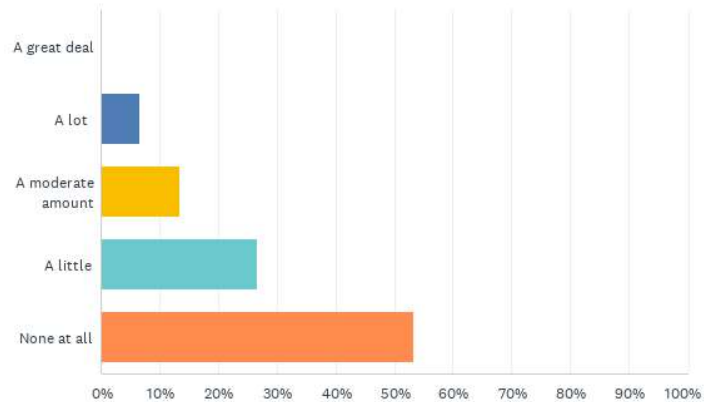
Q8 If not, do you know who you could speak with?



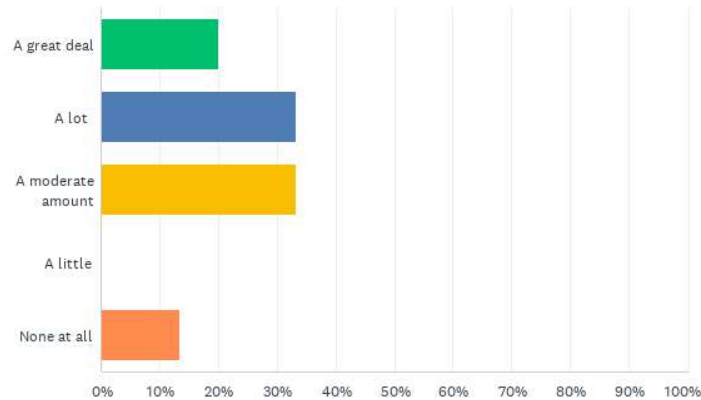
Q9 Do you host agritourism-related activities like tastings, tours, and demonstrations?



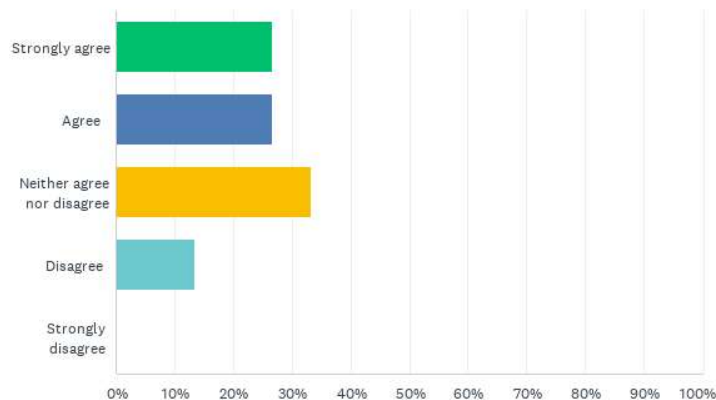
Q10 Have you faced pushback from neighbors over parking, noise, etc?



Q11 Is there additional demand for these services that you could expand to meet if given the financial and technical support to do so?



Q12 Agree/Disagree with the following statement: I am hopeful about the future of farming in the region and my farm is heading in the right direction.



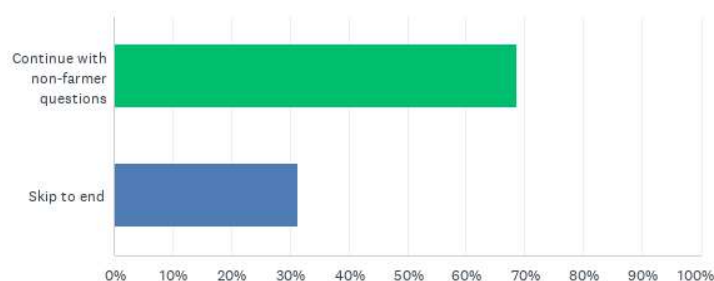


Q13 The Western Connecticut Council of Governments is using this information to inform a Farm Viability Study which seeks to increase opportunities for commercial farming in the region. Is there anything else related you would like us to know?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 333

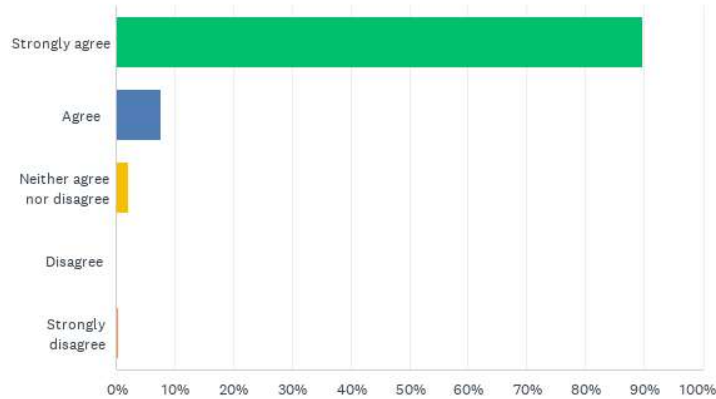
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Organic subsidies needed	9/14/2024 2:36 PM
2	I think Zoning Regulations should take into account the effects of nearby commercial and residential development will have on farming.	9/7/2024 9:20 AM
3	when are grants available for farms	9/5/2024 12:00 PM
4	Not really	9/5/2024 5:38 AM
5	We would like the town zoning to be more flexible regarding farmstands. Ideally we would like to have a building on property that could be a farmstand as well as host small educational workshops.	9/4/2024 8:18 PM
6	Live stock, animal husbandry, breeding are up for grabs.	9/4/2024 6:59 PM
7	We restored a 250 yr old farm that was in disrepair. We now know which crops do well. Will expand next year. Chickens. Goats.	9/4/2024 4:39 PM
8	As a small community (nonprofit) farm, we struggle most with labor. Our fiscal model is one where we pair educational programs to make up the revenue that is lost on our ag side. It is about educating the Town and community about the challenges of small town farming.	9/4/2024 3:52 PM
9	Expand knowledge on cut flower farms, tax help, stronger support for smaller operations (1-2 acres)	9/4/2024 2:06 PM

Q14 Continue with non-farmer questions?

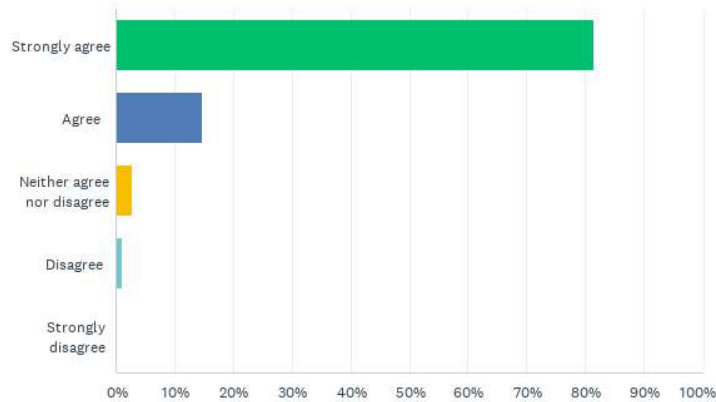


## Resident Survey Results

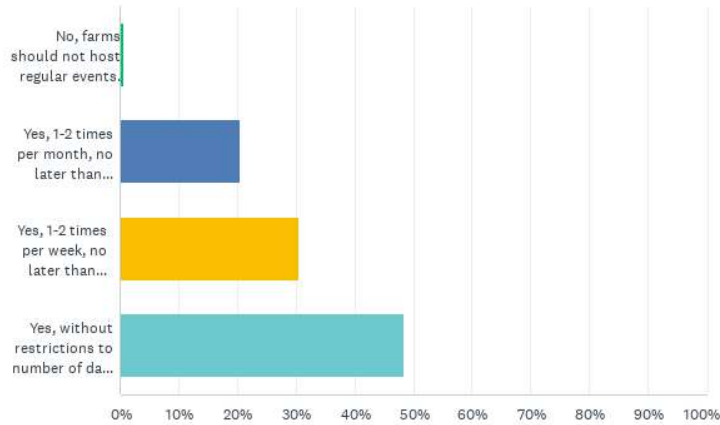
Q15 (Local Residents) Agree/Disagree with the following statements: Having active farmland is valuable to my community/region.



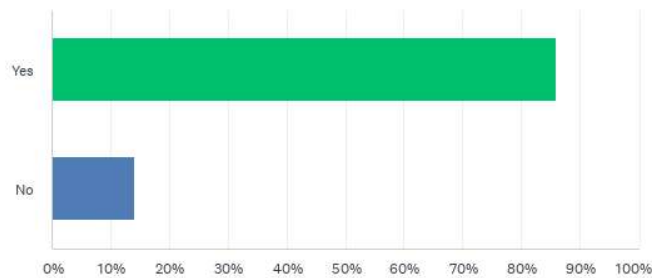
Q16 There should be support for small farmers to stay in business during difficult times.



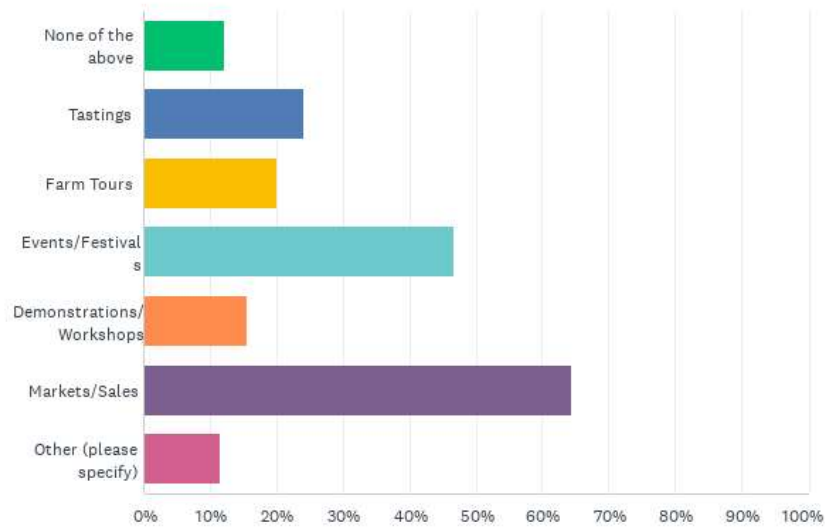
Q17 Should farms be able to host regular events (given enough parking is available)? Which statement do you most agree with?



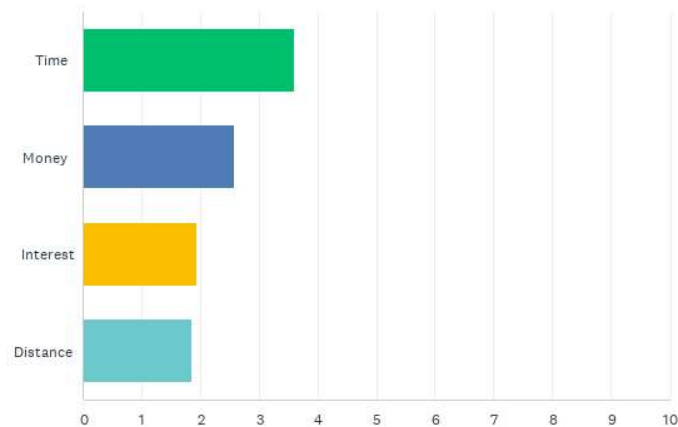
Q18 In the past year, have you visited a farm in your municipality (or nearby municipality) to purchase food, take a tour, or engage in other agritourism activities?



Q19 If yes, what activities did you engage in? Select all that apply.



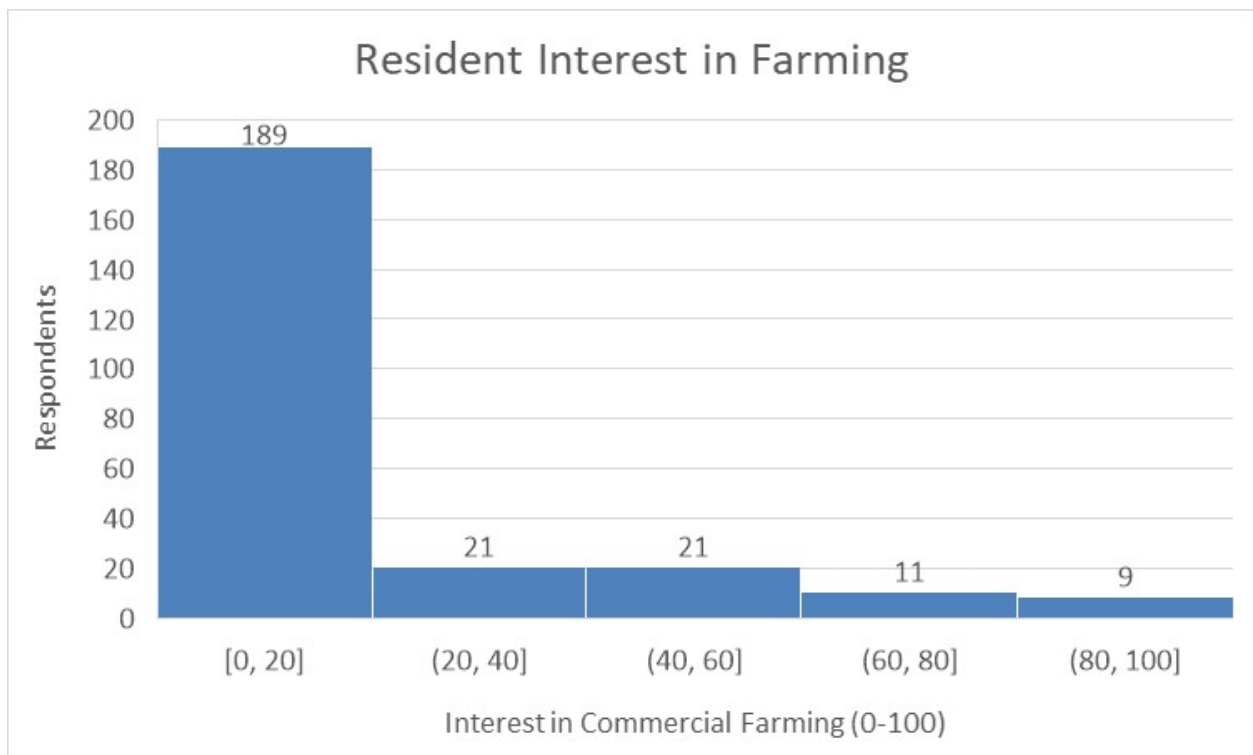
Q20 If not, what was the biggest barrier? (Order from most to least significant)



Q21 What types of products or activities would you like to have available that aren't currently available locally? (if any)

sure fruits vegetables fresh festivals tastings Cheese products markets  
organic Unsure meat eggs produce tours food  
workshops farm vegetables local milk N goods  
farmers market Educational pick Na None farm stand events  
farm table fruits

Q22: On a scale from 0 to 100, how interested are you in becoming a commercial farmer?



## Spanish Translation

Note: No responses were received in Spanish.

1. ¿En qué municipalidad habita?
2. ¿Es usted un agricultor activo en el Oeste de Connecticut?
  - Si
  - No
  - Otro (Favor especifique)
3. (Agricultores) ¿Existen restricciones de zonificación o permisos que afecten negativamente a su granja?
  - Excesivas
  - Muchas
  - Moderado
  - Pocas
  - Ninguna en absoluto
4. ¿Ha hablado antes con su ciudad sobre cuestiones de códigos, permisos o zonificación?
  - Si
  - No
5. Si no, ¿sabe con quién podría hablar?
  - Si
  - No
  - N/R
6. ¿Organiza actividades relacionadas con el agroturismo como degustaciones, recorridos y demostraciones?
  - Excesivas
  - Muchas
  - Moderado
  - Pocas
  - Ninguna en absoluto
7. ¿Ha enfrentado quejas de los vecinos por el estacionamiento, el ruido, etc.?
  - Excesivas
  - Muchas
  - Moderado
  - Pocas
  - Ninguna en absoluto
8. ¿Existe una demanda adicional de estos servicios que le permitirá ampliar para satisfacerla en caso de contar con el apoyo financiero y técnico para hacerlo?
  - Excesivas
  - Muchas
  - Moderado
  - Pocas



- Ninguna en absoluto
9. Está de acuerdo/en desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación: Tengo esperanzas sobre el futuro de la agricultura en la región y mi finca va en la dirección correcta.
- Totalmente de acuerdo
  - De acuerdo
  - Ni acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
  - En desacuerdo
  - Totalmente en desacuerdo
10. El Consejo de Gobiernos del Oeste de Connecticut está utilizando esta información para informar un Estudio de Viabilidad Agrícola que busca aumentar las oportunidades para la agricultura comercial en la región. ¿Hay algo más relacionado que le gustaría que supiéramos?
11. ¿Le gustaría completar también la parte de la encuesta para no agricultores? ¿O saltar hasta el final?

Continuar con preguntas no agrícolas

Saltar al final

12. (No agricultores) Está de acuerdo/en desacuerdo con las siguientes afirmaciones: Tener tierras de cultivo activas es valioso para mi comunidad/región.
- Totalmente de acuerdo
  - De acuerdo
  - Ni acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
  - En desacuerdo
  - Totalmente en desacuerdo
13. Debería haber apoyo para que los pequeños agricultores permanezcan en el negocio durante tiempos difíciles.
- Totalmente de acuerdo
  - De acuerdo
  - Ni acuerdo ni en desacuerdo
  - En desacuerdo
  - Totalmente en desacuerdo
14. ¿Deberían las granjas poder albergar eventos regulares (siempre que haya suficiente estacionamiento disponible)? ¿Con qué afirmación estás más de acuerdo?
- No, las granjas no deberían albergar eventos regulares.
  - Sí, 1 o 2 veces al mes, a más tardar a las 22:00 horas.
  - Sí, 1 o 2 veces por semana, a más tardar a las 22:00 horas.
  - Sí, sin restricciones de número de días ni de hora del día/semana.
15. En el último año, ¿ha visitado una finca en su municipio (o municipio cercano) para comprar alimentos, hacer un recorrido o participar en otras actividades de agroturismo?
- Si
  - No

16. En caso que sí, ¿en qué actividades participó? Seleccione todo lo que corresponda.

Degustaciones

- Visitas a granjas
- Eventos/Festivales
- Demostraciones/Talleres
- Mercados/Ventas
- Otro (especifique)
- Ninguno de los anteriores

17. En caso que no, ¿cuál fue la barrera más grande? (Ordenar de más a menos significativo)

- Financiamiento
- Tiempo
- Interés
- Distancia

18. ¿Qué tipos de productos o actividades le gustaría tener disponibles que actualmente no están disponibles localmente? (si corresponde)

19. El Consejo de Gobiernos del Oeste de Connecticut está utilizando esta información para informar un Estudio de Viabilidad Agrícola que busca aumentar las oportunidades para la agricultura comercial en la región. ¿Hay algo más relacionado que le gustaría que supiéramos?

## Survey Flyer

The following public outreach flyer was distributed throughout the region to reach potential respondents. The flyer was sent to the region's public libraries, senior centers, grocery stores, government officials, and other identified stakeholders for public posting. Additionally, WestCOG staff posted flyers in various other public locations and social media channels.

