

AGRICULTURAL ENHANCEMENT BOARD

November 5, 2025 at 6:00 PM

20 Ontario Street

Economic Development Conference Room 122A, Mezzanine Level

Canandaigua, NY 14424

1. Call to Order

The 11/05/2025 meeting of the Ontario County Agricultural Board was called to order at 20 Ontario St, Canandaigua, NY 14424 with Chairperson Frank Fessner presiding at 6:00PM.

2. Introductions

Upon roll call, the following members were:

Present:

Farmer Frank Fessner

Alternate for M. Tidball Jacob Maslyn

Sr. Planner - Alternate for T. Harvey Linda Phillips

Director of Real Property Tax Dennine Leeson

Alternate for M. Webster Tucker Kautz

Farmer Fred Lightfoote

Agribusiness Fernando Soberon

Present Not Voting:

Erin Holley

Absent:

Farmer Lisa FitzGerald

Ag Land Preservation Elizabeth Newbold

Supervisor to Ag Board Andrew Wickham

Farmer Jared Martin

Present, Voting 7, Present, Not Voting 1, Absent 4, Excused 0

Guests:

Joann Rogers

3. Approval of Minutes

Dennine Leeson motioned to approve the minutes of August 12, 2025. The motion was seconded by Jacob Maslyn. The motion passed.

4. New Business

N/A

Marcus Whitman CSD has purchased hydroponic grow towers and has been reimbursed. At the Middle School, students are learning about the importance of mineral blends and pH levels in the hydroponic system. They are able to harvest food to serve to students. At MWCSd high School, students are primarily growing a variety of lettuce mixes and experimenting with cucumbers. The addition of grow lights has made a significant difference and allows harvest every 21 to 30 days.

Canandaigua CSD Primary-Elementary Schools held their Farmers Market on Oct. 7, 2025. 1,300 students and 100 staff attended. All received voucher to purchase an item such as a gourd, pumpkin, apples, peaches, potatoes, carrots, or juice. Parents also received a flyer about the participating farms and a link to the FLVC website for more information on purchasing local foods and participating in farm-based events.

The Annual Open Enrollment period is Nov. 1 to 30, 2025. A request for inclusion form is posted on the website. Public Notices submitted for publication Oct. 25 in the Finger Lakes Times and Oct. 26 in the Canandaigua Messenger. A press release was distributed to print, radio, and broadcast media outlets on Oct. 27, 2025. The story has run on Finger Lakes Daily News.

<https://www.fingerlakesdailynews.com/local/ontario-seneca-wayne/ontario-county-opens-enrollment-for-agricultural-district-no-1/>

As requested by Board, open enrollment form and information was sent directly to all supervisors and to Farm Bureau and Agricultural Society. S

Frank and Tucker accepted nominations to continue as chair and vice chair of the Ag Board.

Board Motion: To Approve block nomination of Frank Fessner as chair and Tucker Kautz as Vice Chair for the Ag Board in 2026 Motion made by: Fernando Soberon, **Seconded by:** Fred Lightfoote.

Vote: Yes 7, No 0, Abstained 0. **The Motion:** Passed

N/A

Ontario County 2 Grow - NY Finalists - meeting / award will be presented next week Jacob Maslyn will be attending.

5. Old Business

6. Member Reports & Other Business

Tucker Kautz-finishing earthwork and seeding of 7 water storage projects and several manure storage projects. Several projects lost federal funding but SWCD was able to secure replacement funding from NYS.

OCSWCD hosted 2 groups of college students from RIT, Genesee, and FLCC at Elvi Farms. American Dairy NE helped with transportation. Create opportunity for conservation and sustainability students to see a farm operation before they become policymakers and water quality researchers. Would like to host such tours annually and to interest students not just in farm/manure-based energy production, but also cover cropping and other conservation practices. Would like to expand to HWS students & FLI researchers. Used to be only 1 beef producer in Ontario County, now there are 6,

Fernando Soberon-T. Canandaigua denied variances for the solar project on farmland on New Michigan Road. Solar and wind energy development companies must break ground on projects by end of 2026 to be eligible for state and federal incentives; firms may be pursuing 2nd tier projects in case others don't proceed.

Linda Phillips-Hopewell revised local law regarding prohibition of sewer sludge spreading and held another public hearing. I will be convening farmland PDR stakeholders, including CCE, SWCD, and 3 Ontario County Land Trusts on Nov. 13, 2025. Goal of discussion is to develop clear pathways for farmers to gain awareness of program, effort, and long timeline; program details sufficient to make a preliminary decision on participation; and clarifying geographic areas and appropriate applicant organizations. Continued County advocacy regarding electric grid investments for Ontario County.

Jacob Maslyn-CCE hosting pumpkin smashing/composting event. Participation in the 4-H Harvest fest cooking demonstration program has doubled. CCE Ontario annual meeting 11/18/25. Have Rooted in Learning grant to work with 5 school districts (Red Jacket, Canandaigua, Geneva, Bloomfield, and Midlakes) to expand agricultural literacy and local food purchases; the grant includes small grants to districts. Attending Grow NY Food and Agritech startup competition finals and summit Nov 12-13 at Hotel Canandaigua.

Fred Lightfoote-He and other Gorham farmers have been approached by wind energy development company, though he had previously been told his land and other higher ground in Gorham was not economically viable for wind energy development. The change may be that now 650' turbines rather than just 400' turbines are used. The financial feasibility of digesters has also changed, and they are now less attractive to investors. Also approached to provide farmer perceptions on solar energy development. At farm, adding a barn to allow the farm to support working and retired generations. The contractor keeps pushing out the completion date.

Joann Rogers – Attending not as USDA representative. The federal government shutdown continuing. She and 1 other USDA employee are working to support only Commodity Credit Corporation-funded programs. Dennine Leeson and Frank Fessner-nothing to report

General discussion of milk supply expansion needed in New York State to satisfy existing Dairy Federation of America and Upstate customers, as well as new Fairlife plant and 3 Great Lakes Cheese manufacturing plants.

General discussion of regional nutrient balance; may not be enough production land to use all manure from cows following expanded production. It is complicated to involve off-farm vegetable crop lands in a nutrient management plan. Currently, chicken manure is being shipped to NYS from PA; chicken manure is higher in phosphorus than cow manure and greater use of chicken manure could have water quality impacts. There are currently 5 large chicken barns under construction in Penn Yan area and 1 on Lake to Lake Road in Ontario County. CAFO size for chickens is 26,000 and these barns are for 20,000 birds. Once these are

operational, hopefully importing of chicken manure will cease. Frank Fessner — nothing to report

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Thurs. 1/22/26.

8. Adjournment

Board motion to: Adjourn. **Motion made by:** Jacob Maslyn, **Seconded by:** Fred Lightfoote, **Vote:** Yes 7, No 0, Abstained 0. **The motion:** Passed. The Agriculture Enhancement Board meeting was adjourned at 7:30PM.



ONTARIO COUNTY Agriculture Enhancement Board

Frank Fessner, Chairman

MINUTES

Ontario County Agriculture Enhancement Board Tuesday August 12, 2025

Members Present

Frank Fessner
Tom Harvey
Tucker Kautz
Dennine Leeson
Jared Martin
Jacob Maslyn
Elizabeth Newbold

Joann Rogers
Fernando Soberon(A 6:20)

Members Excused

Lisa Fitzgerald
Fred Lightfoote
Andrew Wickham

Staff

Linda Phillips

- A. Call to order – Chair Frank Fessner called meeting to order at 6:05 pm. Quorum present.
- B. Approval of minutes of 3/26/25 meeting: Motion made by Dennine Leeson and Seconded by Tucker Kautz. Approved. Revised minutes include Elizabeth Newbold in list of those present.
- C. New Business

Mini-grant award. Motion to award Marcus Whitman Central School District \$4,761.63 of FY 2026 allocation for initial and additional activities to support agricultural education of. students and wider community. Motion made by Elizabeth Newbold, and seconded by Jacob Maslyn. Approved unanimously.

Remaining FY 2026 Funds to be available for future grant award.

FY 2027 application solicitation materials to include list of Board member organizations and phone numbers and willingness to mentor new applicants or potentially to act as fiscal agent. Expand distribution of application materials to include Farmers Market and Community Garden Managers. The CCE local food guide provides contact information for Farmers Markets in Canandaigua, Farmington, Geneva, Clifton Springs, Victor.

I believe there are community gardens in Richmond and Naples. Please provide contact information for these and other community gardens.

Notice of Intent T. Canandaigua CSG solar project on New Michigan Road 8/12/25 received NYSDAM Commissioners determination letter acknowledging likely loss of access to 5-6 acres on properties to the south and stating the proposed action preserves access to the 22 acres outside the solar facility and will not result in a significant adverse impact to the viability of agriculture with OC Ag District #1. Letter distributed with draft minutes.

D. Member Reports

Tom Harvey Ontario County working on 2026 -2031 Capital Improvement Plan. The Plan will includes funding for new building at FLCC Hopewell Campus to house CCE, SWCD, and FLCC horticulture department and a new greenhouse. Ontario County/FLCC also a partner with New York Kitchen, City of Canandaigua, and Sands Foundation on new building for FLCC Culinary program, CCE food and nutrition programs, and community educational programs on NYS wine and food on land formerly planned for expansion of Pinnacle North. The project will also additional parkland along the northside of Lakeshore Drive. Tom involved in discussions with RGE, NYSEG and elected officials regarding limited electric supply, transmission, and circuit capacity resulting in limits to residential and commercial development. Tom retiring in June 2026.

Dennine Leeson Distributed summary of \$ 106,913 in Agricultural Conversion Penalties paid to county, towns, and school districts in 2025 for development of two homes and 3 solar projects on 155 acres in Geneva, Manchester, Canandaigua, and Phelps.

Joann Rogers Crop reporting of 120,000 acres resulted in payments for 12,000 A that were too wet to plant in the spring and likely for reduced yields of corn and soy due to summer excessive heat. Some farms with uninsurable crops have benefited from FSA Stage 1 disaster crop assistance from FY 2023-24 funded by American Relief Act. The be eligible for Stage 1 or Stage 2 assistance, farm must purchase crop insurance with non-insurable assistance program coverage and have loss inspected. Also mentioned required reporting of lease or ownership of ag land by foreign entities. Two Ontario County solar project leases held by Japanese firms have reported.

Elizabeth Newbold This year is 30th anniversary of NYS PDR program. American Farmland Trust will be holding a fall celebratory event in Canandaigua. Canandaigua Lake Watershed Council (CLWC) received funds from Sands Foundation for implementation of 9 Elements Watershed Management Plan.

Fernando Soberon T. Canandaigua is seeking funding for signs to place on farmland and other natural features permanently preserved through purchase of development rights (PDR). Expanded public open space along Lakeshore Boulevard could provide a location for expanded Farmers Market as current market at Mill Street and Beeman Street cannot accommodate additional interested vendors. Upstate's process of asking farmers what price they would need to receive to meet Fairlife requirements for 48 hour on-farm storage, chillers, and fast pumps resulted in some Ontario County farmers not being selected as Fairlife supplier.

Jacob Maslyn Attending NYS fair with 40-50 youth as part of on-going workforce development program. Initiated conversation about 3 T. Hopewell Local Laws banning land spreading of human sewage sludge due to concerns about PFAS. NYSDEC is not aware of such spreading in Ontario County, though it is being done in North Rose and Dundee. Other points of discussion included lack of reporting on NYSDEC research on PFAS in biosolids, NYSDEC halt to previously permitted spreading of pumped septic system

sludge, and need for alternative to sludge dewatering and use as daily cover once Ontario County landfill closes in 2028.

Frank Fessner noting to report.

Jared Martin Has his crops in and is hoping for gentle soaking rains. Brings greetings from Fred Lightfoote who is recuperating from back surgery.

Tucker Kautz Electric supply restrictions also impacting farm expansion plans. Unclear how this may impact Upstate's ability to source additional milk as promised to new Fairlife plant in Webster and existing processors. SWDC overseeing bids and installation of grant funded erosion and sediment control, manure storage cap and flare, and barnyard management improvements on area farms. NYS has used allocated unspent funds to fill gap left by loss of \$300,000 in federal funds for Genesee River Watershed CAFO projects. Initial investors have abandoned renewable natural gas digester planned for T. Seneca due to changes in California regulations on methane fees/off-sets. Looking forward to award of \$700,000 allocated to new Eastern Finger Lakes Watershed Coalition for Conservation District and concerned that use of NYS not Conservation District protocols may increase project costs for water quality projects that reduce phosphorous and implement other 9 Element Watershed Management Plans and plans to reduce harmful algal blooms. Pleased to have another Senior Technician at SWCD and frustrated by jurisdictional determination and permitting backlog created by new NYSDEC wetland regulations.

Linda Phillips Excerpt on New York State from report by Sabin Center of Columbia Law School Opposition to Renewable Energy Facilities states: On May 3, 2023, the state adopted a law directing the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to develop renewable energy projects "to support the state's renewable energy goals established pursuant to the climate leadership and community protection act." While the law generally encourages renewable energy development, it places two significant limitations on where renewable energy facilities may be sited. First, the law specifies that **NYPA shall not develop renewable energy generation projects on "land used in agricultural production . . . unless [the] project is in furtherance of an agrivoltaics project" (i.e., unless the project is designed to accommodate dual- use farming and energy production)**. Second, the law provides that NYPA "shall . . . not build on lands located upon any Native American territory or reservation . . . except through voluntary sale or other agreement for such use with the consent of the relevant nation.

E. Next meeting Wednesday November 5, 2025

F. Adjournment Motion made by Tom Harvey, seconded by Jacob Maslyn.

Farming & Agriculture

"When it comes to betting on yourself, you are a chicken-livered coward if you hesitate."
— B.C. Forbes, founder, Forbes Magazine

Two Ontario Co. startups among Grow-NY finalists

This year's competition takes place in Canandaigua in November

Finger Lakes Times

ITHACA — Two Ontario County startups are among 20 finalists in the seventh round of the Grow-NY food-and-agriculture competition, which this year takes place in Canandaigua.

The finalists were announced last week by Empire State Development and Cornell University's Center for Regional Economic Advancement.

The two Ontario County finalists:

• **Finger Foods Farm, Bloomfield:** Finger Foods Farm produces a line of frozen soups, made with local ingredients, processed at regional businesses, and branded to celebrate New York's bounty.

• **Renewal Mill, Canandaigua:** Renewal Mill creates premium, gluten-free, vegan, and up-cycled baking ingredients and snacks by transforming nutritious byproducts from food manufacturing into delicious, sustainable products.

The Grow-NY competition, funded through

New York State's Upstate Revitalization Initiatives — Finger Lakes Forward, CNY Rising, and Southern Tier Soaring — and Empire State Development's Division of Science, Technology and Innovation, was created to catalyze economic growth in upstate New York. Finalist startups are required to commit to growing jobs, partnerships or operations in the 22-county region said Grow-NY organizers.

A panel of 40 judges, with backgrounds in agribusiness, economic development, equitable access to capital, food systems, and entrepreneurship,

selected the finalists who now move forward to the next phase: a 10-week business development accelerator, where finalists will receive tailored mentorship from industry experts.

This year's Grow-NY Food and Ag Summit will take place Nov. 12-13 in Canandaigua.

Grow-NY will award a total of \$3 million in prize money to seven winners. This includes a \$1 million top prize, two \$500,000 awards, and four \$250,000 prizes. Winners will be announced live during the Summit's closing ceremony.



Provided

Sarah and Alex Cookfair of Bloomfield are co-founders of Finger Foods Farm, one of two Ontario County startups named finalists in the 2025 Grow-NY competition. The other area finalist is Renewal Mill from Canandaigua.

Registration is now open for in-person and virtual attendance at the Grow-NY Summit: <https://event.me/E10znv>.

Summer farming



Customer Sales Day

Wednesday, Sept. 3rd

Through Saturday, Sept. 6th

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