

AGRICULTURAL ENHANCEMENT BOARD

March 30, 2026 at 6:00 PM

20 Ontario Street

Economic Development Conference Room 122A, Mezzanine Level

Canandaigua, NY 14424

1. Call to Order

The 3/30/2026 meeting of the Ontario County Agricultural Board was called to order at 6:01PM at 20 Ontario St, Canandaigua, NY 14424 with Chairperson Frank Fessner presiding.

2. Introductions

Upon roll call, the following members were:

Present:

Farmer Lisa FitzGerald @ 6:15PM

Farmer Frank Fessner

Ag Land Preservation Elizabeth Newbold @6:45PM

Alternate for M. Tidball Jacob Maslyn

Director of Planning Thomas Harvey

Director of Real Property Tax Dennine Leeson

Alternate for M. Webster Tucker Kautz

Farmer Fred Lightfoote

Farmer Jared Martin

Board of Supervisor Representative Michael Baker

Present Not Voting:

Sr. Planner - Alternate for T. Harvey Linda Phillips

USDA - non-voting member Joann Rogers

Erin Holley - Ontario County Planning

Absent:

Agribusiness Fernando Soberon

Excused:

Present, Voting 10, Present, Not Voting 3, Absent 1, Excused 0

Guests:

3. Approval of Minutes

Thomas Harvey motioned to approve the Revised minutes from January 22, 2026. The motion was seconded by Jacob Maslyn. The motion passed.

4. New Business

BOS approved the addition of one 12.4-acre parcel in Farmington to OC Agricultural District #1.

Preparing a report for certification of the addition by NYS Ag & Markets. A second public hearing is needed due to an incorrect tax map number in the public hearing notice.

OC Economic Development Strategic Plan 2026-2030

To support the growth of agriculture, agri tourism, and agribusiness is 1 of 7 Plan goals. The plan lists objectives and tasks for each goal. Tasks include bring to market infrastructure investments; incentives for methane conversion, agribusiness startups, and Tech Farm businesses; and a county-wide agricultural land use plan to address market changes and renewable siting. No Ag goals tasks are listed as high priority tasks.

The AEB appreciates that the Economic Development Strategic plan includes a focus on agriculture and agribusiness. There was a wide ranging discussion of the economics of farming and the preponderance of large-scale dairy farming in Ontario County. Key points include:

- Some agri-business proposals involve expected input costs too low to cover farm production costs. This factor should be assessed early in any economic development discussions.
- Current milk processing plants are encouraging farms to add cows. Other options include diversifying to avoid reliance on the fluid milk mass commodity market pricing. Examples in Ontario County include waste to energy projects, raising beef cows, and adding chickens. Examples from neighboring counties include production of cream or dry milk. Such value-added projects often involve partnerships with other farms and IDA participation.

Also Board discussed the opportunity to build on the branding work undertaken over the last 50 years by the Finger Lake wine industry to launch other agricultural value-added products.

AEP Implementation Grants

- Request for volunteers for grant evaluation committee. AEP Implementation Grant applications due 5/16/26.

Elizabeth, Fred, Michael - grant committee

- Discussion of eligible projects from farmers markets and community gardens.

Item Description: Farmers Market and Community Garden projects would likely address AEP Implementation Strategy 2 Increasing opportunities for interaction between farmers and the non-farming public (sub-strategy d. Support special events?) or Strategy 3: Expand and improve regional networks within the food systems economy (sub-strategy a. Support activities to increase sales of Ontario County local food products through networking events, trainings, and public outreach initiatives).

Would funds to help establish a Farmers Market be eligible under Strategy 2? Would other types of community events? AEB funded the Canandaigua CSD on-site farmers market and a related handout with info on area farm markets and a link to FLVC hosted Ag experience website as related to Strategy 3a. (The handout was actually distributed digitally).

Community garden establishment activities might not fit under Strategy 3, but once established, there could be a food preservation class which could help community gardeners preserve what they grow and also promote buying local produce in season and preserving it for off-season use. Would a farmers' market or community garden local food cooking demonstration or a spring plant sale with vegetable starts from Ontario County nurseries be eligible?

Discussion items included the availability of the NYS Urban Farm and Community Garden Grant program <https://agriculture.ny.gov/rfa-0344-urban-farms-and-community> and SWCD example of using community garden as an outdoor classroom a part of the summer recreation program.

Board would like grant materials distributed to municipal recreation directors to encourage local recreation programs to include food production and preservation offerings and other activities to increase community interaction with farmers and consumption of local foods.

FLLT has requested a grant support letter for an application to Round 20 of the NYS Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program on behalf of Pritchard Farms in the Town of Canandaigua. The application involves the purchase and recording of an agricultural conservation easement to protect approximately 400 acres, 97 percent of which is prime, prime if drained, or farmland of statewide importance on the following 3 parcels: 69.00-1-7.110 (325.7 A), 69.00-1-6.100 (43.8 A) and 55.00-1-27/120 (30.6 A).

Elizabeth left at 7:08 returned at 7:20 for questions and left for the vote at 7:27 and returned at 7:28 once the vote was complete.

Elizabeth responded to the Board's questions as follows:

1. As a future conservation easement holder, FLLT is aware of the existing air rights easement and the value of the development rights has been adjusted accordingly.
2. The proposed easement allows development of 2 farm homesteads with 4 allowable sites identified. These areas cannot be subdivided from the farm parcels. No rural enterprise areas for non-farm-related family businesses have been requested.
3. If in the future, the Ontario County Industrial Development Authority proposed eminent domain to extend the airport runway, that would lawfully extinguish the conservation easement.

This agenda item also sparked a discussion of the track record of agricultural land protection activities. Elizabeth reported on research that supports FLLT's strategy of preserving blocks of farmland, not isolated farms. Other research by American Farmland Trust

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://farmlandinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/10/AFT-frpp-analyzing-lasting-impacts.pdf

Indicates purchase of development rights programs can make farmland more affordable for new farmers, provide capital for farmers to invest in land, equipment and infrastructure, and encourages adoption of conservation practices.

Board Motion: To Approve the response to/ for the letter of support as presented. **Motion made by:** Thomas Harvey, **Seconded by:** Tucker Kautz. **Vote:** Yes 9, No 0, Abstained 1. **The Motion:** Passed

5. Old Business

1. In 2025, the County Planning Board reviewed applications for five large-scale solar projects occupying a total of approximately 141.7 acres of prime farmland and generating 16.3 MW of power.
2. Added to the Ontario County web page. [Agriculture and Solar Resources](#), a link to a short research article on transitioning land from corn ethanol production to solar while increasing energy generation per acre and ecosystem services (flood plain, bird and pollinator habitat, stormwater management).

Collaboration with Land Trusts on Farmland and Open Space Preservation

Ontario County Agricultural Protection web pages were updated and re-organized to provide easy access

to information on Conservation Easement/Purchase of Development Rights programs and links to 3 land trusts serving Ontario County.

Some progress on adding a land trust service area map to the website and adding a land trust conservation easement layer to OnCor.

The CE/PDR program training session is now anticipated in summer 2026. There are Genesee Valley Conservancy trainings for landowners in Genesee, Livingston, and Wyoming counties in March/April.

6. Member Reports & Other Business

Linda - NYSERDA RFI 6138: Sun and Soil Program

The purpose of this Request for Information (RFI) is to solicit input from interested stakeholders to help NYSERDA, in collaboration with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, develop Sun and Soil program offerings that support farmers in benefiting from the integration of solar energy development on their land while sustaining the agriculture use of productive farmland. This Request for Information (RFI 6138) will help NYSERDA gain information and diverse perspectives on challenges to, potential benefits of, and opportunities for the responsible co-utilization of solar energy with commercial agriculture, including but not limited to agri voltaics, solar energy and battery storage microgrids for powering farms, and other means for farmers and agricultural communities to benefit from the integration of solar energy development in ways that sustain agriculture, and will inform future solicitations.

<https://forms.office.com/g/BuJtCC7u6r>.

Link to research on survey of landowners adjacent to transmission lines and sub-

stations. <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2026/03/solars-threat-nys-agriculture-may-be-overstated>

Overall, a high 40 percent of 584 owners of 30 or more acres of rural, vacant or agricultural land responded. Findings indicate farmers were more likely than non-farmers to be solicited, but less likely to sign leases. Of the 70 farmer respondents who signed leases, most plan to continue farming. The text in the link on agri-voltaics research below suggests many farmers who sign solar leases pursue agri-voltaics.

Link to research on agri-voltaics including the statement that soybeans and not corn can be grown in conjunction with solar panels. <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2025/02/solar-solutions-agrivoltaics-offer-array-options-farmland-use>

Farmer Frank Fessner - had nothing to report

Ag Land Preservation Elizabeth Newbold — nothing to report

Alternate for M. Tidball Jacob Maslyn - on April 24 is the Board of Supervisors Ag Tour, 4-H Career tour, May 17 Household Hazardous waste collection, June tractor and chainsaw safety.

Director of Planning, Thomas Harvey — Board of Supervisors approved the SPRING building project at FLCC to house CCE, SWCD and the Horticulture and Environmental Conservation program.

Director of Real Property Tax Dennine Leeson - has nothing to report

Farmer Lisa FitzGerald - spring chick incubator project with St. Mary's and homeschoolers.

Alternate for M. Webster Tucker Kautz - more farmers investing in manure movement efficiency projects, including underground manure transfer and manure separators to create dry matter that can be used for animal bedding, and the use of silage liquid for irrigation. DR11 piping in short supply, contracts being repriced at +30% or canceled

Farmer Fred Lightfoote - had nothing to report

Farmer Jared Martin - enjoying high beef prices

USDA representative Joann Rogers Due to low commodity prices, Farm Bridge programs enrolling for row and specialty crops. The conservation reserve has a competitive offer for grass cover.

Michael Baker nothing to report

7. Next Meeting

The next regular Ag Board meeting will be June 16, 2026.

8. Adjournment

Board motion to: Adjourn. Motion made by: Thomas Harvey, seconded by Frank Fessner, Vote: Yes 10, No 0, Abstained 0. The motion Passed. The Agriculture Enhancement Board meeting was adjourned at 7:55.