



# 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 30<sup>th</sup> 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.