

# TOWN OF GRAND ISLAND

## *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*



Draft Report - November 2019





***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

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***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<i>Page</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	S-1
I. INTRODUCTION	
A. Background	I-1
B. Existing Plans and Programs	I-2
C. Approvals	I-12
II. COMMUNITY INPUT AND GOALS	
A. Public Participation (PIM, stakeholders', Focus, PH)	II-1
B. Goals and Objectives	II-4
III. COMMUNITY OVERVIEW	
A. Regional Setting / Location	III-1
B. Demographics and Housing	III-1
C. Land Use, Zoning and Other Policies and Regulations	III-4
D. Natural Resources	III-13
E. Infrastructure Services	III-15
IV. AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND RESOURCES	
A. Agricultural Soils	IV-1
B. Agricultural Districts	IV-3
C. Farm Operations, Farm Statistics and the Economic Contributions of Farming	IV-6
D. Agricultural Markets and Support Businesses	IV-9
E. Climate Resiliency	IV-11
F. Development Pressure and Consequences of Conversion	IV-11
V. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	
A. Summary of Issues Relating to Farming, Farmland and Agricultural Protection	V-1
B. Vision for the Future	V-2
C. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats	V-5
D. Tools and Techniques for Farmland Protection	V-5
E. Recommendations and Implementation Strategies	V-24
VI. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY	VI-1
VII. GLOSSARY, RESOURCES AND REFERENCES	VII-1



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**List of Maps**

	<u>Page</u>
1 Regional Setting	III-2
2 Existing Land Use	III-5
3 Zoning	III-7
4 Environmental Resources	III-14
5 Water and Sewer Service	III-16
6 Farmland Soils	IV-2
7 Agricultural Districts	IV-4
8 Local Agricultural Operations and Properties	IV-7
9 Future Land Use Map	IV-12
10 Agricultural Protection Areas/Vision Map	V-3

**Appendix**

- A Public Participation
- B Town of Grand Island Land Use Regulations
- C NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Information
- D Sample Agricultural Data Statement
- E American Farmland Trust Cost of Services Study Fact Sheet
- F Purchase of Development Rights Information
- G Transfer of Development Rights Information
- H Cornell University Small Farms Program and Natural Resources Conservation Services/USDA Information Fact Sheets
- I Tax Credit Program Information
- J Cornell Climate Change Fact Sheet – Farming Success in an Uncertain Climate



# Town of Grand Island Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming

## Executive Summary

Agriculture in Town of Grand Island, though not as prevalent as other suburban or rural communities in Western New York, is alive and active, with a deep history that supports its continuation well into the future. Farming today on the Island consists of a mix of different operations and pursuits, from larger field operations and greenhouses to smaller, non-commercial, hobby-scale pursuits including beekeeping, raising flowers, herbs, poultry, and fruits, among others. The uniqueness of Grand Island, being an island community, creates a much different agricultural environment for farmers in that self-sufficiency is a key attribute for resources and support. Since the scale of farming and agriculture in the Town varies widely, regulations and policies cannot be a “one size fits all” approach and, instead, need to be responsive to the different areas of the Town where agricultural and farming activities occur, and the characteristics found within them.

This *Resource Guide* serves two functions for the Town – providing a framework for future regulatory and policy actions to protect farming and agriculture, and to act as a resource document for new and existing farmers, providing financial, educational and technical support and other pertinent information.



## Vision for Farming on Grand Island

The vision for the future of farming and agriculture on Grand Island is to provide an environment in which these activities can become established and/or remain active and viable, regardless of their size,



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

level of intensity, or type of operation. Promotion of existing agricultural businesses and farming uses is as important as protection of these resources with the goal of making Grand Island self-sufficient and self-enforcing of its own unique agricultural environment. Many of the items outlined in this *Resource Guide* indicate the need to revisit existing regulations and views of agriculture to make Grand Island more farming-friendly, promote agricultural activity, protect the environment and make it clear that farming does not need to be a “hidden” activity in the community. Without such changes, the future of farming and agriculture in the community, at any scale, will continue to be stymied through unnecessary and unrealistic constraints.

#### ***Key Issues***

Through the development of this *Resource Guide*, several key issues were revealed pertaining to the current state of agriculture and its future on Grand Island:

- Pressure for expanding residential and commercial development, particularly in sewer districts where prime farm soils and agricultural activities occur.
- The need to understand and accentuate the relationship between agriculture and the natural environment. There is a need to support the basic tenet that farming should be undertaken in a manner that demonstrates environmental stewardship.
- The extent of poorly drained soils, associated wetland growth and flooding that occurs adjacent to creeks, drainage ditches, and other waterbodies on Grand Island limits the extent that lands can be used for new and existing agricultural activities. This is the result of many factors and is a Town-wide issue that impacts agriculture, as well as other non-agricultural uses.
- Though a *Right to Farm* law is in place, it puts a limit on farming practices by not allowing livestock by right as part of operations. Though several properties are located within State-certified, County-adopted Agricultural Districts, the limitations of the Town’s *Right to Farm* law limits protection from, and is inconsistent with, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets statutes.
- Public water is found throughout the Town and all water users are billed at the same level; no tiered or high-user rates exist for higher capacity users. This is particularly costly for farmers that have land within a sewer district where sewer rates are based on water usage (as indicated by meters). This inflates sewer bills although actual sanitary sewer use is





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

low. While submetering is now available, it restricts the connection of new facilities and the amount of water usage required is excessive and cost-prohibitive for farm operations on Grand Island. Water costs on Grand Island are higher than what is charged in farm areas in surrounding Towns.

- Hobby farms (small scale, non-commercial operations) are on the rise in Grand Island, as are other “non-traditional” farming operations such as apiaries, greenhouses, hydroponics, aquaponics and agri-tourism. Existing land use regulations are not keeping pace with changing trends and, therefore, existing regulations are restricting the potential for new and existing agricultural businesses and activities.
- Many Grand Island residents and business-owners are unaware of the extent of agriculture in the Town and unfamiliar with farming practices, which can lead to nuisance issues and complaints. Expanded promotion and public education is a means for addressing this issue.
- Grand Island is a suburban/urban fringe community where agriculture is transitioning to smaller and newer “urban-oriented” farming activities. While offering a host of services and information, many local support agencies lack experience to provide more specific guidance or resources of this nature.
- Local support of agriculture has been achieved through the grassroots efforts of Grand Island Farms, Inc., a cooperative of local farmers that act as a gateway for sharing resources, expanding knowledge, and promoting local agricultural businesses and farms. This *Resource Guide* will help this organization in its mission to support and promote farming on Grand Island.
- Modern farming practices and operations encourage diversification of farming products and activities that enable farms to remain viable and sustainable, including raising alternative and new crops and the use of farm stands, u-pick fields, ecotourism, community supported agriculture (CSA),



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

and other endeavors. The Town's zoning regulations are outdated and have not kept up with these various and changing uses; therefore, many new and potential opportunities available to farmers are prohibited or constrained.

- No formal process or committee/board exists to hear or mediate nuisance complaints received from residents with respect to agricultural operations and activities. Such an entity could also assist with the provision of public education and promotion of agricultural activities on the Island.

#### ***Recommended Actions***

The *Resource Guide* identifies several goals for the future of agriculture and farming, with coincident recommended actions in order to promote and protect the future of agriculture on Grand Island. The four key goals include:

1. Protecting agricultural land and farming resources
2. Promoting the link between farms and food by increasing awareness of agriculture on the Island
3. Enhancing and expanding the agricultural economy
4. Better educating the local community about agriculture

Recommended actions include:

- Revising local regulations and the *Right to Farm* law to bring them in line with current agricultural definitions and allowing the full breadth of farming in the Town.
- Expand agricultural definitions and policies in the Town to include hobby farms and other small-scale, non-commercial enterprises as allowable uses.
- Create proper channels and processes for addressing any potential nuisance complaints by creating a permanent Agricultural Advisory Committee.
- Identifying the proper areas for more intensive agricultural undertaking in the Town while and permitting a wider variety of smaller scale uses in more broader areas.
- Utilizing available resources that may not be advertised or easily found for educating new and existing farmers on new technologies, business endeavors, management, and financial support, among other resources. Cornell Cooperative extension (as well as other educational extensions), USDA, Northeast Organic Farming Association, and American Farmland Trust are a few of the resources with a wealth of material available.
- Expand markets for local agricultural products through the school district, local businesses, the regional Welcome Center, churches, and other avenues to use local products and support Grand Island farmers.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Educate the community on common farm practices and operations via the Town website, information at Town Hall, and at community events to help market local farmers and increase awareness.

***Moving Forward***

The recommendations included in this *Resource Guide* above provide the foundation for the Town of Grand Island to take the next steps necessary for preserving and promoting agriculture for the future. To put the recommendations into action, the plan must be approved and adopted by the Erie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, the Town Board and the Commissioner of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. Thereafter, the Town can begin implementing the recommendations, many of which do not require funding. The recommendations associated with zoning code revisions can be referred to the appropriate boards or committees and coupled with other, broader zoning revisions identified in the Town's 2018 Comprehensive Plan, *Bridging the Future*. Section V and VI of this *Resource Guide* contain a complete implementation strategy for each of the recommendations. The two most important and effective ways to implement the strategies and recommendations contained in this plan are to formalize a Committee to represent agricultural interests in the Town and assist with implementation of the plan, and to undertake necessary revisions to local regulations to create a more favorable environment for farming, now and into the future.







**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

**SECTION I – INTRODUCTION**

**A. Background**

In 2018, the Town of Grand Island prepared an update to the Comprehensive Plan as a means of better managing future growth and development in the community. The Comprehensive Plan Update includes specific goals and recommendations for the protection of farming and agriculture in the Town. In 2018, the Town secured funding through the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to prepare an Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and protect farmland and enhance farming in the Town.

The State’s Agricultural and Farmland Protection Program was formed under Article 25-AAA of the Agriculture and Markets Law to encourage further development of agriculture and farmland in New York State. The Statement of Legislative Findings and Intent of Article 25-AAA states:

*“It is hereby found and declared that agricultural lands are irreplaceable State assets. To maintain the economic viability and environmental and landscape preservation values associated with agriculture, the State must explore ways to sustain the State’s valuable farm economy and the land use base associated with it. It is therefore declared the policy of the state to promote local initiatives for agricultural and farmland protection”.*

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets defines farmland and agricultural protection as *“the preservation, conservation, management, or improvement of lands that are part of viable farming operations, for the purpose of encouraging such lands to remain in agricultural production.”* Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans help municipalities develop strategies for the future of agriculture in their communities.

In accordance with the State’s requirements, municipalities that develop Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans must include, among other things:

- the location of farmland or other areas proposed to be protected;
- an analysis of the factors concerning the areas and lands proposed to



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

be protected, such as the value to the agricultural economy, the value of open space to the community, the consequences of possible conversion of farmland to other land uses, and the level of conversion pressure on the lands or areas proposed to be protected; and

- a description of activities, programs and strategies intended to be used to promote continued agricultural use.

Preparation of an agricultural and farmland protection plan must include public input and, thereafter, be submitted to the Grand Island Town Board and the Erie County Farmland Protection Board for their review and approval. Upon Town and County approval, the plan must be submitted by the Town to the Commissioner of the New York State Department of Agricultural and Markets for final approval. This Grand Island Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, which the Town is calling “*The Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island*”, has been developed to comply with intended State requirements.

**B. Existing Plans and Programs**

The following is an overview of existing land use plans that have been developed by other entities, including Erie County and the Town of Grand Island, that promote the protection and enhancement of agriculture. The information presented below includes the policies, goals and recommendations related to agricultural and farmland protection, as set forth in each individual plan. These plans are all supportive of the Grand Island Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan and the Town’s desire to maintain farming as an important industry in the community.

**Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan**

The Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan was developed by the Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board in 1998; an update to this plan was developed by the American Farmland Trust in 2012. The preparation of this plan was made possible through grant funding from the New York State Agricultural and Farmland Protection Program, which is administered by the State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The goal of the Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan strategy is to maintain a productive, open landscape that is viable for future generations and that does not preclude more intensive activity when the demand exists; and to promote and expand markets for agricultural products. The findings in the plan indicate that Erie County has diverse, productive, vital farms that are located near a sizable population. The County benefits from prime farm soils, a climate that is



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

moderated by Lake Erie, and farmers with years of experience, as well as new farmers who are eager to take on the challenge of agriculture. Additionally, a growing interest in local farms and farm products has boosted agriculture as a visible economic driver that is creating new opportunities for farming in both urban and rural areas of Erie County.

The Plan is intended to direct agricultural planning in Erie County for the next decade and provides a picture of agricultural activity as it presently exists and outlines the loss of farmland that has occurred over the past few decades. The Plan also documented strong public support for agriculture and demonstrates how agriculture has been a significant contributor to the County economy, although much of the farmland is now located in the outer ring of land, adjacent to neighboring farm counties. Focusing on agricultural economic development holds significant promise for Erie County farms, particularly with regard to direct marketing opportunities and opportunities to improve farm viability and profitability through coordinated economic development efforts.

The two major strategies and associated goals and recommendations set forth in the Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan include the following.

- Keep land in agricultural production by protecting farmland, helping a new generation to farm, and improving the viability of all farms in the County.

**Summary Actions:**

- Protect farmland and stabilize the farm base.
- Determine the feasibility of developing a County-wide purchase of development rights program.
- Support the State-certified agricultural district program with right-to-farm provisions.
- Collect agricultural assessment data by town in order to inform agricultural planning efforts.
- Assist towns that wish to adopt term and/or permanent easement programs.
- Develop a ditch maintenance program that supports preservation of prime agricultural land.
- Help a next generation become established on new and existing farms through training programs, promotion of farming and local training programs, other education initiatives, and incentives.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Determine the feasibility of developing a community college agricultural training program for workforce development or establishing County-wide apprenticeship and internship programs.
  - Research the institution of a farm workforce development program that could benefit new immigrant populations and farms.
  - Encourage BOCES, and local school districts (City, suburban and rural) to include agricultural workforce training.
  - Support City and suburban community zoning regulations in order to expand urban farming opportunities.
  - Determine the feasibility of establishing a property tax abatement program for new farmers.
  - Improve farm viability and increase investment in agricultural development projects, such as agritourism.
  - Establish a shovel-ready agricultural business park to attract food and agricultural processing businesses.
  - Develop a program to help farmers market their agricultural products and to assist in identifying new market opportunities.
- Inform the public, local leaders and elected officials about the benefits that agriculture provides and support policy and legislative changes that will improve farm viability

**Summary Actions**

- Educate local leaders and elected officials about the benefits that farms provide to local economies and to the quality of life for County residents.
- Calculate the value of agriculture to the local and regional economy as part of a complete economic analysis of agriculture and its multiplier effects.
- Offer regular training for local leaders and volunteers.
- Periodically host farm tours for local leaders and officials.
- Support policies that will help farms to provide affordable, local food to County residents.
- Develop a County Food Policy Council that includes a formal role for the Erie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board.
- Promote locally grown food purchasing by school districts in the region and work with the Erie County Agricultural Society to promote the Farm2Table school program.





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Promote/support farmers markets in the cities, towns and villages to attract more people to existing markets.
- Educate and inform the public about farms and food production through the establishment of an annual County-wide agricultural event.
- Support the Erie County Farm Bureau's efforts to encourage Agriculture in the Classroom.
- Support partner agricultural organizations, such as Farm Bureau, American Farmland Trust, the Soil and Water Conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension, through advocacy efforts to increase penalties for terminating agricultural assessments and enact revisions to County, State and Federal agricultural policy and legislative changes.
- Establish stronger regional planning, especially between Erie and Niagara Counties.

#### **Erie Niagara Framework for Regional Growth**

The Erie Niagara Framework for Regional Growth, adopted in 2006, was prepared and supported by Erie and Niagara Counties. It sets forth a blueprint to support the actions of county and regional agencies as they relate to the area's physical development. It is to be used to inform state and local governments, private developers, and non-profit organizations about the process and actions County government could undertake when making decisions affecting the region's development. The Framework establishes basic policies and principles to guide the future growth and development of the region, and provides:

- a vision for how the region should grow and redevelop over the next 15 years;
- direction on growth and redevelopment to County decision makers and other regional organizations that are linked to the two counties via funding, membership and other relationships;
- information on the ways local government, private sector and non-profit actions and initiatives can reinforce the overall regional vision; and
- mechanisms to ensure that the goals, concepts and recommendations of the Framework for Regional Growth are implemented in an efficient and accountable manner.

The Framework examines the regional context and challenges and establishes guidance for growth and investment in a number of areas. One area in particular is the loss of rural, agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands. The report recognizes that the loss of agricultural lands and the associated effects on rural economies and landscapes warrants attention for several reasons. Agriculture plays an important role in the region's and the State's economies, contributing directly



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

through sales, job creation, support services and businesses, and secondarily through markets for processing and agricultural and heritage tourism.

Agriculture also generates low levels of demand on public services and infrastructure. Studies across the State have shown that agricultural lands have a positive fiscal impact. Well-managed, privately held agricultural land also has environmental and social benefits by providing food and cover for wildlife, conserving environmentally sensitive lands and maintaining scenic, cultural and historic landscapes.

The Framework's core policies and strategies offer guidance regarding the type and pattern of development for three broad geographic areas – *Developed, Developing, and Rural*. *Developed* areas include the cities and large, contiguous areas of urban and suburban development that are served by public sewer, water and transportation infrastructure. *Developing* areas include both recently developed and sparsely settled areas experiencing development pressure and increasing demand for the extension of public sewer, water and transportation infrastructure. *Rural* areas include the region's least intensely developed areas, with large, contiguous blocks of farmland and/or forested land, as well as compact commercial, public and residential uses clustered in hamlets or incorporated villages.

For each of these three areas, the Framework offers:

- high level policy direction for regional decision-makers;
- guidance for municipal officials and community stakeholders regarding regional preferences for future development and conservation, and
- a baseline to compare future conditions with existing conditions and Framework growth targets.

The central portion of Grand Island lies within the *Developed* Area as it includes the Town Center growth area that is served by transportation, public sewer and water infrastructure. The Framework policies and strategies for the *Developed Areas* include:

- Sparking Investment in areas with adequate infrastructure to support it;
- Attracting new households and businesses;
- Supporting the preservation and stabilization of existing neighborhoods;
- Supporting new compact, pedestrian oriented, mixed-use development on vacant and underutilized sites; and



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Improving livability and economic vitality.

Away from the center of the Island, the remainder of the community is designated as a *Developing* area. The guidance and strategies outlined for *Developing* areas include:

- The conservation of agricultural and rural lands;
- The location of new compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development on vacant and underutilized sites that improves local accessibility;
- Encouraging public investments in the preservation, repair and restoration of existing infrastructure and public facilities;
- Limiting capacity improvements to roads and extensions to sewer and water infrastructure; and
- Supporting local comprehensive planning and policy making that designates areas appropriate for development and conservation and avoids leapfrog patterns of development.

#### **Western New York Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan – A Strategy for Prosperity**

The Western New York Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan is a comprehensive plan to create a more dynamic and sustainable economy for the region. The Plan reflects the values, perspectives and aspirations of the people in the region. The Plan is aimed at making fundamental improvements in the economy to ensure sustainable and long-term growth in jobs and income in the five-county area, and to contribute to the resurgence of the broader economy of New York State.

The Strategy for Prosperity focuses on three fundamental issues that, if addressed properly, can create the right environment for achievement. These issues include job readiness, smart growth and entrepreneurship. The Strategy also puts forward ways to capitalize on opportunities in eight industry sectors where Western New York is the strongest. Among these eight sectors is agriculture.

The Strategy for Prosperity recognizes that the production of food and agricultural products is a leading industry in the region, as well as New York State. Agriculture capitalizes on geographic or natural resources that are unique to the region. However, the full potential remains unrealized and concern about local food systems and other economic needs provides new opportunities. The Plan calls for programs to spur innovation in products, processes and market links through applied research; to improve marketing and communicate the value of local food; and to join in efforts to reform regulatory processes for more effective and efficient regulation.



## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

The Plan identifies that farms account for one in every seven businesses in Western New York. Western New York has a strong strategic location, natural resources, critical mass and human capital to sustain the industry. Western New York has a reputation for the highest quality fruit, vegetable and dairy products, and produces significant quantities of other products, including grains. In Erie County, agricultural activity is split fairly evenly between the raising of crops and livestock. However, there is a need to leverage market opportunities and improve consumer education. There is also a need to overcome urban sprawl to protect agricultural lands. With better access to markets, new products and processes and a less burdensome regulatory scheme, this industry could be improved. Because the agricultural sector is large, even modest increases in sales or reductions in cost can translate into new jobs, and more income and opportunity.

The Plan indicates that Western New York can position agriculture as an economic driver, cultivate next-generation farms and sustain local food systems by diversifying products and markets, creating a supporting policy environment and pursuing applied research. The industry is primed for diversification and expansion in food processing, value-added products, tourism and untapped local and external markets. These opportunities are particularly important with growing concerns over local food system sustainability and community health. Additionally, rising costs, outdated and cumbersome state regulatory policies and global competition challenge farm sustainability, inhibit growth and threaten next generation farming. Innovative programs can overcome these barriers and seize growth opportunities. New investment models are needed to support often risky agricultural ventures. Applied research can improve awareness of sustainable practices and new market or product opportunities. And marketing and advocacy efforts can build public awareness, develop an agricultural workforce, correct misperceptions of the industry and push policy change. The Strategy for Prosperity calls for creation of a new marketing strategy that is focused on promoting the value of local food, with a goal of increasing sales across the sector. Innovation in agriculture is also key. The Plan proposes a broad-based program to connect farmers with researchers to improve techniques for growing, processing, packaging and distribution, and to introduce new products and create new market linkages to increase competitiveness within the sector. As set forth in the Plan, the agenda for making the agricultural industry sector in Western New York more competitive is as follows:

- Collaborate to create and promote a regional brand for local food and agricultural products – Collaboration is necessary to create program to educate the public on the value and availability of locally produced food and agricultural products with the goals of increasing sales for local producers.





***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Increase innovation to improve products, processes and market links – Organize an innovation council to promote connections among farm businesses and research institutions to develop and promote innovative practices to lower costs and increase the value of farm products. Increased investment in research and translation can help farmers increase product quality, reduce energy use, promote workforce quality and motivation, develop new linkages between producers and consumers, and share information across the industry and research universities.
- Undertake actions that promote regional assets and protect and enhance resources, and reforms that allow businesses to thrive.

**Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan**

The Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan was developed to create a future where social and environmental issues in the five-county region are addressed within the framework of a sustainable regional economy. The Plan promotes the creation and maintenance of conditions under which Western New York communities utilize the resources they have in the most effective ways to permit social and economic growth, while preserving natural resources. The Plan focuses on six areas that are critical to attaining sustainability in the region, including agriculture and forestry. The Plan considers agriculture and forestry as two important industries that provide tremendous economic value and environmental benefits to local communities. The need to incorporate sustainable practices, protect agricultural land and increase the availability of value-added products are recognized in the Plan, as well as the fact agriculture in the region is important in supporting the entire food system from farmers to processors and restaurants to grocers. Land that remains in farming also provides scenic, employment and tourism benefits while avoiding the costs of urban sprawl.

The Plan establishes regional sustainability goals for agriculture, which include the following:

- Strengthening the economic viability of agriculture and forestry enterprises by establishing a WNY Food Hub or agricultural processing facility; connecting farmers with markets in new or more effective ways that increase profit margins, value-added products, specialty products in demand by consumers, meeting demands in food deserts, etc.
- Achieving more efficient uses for energy inputs and maximizing use of agriculture and forestry by-products for energy production by working with farmers to develop and implement farm energy audits that enable farmers to maintain production while saving energy and money through efficiency; and promoting energy generation projects that use agricultural or forestry by-products as fuel sources.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Increasing support from government officials and the public for the protection of farmland, continued use of farmland for agricultural purposes, and strengthening the business climate for agriculture and forestry in the region by coordinating policies and program to minimize conflicts between infrastructure planning and continuing farming by expanding the number of right-to-farm communities; updating agricultural protection plans at the county level, encouraging plan development at the local level and supporting implementation of farmland protection plans.
- Promoting environmentally sustainable management systems for the agriculture and forestry sector by promoting and preserving enterprises through farmer recruitment programs and innovation and entrepreneurship programs for small farms.

The Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan also establishes targets for selected indicators to measure achievement of goals. For agriculture, the target is the number of acres of harvested cropland that are kept in production, keeping the acreage constant through 2017 (from a 2007 baseline).

#### **'Bridging the Future" Town of Grand Island 2018 Comprehensive Plan Update**

The Town of Grand Island adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan in September 2018. This plan includes specific goals and recommendations for farmland and agricultural protection.

The Vision for the Future of Grand Island, as outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, recognizes that while the local economy may be geared toward recreation and ecotourism, other industries should be encouraged, including but not limited to, local agriculture, light industry and hospitality services. Economic diversity helps encourage year-round activity and provides residents with a variety of needs within the confines of the Island.

- **Goals**  
Two of the five goals outlined in the plan included objectives that apply to agricultural protection, as follows:

#### **Goal – Natural Resources**

Supporting the preservation of Grand Island's many natural resources due to their contribution to the overall character of the Island, as well as the numerous economic opportunities they can provide.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- *Objective* – Encourage agricultural ventures in appropriate areas of the Town to conserve rural landscapes and support local agricultural business opportunities. Promote practices that balance farm productivity with green space protection and sustainability.

#### *Goal – Economic Development*

Maintain a strong and diverse economy that capitalizes on the existing assets of the community (built and natural), provides a business environment that retains and attracts new ventures, and complements the “Island character” that is unique to Grand Island.

- *Objective* – Encourage agricultural pursuits within the Town to continue to build up existing local farms and support new economic opportunities.
- *Encourage the development of a local Farmland Protection Plan to support agricultural businesses and farms on Grand Island.*

- Findings – Future Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan includes a Future Land Use Map that illustrates targeted development areas, as well as valuable natural and cultural resources that contribute to the character of the Grand Island community. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that these resources, which include prime agricultural lands, should be preserved and commercial or residential growth in these areas should be limited.

- Recommendations

- Where farming is encouraged, ensure zoning regulations that allow for flexibility in agricultural operations in conjunction with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets guidelines. The intent is to create an environment in which the community and agricultural activities can co-exist.
- Develop a Farmland Protection Plan to guide farmers and provide direction for an agricultural economy on Grand Island.
- Identify opportunities for new businesses in agritourism that are valuable to residents and visitors.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**C. Approvals**

In accordance with the requirements of the New York State Department of Agriculture, the draft Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan must be approved by the Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board and the Grand Island Town Board before it receives final approval from the State. **The Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board reviewed a draft plan and approved it on \*\*, 20\*\*.** In addition, the Town Board must conduct a public hearing on the Plan. **This hearing was held on \*\*, 20\*\* and the Town Board approved the Plan on \*\*, 20\*\*.**

DRAFT



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**SECTION II – COMMUNITY INPUT AND GOALS**

**A. Public Participation**

Farming in the Town of Grand Island has been practiced since the early settlement of the community. Today, farming continues as a way of life and economic driver in the Town, but agricultural activity, as a whole, has been greatly diminished over the years. The preparation of this *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island* is a means of ensuring that existing agricultural activities remain active and viable in the Town, that the expansion of small-scale and non-commercial agricultural activities are encouraged, and that productive farmland is protected to ensure the continuation of existing and future farming activities. As a part of the preparation of this *Resource Guide*, the Town undertook the following efforts to ensure that public involvement was an ongoing part of the overall planning process.

As noted in Section I, the Town of Grand Island adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan in September of 2018. That Plan includes goals and recommendations for managing future growth and development in the community. To undertake the update of the Comprehensive Plan and, thereafter, achieve the goals and implement the recommendations outlined in the Plan, the Grand Island Town Board established a Long-Range Planning Committee. Understanding that farmland protection was an issue of growing importance in the Town, as identified in the Comprehensive Plan update, the Town established the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee as an extension of the Long-Range Planning Committee to evaluate and address farmland preservation issues and oversee the development of the *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island*.

As the Town of Grand Island is committed to the idea that a critical and necessary element of the planning process is continuous and effective public participation, an ongoing public outreach program was established as part of the development of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. This effort included regular meetings of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and recognition of issues important to local stakeholders, acknowledgement of public concerns, and the identification of potential issue and opportunities for farmland protection in the Town. The public participation program for the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan consisted of public





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

meetings and stakeholder outreach, survey questionnaires, public comment forms, and postings on the Town's website.

- **Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee**

As noted above, the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee was charged with providing guidance and oversight for the development of the *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island*, and with the implementation of the goals set forth in that plan. The Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee included representation from Town government and the agricultural community. This Committee met on a regular basis to oversee the development of the *Resource Guide*, provide insight into the planning process, and ensure that the concerns of stakeholders and local citizens were taken into consideration.

- **Stakeholders' Meetings**

**Meeting #1** - This project was commenced with a Stakeholders' meeting that was held on November 29, 2018 in the Town of Grand Island Golden Age Center. This meeting was aimed at gathering input from local farmers and others interested in farming and agricultural activities in the Town. This meeting included breakout table discussions centered on several questions about farming and agriculture in the Town. Maps were used to identify local farms and other agricultural



properties, areas under development pressure and other important locations in the Town. The input provided from these discussions and the survey questionnaires used at this meeting helped provide the project Consulting Team with a better understanding of existing conditions and agricultural practices on Grand Island. The meeting summary is included in Appendix A.

**Meeting #2** – A Stakeholders' Meeting was held on May 2, 2019 arranged with representatives from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Army Corps. of Engineers, the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Erie County Highway Department, Town of Grand Island Highway Department and the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation Service. The purpose of this meeting



## **Town of Grand Island**

### **Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

was to help the Agricultural and Farmland Planning Committee gain a better understanding of regulatory requirements for stream clearance and better address issues of localized flooding and farmland drainage. Discussions were centered on identifying how local creeks and streams are regulated, what actions require a permit or other regulatory approvals, and to identify potential solutions for clearing creek obstructions, mitigating localized flooding of productive farmland, addressing other drainage concerns (such as the expansion of wetlands) and restoring creek flow without adversely impacting habitat quality in an effort to maintain and recover farmland property. The summary of discussion for this meeting is included in Appendix A.

**Meeting #3** – To help the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee and the Project Consulting Team gain a better understanding of issues related to urban farming and smaller-scale agricultural activities in the region, as well as other issues pertinent to the preparation of the *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island*, a Stakeholders’ Meeting was held with representatives from local agencies and organizations that focus on agriculture. This meeting was held on May 9, 2019 and included representatives from the Niagara and Erie County Farm Bureaus, the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation Service, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Young Farmers Coalition, the Western New York Land Conservancy and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, among others. The information gathered at this meeting was useful in identifying and planning for a wider range of farming activities and establishing recommendations to help the Town achieve its goals. The summary of discussions from this meeting is included in Appendix A.

#### **Meetings with the Public**

**Meeting #1** – A **Public Information Meeting** was held on February 26, 2019 to gather input from residents and others on issues and opportunities related to farming activities in the community, to vet preliminary goals, and to discuss the vision for the future of farming on Grand Island. This meeting included a brief presentation to help attendees understand the purpose of the *Resource Guide*, the parties involved, followed by an interactive session where residents and



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

others could view maps and actively discuss various aspects of farming and agriculture on Grand Island. The results of this meeting were used to finalize the goals and objectives and establish an overall vision for the *Resource Guide*, to direct the development of recommendations for future action. The Public Information meeting was also well attended by local farmers. This provided the opportunity to gather additional input from these individuals and to confirm information that had been gathered at the previous Stakeholders' Meeting. The meeting summary for the public information meeting is included in Appendix A.

**Meeting #2** – A second **Focus Workshop** was conducted for the general public and farming stakeholders on September 18, 2019. The purpose of this workshop was to ensure support for the *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island* and to discuss any remaining opportunities, concerns and needs with residents and others. This meeting included a brief presentation and discussion of the summary findings and recommendations outlined in Sections IV and V of the draft Plan. The comments gathered at this meeting were used to finalize the draft *Resource Guide* in preparation for presentation to the Town Board and commencement of the New York State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process. The meeting summary for the Public Focus Workshop is included in the Appendix.



**Meeting #3** – After the draft *Resource Guide* for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island was finalized and presented to the Town Board, a **Public Hearing** was **conducted on \*\*** as part of the SEQR process to gather any final comments from the public. Comments gathered at this hearing were used to finalize the *Resource Guide* prior to review by the Erie County Farm Bureau, adoption by the Town Board and review and approval by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.





# ***Town of Grand Island***

## ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

### **B. Goals and Objectives**

The Town's primary purpose for developing this *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island* is to recognize, better understand and establish a strategy for protecting the agricultural and rural character of the community, as well as promoting the expansion of agricultural activities on Grand Island. These goals and objectives were developed with input from the Agriculture and Farming Planning Committee and were shaped around the major issues and concerns expressed by farmers, residents, Town officials and other interested parties at the stakeholders' and public information meetings. They are aimed at protecting and enhancing important agricultural resources; increasing public awareness of agriculture in Wheatfield; ensuring the long-term viability of farming in the Town; and protecting, enhancing and expanding the agricultural economy.

#### ***GOAL 1: Protect Lands and Resources Critical to the Long-Term Success, Viability and Resiliency of Agriculture of any Size or Scale***

The Town recognizes that the protection of farming and agricultural activities, regardless of their size or scale, contributes to the preservation of open space and maintains the rural community character and heritage of the area. Protecting and promoting agriculture in the Town, which includes field crops, the keeping of animals, and numerous other pursuits, is of primary importance to the local economy and future of farming on Grand Island.

- Protect farms and farming related activities that are economically viable throughout the Town.
- Consider farming as the highest and best use for areas with prime farm soils or soils of State-wide importance.
- Build public support for local farms and farmers and the right to farm.
- Provide drainage support and relief to maintain existing farmland and improve the use of additional lands for farming.
- Encourage growth patterns and conservation measures that are respectful of agricultural activities, enable continued farm uses, and protect productive farmland.
- Encourage flexible Town land use policies to support agriculture and ensure that local regulations and permit procedures are protective of agricultural activities.
- Evaluate tax assessment policies that assist farm property owners who live on site.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Allow for the development of housing in a manner that discourages sprawl and utilizes existing services and infrastructure efficiently.
- Promote environmental stewardship of the land.
- Preserve and enhance viewsheds that contribute to the rural and agricultural character of the Town.
- Maintain and strengthen positive relationships between the farming community and various levels of State and County government that support all means of farming activity.
- Establish and maintain partnerships with not-for-profit and government agricultural support agencies and organizations.
- Promote and build upon the County Agricultural District regulations and the County's Farmland Protection Plan.
- Avoid and mitigate conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors.

***GOAL 2: Promote the link between farms and food, and farms and secondary income, to increase awareness by the non-farm community, grow the industry and help ensure the long-term sustainability of farming activities on Grand Island***

Farming provides a number of benefits, including the production of local food, jobs and other economic benefits to the community at large and the region; preservation of scenic vistas and rural character; potential for secondary income for residents, and a more balanced tax base. Strengthening and increasing public awareness and understanding of how agriculture positively impacts a community is essential for achieving public support for the continuance of farming activities.

- Promote an understanding of agriculture and its importance as a source of locally grown food supply to the local and regional economy, a means of continuing community heritage and culture, and for preserving local scenic landscapes.
- Increase awareness of local farmer's markets and the availability of local farm products.
- Foster a community environment that supports and exercises patience and understanding of the needs of farmers and farm operations.
- Promote agricultural tourism as a means of increasing awareness of farming and agriculture.
- Educate the general public about local agriculture and its value to the Grand Island community and region.





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Promote community supported agricultural projects that bring farmers and residents together.
- Promote small-scale farming as a means of secondary income or pastime for residents.
- Promote and support fairs, festivals and farming events to make farming visible in the Town and help residents understand the benefit of having farms in the community.

#### ***GOAL 3: Enhance and Expand the Agricultural Economy of the Town and its Capacity to Respond to Economic and Climate Trends and Changes***

Although it has changed in size, scale and nature, agriculture remains an integral component of the character and economy of the Town. Agricultural related businesses support farming and contribute to the local and regional economy. The existing economic base of farming in the community and the viability of existing businesses should be enhanced and expanded because a strong base is good for farmers, the Town and the region, as well as for the long-term success of agriculture.

- Promote the continuance of farming and agriculture as a business and a means of economic development.
- Support a viable agricultural economy and encourage the expansion of agricultural activity within the Town.
- Promote hobby (small-scale and non-commercial) farming in the community.
- Promote small-scale and non-commercial farming as a means of secondary income or pastime for residents to increase farming activity in the community.
- Recognize farmland and farm soils as a significant resource that can support farming as an economic activity that warrants protection.
- Locate business and industrial economic development in a manner that does not sacrifice viable and valuable farmland and farm soils.
- Encourage and allow farming related businesses and accessory farm uses as a support service and secondary interest to farming and agricultural activities in the Town.
- Promote organic farming as a viable form of sustainable, value-added agriculture.
- Promote locally grown products.
- Allow for and promote farm markets and roadside stands throughout the Town.
- Realize the economic potential of agricultural tourism as a means of enhancing the economic vitality of farming and agriculture.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Encourage the expansion of new technologies, such as biomass production, and explore and promote new markets and agricultural activities in response to climate changes and other factors.
- Encourage cooperative farming initiatives that benefit the community.
- Promote community supported agricultural projects that bring farmers and residents together.
- Increase the share of agricultural products that are direct marketed to consumers at higher margins.
- Allow for the development of new businesses and land uses that are compatible with neighboring agricultural uses and are in character with the surrounding area.

***GOAL 4: Ensure a Better Educated Community***

Farming on Grand Island has transitioned to smaller activities and enterprises, with a growing number of individuals new to their craft. It is important that local farmers understand what they are doing and are aware of the resources available to help them educate themselves to become better at what they do.

- Ensure awareness and access to programs and resources available to farming interests.
- Ensure an understanding of State and County programs and regulations that govern farming activities (e.g., agricultural districts).
- Encourage farmland property owners to utilize available tax relief programs and agricultural district protections.
- Encourage farming interests to participate in local programs offered by Grand Island Farms, Inc. to learn about topic relevant to farming in the community and region.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**SECTION III – COMMUNITY OVERVIEW**

**A. Regional Setting/Location (MAP 1)**

Grand Island, the aptly named 33.3 square mile land mass, takes the title of the largest island situated on the bi-national waterway of the Niagara River as well as the fourth largest in New York State. Original settlers on the island consisted of Native Americans from the Seneca Nation of the Iroquois and the area was used as a stopover for French traders and missionaries in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Control of the island then went to the British following the French and Indian War and later to the State of New York in 1815, along with several other islands. Settlers moved onto the island shortly thereafter and began developing it for crop planting, finding the land, water, and weather conditions favorable for abundant production. By 1852, the Town of Grand Island was officially incorporated, consisting of three islands - Grand Island, Buckhorn Island to the north, Beaver Island to the south. Anchored by State parks on the northern and southern ends of the island, the Town is a relatively rural-residential “bedroom” community situated between two of the most notable cities within the Western New York region, the City of Buffalo and the City of Niagara Falls. Though agriculture is not as vibrant as it was in the past, farming remains entrenched in the community today, with a mix of traditional farming pursuits (commodity crops such as corn, alfalfa, soy, etc.) along with timber harvesting, greenhouses, fruit farms, vineyards, and apiaries, among others.

**B. Demographics and Housing**

**Demographics**

Town population was estimated at 20,855 people in 2017, highlighting a slow, but steady increase from 2010 (19,974) and a general trend that has been in place since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The largest population increase occurred between 1950 and 2010, when the population grew almost by 17,000 people due to suburban housing development. On the larger scale, the region has been growing since 2010, but at a much slower rate than the Town. When compared with the County, which grew at approximately one percent during the same time period, the Town is on a better track for growth. Population projections for the Town out to 2040 by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) indicate an estimated 24,400 people, a 17 percent increase from 2017.



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**





**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

Family households remain stable (73 percent) though household sizes are decreasing, in line with regional and national trends. The median age (42 years old) of the Town's population is also stable, but the percentage of people over the age of 65 is increasing (from 11.3 percent in 2000 to 15.3 percent in 2015).

**Housing**

As of July of 2016, the number of housing units reported were 8,587, representing a 7.5 percent increase in the number of units since 2010, and a 14.3 percent increase since 2000. Most of the

**Population Trends -- 2010 to 2016**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Town Population</b>	<b>Erie County Population</b>
2010	19,974	919,220
2011	20,120	920,088
2012	20,324	920,792
2013	20,469	922,150
2014	20,580	923,702
2015	20,679	922,957
2016	20,976	921,046

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau.*

housing stock within the Town is comprised of single-family detached homes with only 13.3 percent of the structures in the Town consisting of two or more dwelling units. Approximately 96.7 percent of the housing stock was occupied, leaving 282 units (3.3 percent) vacant. Of those occupied units, 6,615 units were owner-occupied while 1,690 were rental units.

The age of the housing stock is mixed, with approximately 77 percent of the homes having been built prior to 1990 and the remaining 22 percent being built between 1990 and 2014 indicating an aging housing stock. Housing values have been on the rise in the past few decades with a median value of \$95,000 in 2000 and increasing to \$181,500 in 2014. Housing construction has slowed from a high of 141 in 2003 and has averaged around 62 a year between 2004 and 2014, though actual annual figures varied between 33 and 111. While the pressure has subsided since





**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

the “boom” years of 2003 and 2004, many new homes are still being added to the tax rolls each year. These homes require public servicing including roads, sewers, and schools. As the Farmland Protection Plan is developed, the important question for the Town is, how much new single-family development can safely and cost-effectively be sustained into the future while balancing the desire to preserve farmland and open space?

**C. Land Use, Zoning and Other Policies and Regulations**

**Land Use (MAP 2)**

Consisting of more than 17,000+ acres of land, the Town of Grand Island contains over 8,900 parcels of various land uses with the most prominent use, in terms of acreage, is residential at 41.4 percent. A general breakdown of the various land use types follows.

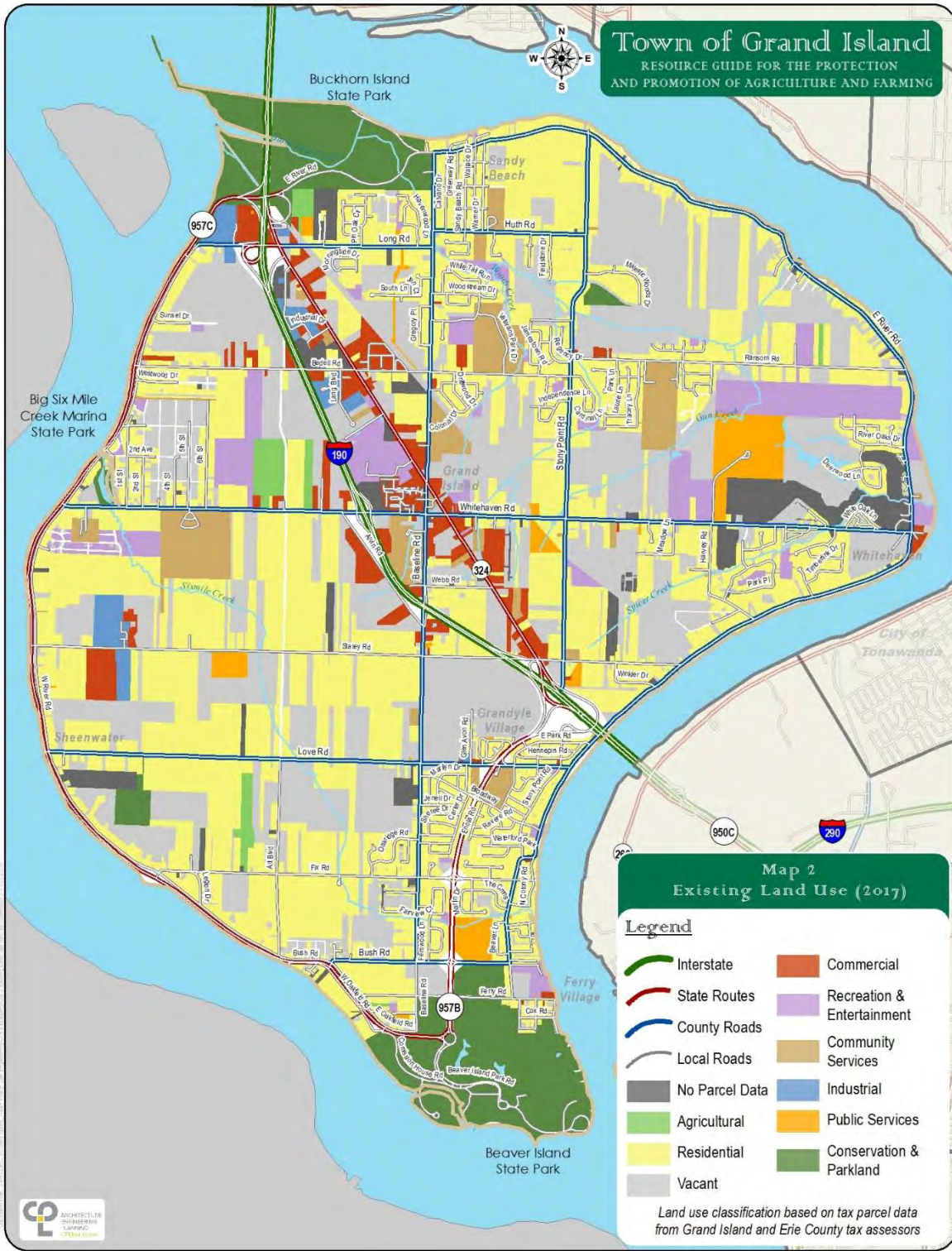
Code	Property Class	No. of Parcels	% Total	Acreage	% Total	Assessed Land Value	% Total	Assessed Total Value	% Total
100	Agricultural	5	0.1%	108.94	0.7%	\$380,400.00	0.1%	\$525,700.00	0.0%
200	Residential	7,073	79.3%	6,805.86	41.4%	\$267,345,391.00	70.4%	\$1,333,230,116.00	81.2%
300	Vacant	1,439	16.1%	5,445.08	33.1%	\$35,444,870.00	9.3%	\$36,238,870.00	2.2%
400	Commercial	172	1.9%	514.64	3.1%	\$15,963,200.00	4.2%	\$106,741,920.00	6.5%
500	Recreation & Entertainment	51	0.6%	576.03	3.5%	\$8,882,300.00	2.3%	\$20,486,900.00	1.2%
600	Community Service	38	0.4%	631.03	3.8%	\$7,475,500.00	2.0%	\$61,192,100.00	3.7%
700	Industrial	21	0.2%	184.75	1.1%	\$3,185,540.00	0.8%	\$30,302,400.00	1.8%
800	Public Services	26	0.3%	316.07	1.9%	\$2,034,600.00	0.5%	\$11,233,664.00	0.7%
900	Forest, Parks & Conservation	7	0.1%	1,403.15	8.5%	\$39,227,600.00	10.3%	\$42,005,500.00	2.6%
0	No Data available	84	0.9%	469.81	2.9%	\$0.00	0.0%	\$0.00	0.0%
TOTAL		8,916	100.0%	16,455.36	100.0%	\$379,939,401.00	100.0%	\$1,641,957,170.00	100.0%

*Residential* use in the Town consists of a variety of styles and patterns including larger lot rural frontage homes, suburban subdivisions, mixed-used neighborhoods, and several unincorporated hamlets. The various hamlets on the island can find roots in the early commercial trade of agricultural goods which was driven by water transportation. The oldest hamlets on the island are Whitehaven Settlement and Ferry Village. From a value standpoint, residential uses are also first in the Town, contributing 81 percent of the overall value of the Island - this indicates that residential property owners are carrying the bulk of the tax burden. Residential



# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

lands in more recent subdivisions, especially those within currently sewered areas to the east and south, as well as the older hamlets consist of smaller lots in half-acre or smaller range, primarily reflecting a suburban development pattern. Lands west of Interstate I-190 are unsewered and are typically larger (3-5+ acres) and deeper.

Following residential lands, *vacant* uses are second at 33.1% percent for total acreage. Typically, vacant lands are areas that lack infrastructure or any type of improvements, including dwellings or structure. However, in some cases these lands are being converted to preservation areas through land stewardship by organizations such as the Western New York Land Conservancy. In other instances, it should be noted that these vacant lands may, in fact, be wooded areas used for timber harvesting or croplands that do not happen to be actively farmed at the time (i.e. fallow lands). Dedicated *forested lands, parks & conservation* round out the top three land uses at 1,403 acres or 8.5 percent, which are anchored by Beaver Island State Park and Buckhorn Island State Park on the north and south ends of the Island.

*Commercial, Industrial, and Public Services* make up the remaining bulk of the land use categories in the Town, totaling approximately 10 percent of the total land area combined. The only noticeable cluster of commercial and industrial uses are found along the Grand Island Boulevard corridor along with a mixing of other uses as well. These uses represent the commercial core of the island for consumer buying in addition to employment opportunities (outside of the schools).

Though smaller by comparison to other uses, *Recreation & Entertainment* uses are important to the Town, especially during the summer months, due to the presence of Martin's Fantasy Island amusement park and the Grand Island KOA campgrounds.

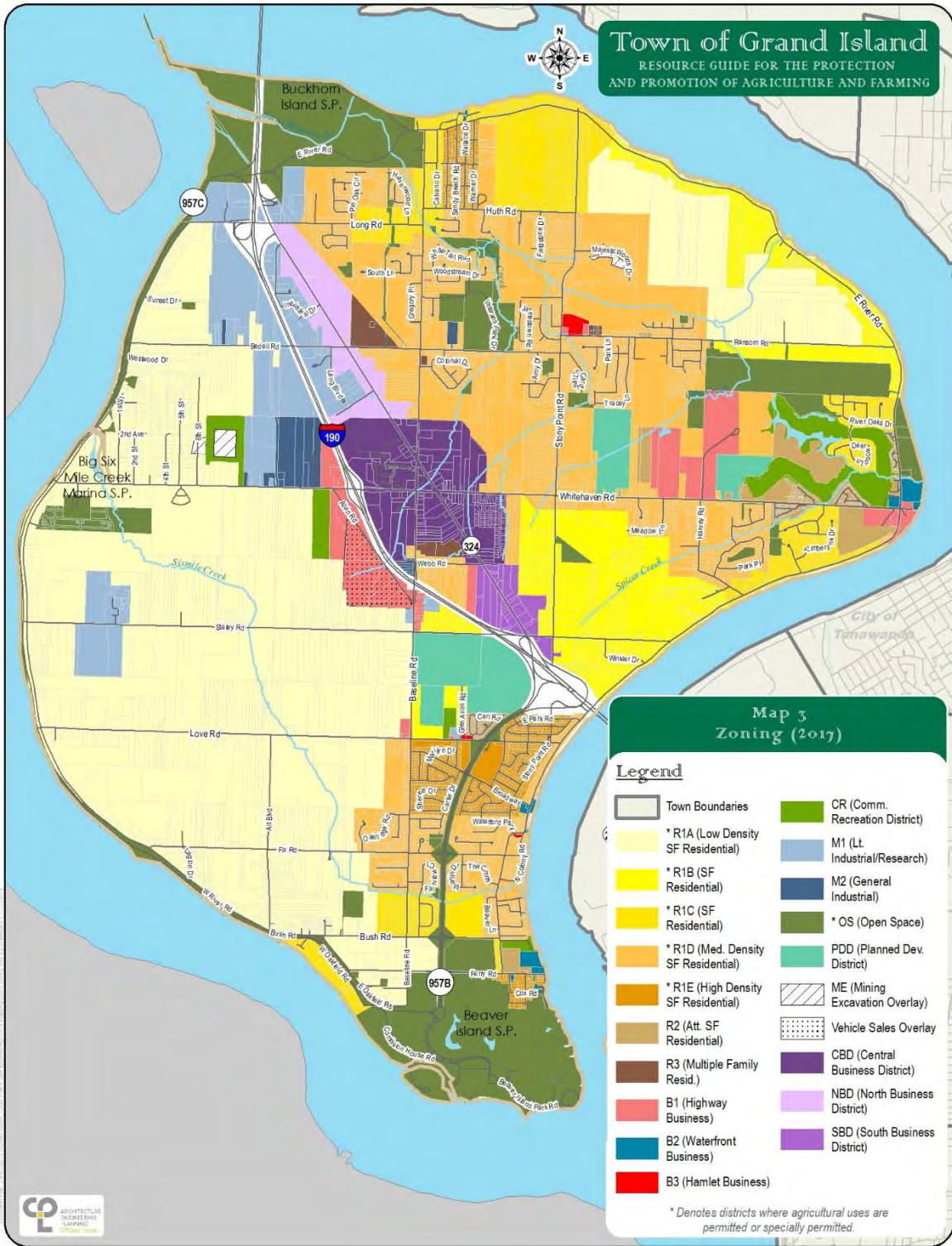
#### **Zoning (MAP 3)**

Zoning in the Town of Grand Island is Euclidean-based and made up of 22 different districts, including three overlay districts. Similar to the land use breakdown, these zoning districts mainly consist of a variety of residential districts followed by open space and a swath of business, commercial, and industrial districts through the interior core. The districts are broken down as the following:



# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming





## **Town of Grand Island**

### **Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

- **Residential**

*Low Density Single Family (R1A), Single Family (R1B), Single Family (R1C), Medium Density Single Family (R1D), High Density Single Family (R1E), Attached/Detached Single Family (R2), Attached/Detached Waterfront Single Family (R2A), Multiple Family (R3)*

In general, development density increases with each progressive district, though the extent of permitted and specially permitted uses generally remains the same - single family detached residential, public uses, and limited home business. R1A district is primarily catered to maintaining the rural character of Grand Island with larger properties and low density. R2 and R2A districts fall in the same category as the previous zones, but at a higher density and a variety of housing. R3 district is the only one that allows mobile homes.

- **Business**

*Town Center Central (CBD), Town Center North (NBD), Town Center South (SBD), General (B1), Waterfront (B2), Hamlet (B3)*

The CBD (*Central Business District*) encompasses what is considered the heart or centralized location of the island with a diverse number of uses and encouraging more pedestrian interaction within the area. Extending to the north and south is the NBD (*Northern Business District*) and the SBD (*Southern Business District*), districts that expand on the uses within the CBD but are more auto-centric in design and intent while still incorporating pedestrian use. The remaining business districts within the island consist of the B1 (*Highway Business*), B2 (*Waterfront Business*), and B3 (*Hamlet Business*). The B2 and B3 districts are small, niche-orientated districts that encourage smaller commercial uses integrated within residential areas and focus on pedestrians while the B1 is catered to businesses appropriate to the Thruway.

- **Industrial**

*Light Industrial and Research (M1), Industrial (M2)*

Both M1 (*Light Industrial and Research*) and M2 (*Industrial*) districts are geared towards clean industry or industries that are more appropriate in proximity to residential uses (i.e., non-polluting or lighter intensity). Commercial uses are allowed within the districts providing that they are supportive and/or contribute to a primary industry enterprise. Little differences exist between the two districts with the exception being that the M2 district





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

allows contractor yards and adult uses; residential uses are not permitted in either M1 or M2.

- ***Recreation and Open Space***

*Commercial Recreational Facilities (CR), Open Space (OS)*

CR (*Commercial Recreational Facilities*) Districts cater to businesses with large swaths of developed land on the island, including amusement parks, golf courses, campgrounds, etc. The OS (*Open Space*) Districts delineate areas of the Town that have severely limited traditional development opportunities due to environmental features and/or are designated as public parklands. Non-livestock agriculture is permitted with these districts barring any environmental restrictions.

- ***Overlay and Special Districts***

*Enhanced Environment (EEO), Mining/Excavation (M/E), Planned Development (PDD), Vehicle Sales (VSO)*

Overlay districts add another level of regulation to underlying districts, typical in terms of specific design standards or additional regulations pertaining to a specific use or set of uses. The EEO (Enhanced Environment Overlay) District adds additional protection to the Town's six designated ecosystems. Disturbances to these resources require additional levels of review at the Town level to ensure minimal impact and appropriate mitigation measures to offset any adverse impacts. MEO (Mining/Excavation Overlay) is a floating district, to be used where a mining/excavation venture is proposed by an applicant, giving the Planning Board the ability to minimize potential adverse impacts. The VSO District (Vehicle Sales Overlay) helps define, regulate, retain, standardize, and expand the appearance and general site characteristics for distributors of motor vehicles, large equipment (agriculture & construction), and/or similar merchandise. PDD (Property-Driven Development/Design Overlay) District allows the Town to amend the current zoning code for development that meets minimum acreage standards and that is developed in accordance with a specific master plan for the property.



# ***Town of Grand Island***

## ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

### **Town Land Use Planning Documents**

- ***Town of Grand Island Comprehensive Plan – Bridging the Gap***

The Town updated their Comprehensive Plan in 2018 which emphasized greater investment and planning for the town center and existing neighborhoods/hamlets, as well as environmental conservation, including agriculture. Though agriculture is not as significant of a use within the Town as it is for other rural communities such as North Collins, Eden, or Newstead, it was an important component to the founding and historical development of the Town and still exists to this day. The vision statement for the community notes the natural assets of the Island, which includes agricultural lands and resources, and indicates a desired balance between development and the natural environment. Several goals and recommendations for agriculture are included in the plan:

- Encourage agricultural ventures in appropriate areas of the Town, to conserve rural landscapes and support local agricultural business opportunities. Promote practices that balance farm productivity with green space protection and sustainability. (#14, Natural Resources goal)
- Encourage the development of a local Farmland Protection Plan to support agricultural businesses and farms on Grand Island (#16, Natural Resources goal)
- Encourage agricultural pursuits within the Town to continue to build up existing local farms and support new economic opportunities (#10, Economic Development goal)

Though not specifically catered to agriculture, many of the goals in the Natural Resources section relate to protection of resources that can, in turn, encourage preservation of lands that could be used for future agricultural production. The future land use plan also supports agriculture by highlighting areas for rural uses that include continued and expanded farming where lands are suitable and development pressure is lower. Recommendations related to agriculture include:

- Development of a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI)
- Use of the NRI to update the Comprehensive Plan or create a dedicated Open Space Plan that includes conservation and open space tasks such as zoning and other land use regulations



## **Town of Grand Island**

### **Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

- Preparation of educational information on conservation easements, property acquisition, deed restrictions, and other avenues for land conservation
  - Where farming is encouraged, ensure zoning regulations allow for the greatest flexibility in agricultural operations in conjunctions with NYS Dept. of Agriculture and Markets guidelines
  - Develop a Farmland Protection Plan to guide farmers and provide direction for an agricultural economy on the Island
- **Land Subdivision Regulations**

Chapter 327 of the Town Code authorizes the Town to review properties for land subdivision through the Planning Board and recommend action by the Town Board for approval. Lands shall be subdivided in such a manner to be used safely for building purposes without danger to health or peril from fire, flood, or other hazards. Provisions are to be made for drainage, water supply, septic/sewerage, roadways, and other required land improvements. All lots are to be laid out and sized to conform to Town requirements in harmony with existing and desired development patterns. Subdivisions of a certain size and extent should also include provisions for parks and recreation, depending on whether they are considered minor or major divisions.

- **Right to Farm**

Chapter 145 outlines the “Right to Farm” within the Grand Island community, specifically noting:

*The Board recognizes that farming is an essential enterprise an important industry which enhances the economic base, natural environment and quality of life in Grand Island. Therefore, the Town Board of Grand Island finds and declares that this Town encourages its agriculture and urges understanding of and cooperation with the necessary day to day operations involved in farming.*

*It is the general purpose and intent of this law to maintain and preserve the rural traditions and character of the town, to permit the continuation of agricultural practices, to protect the existence and operation of farms, and to promote new ways to resolve disputes concerning agricultural practices and farm operations. In order to maintain a viable farming economy in Grand Island it is necessary to limit the circumstances under which farming may be deemed*



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

*to be a nuisance and allow agricultural practices inherent to and necessary for the business of farming to proceed and be undertaken free of unreasonable and unwarranted interference or restriction.*

This law provides the following protection for agricultural practices:

- Outlines that the intent of the Town is to preserve, protect and encourage the development of agricultural land and industries for the production of food and other agricultural products;
- Requires residents of property on or near agricultural uses or zoning districts are aware of and accept certain inconveniences or discomfort from normal and necessary farming operations;
- Protects agricultural or farming operations, establishments, facilities or any other supporting uses from being alleged a nuisance due to odors, noise, dust, use of chemicals or water pollution from livestock or crop production activities unless such actions are found to have a substantial adverse effect on public health and safety
- Prohibits any person, without the consent of the owners or occupants, to enter upon lands where any field crops, vegetables, fruits, flowers or plants are cultivated with intent to take, suffer, injure or destroy anything growing there; or to directly or indirectly permit any act or thing that would remove or impede, interfere with or injure the growth of any such field crops, vegetables, fruits, flowers or plants after maturity;
- Provides the right and establishes policy for Town residents to conduct farming activities on lands owned by the Town that have been identified for such use;
- Requires that the approval of preliminary and final subdivision plats for project located within 500 feet of an agricultural zone shall be conditioned upon the recording of a Grand Island Right-To-Farm Notice that indicates the Town's policy to preserve, protect and encourage agricultural land uses and industries and need for residents to accept normal and necessary farm practices;
- Requires that a real estate disclosure notice, pursuant to the Agricultural Districts Law, be attached to the purchase and sale contract at the time an offer for the purchase of property is made, or shall be provided prior to the sale or exchange of real property if no purchase and sale agreement exists, or prior to the acquisition of a leasehold interest or other interest in real property located in the Town; and



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

- Establishes a policy for handling grievances that may arise between farm and non-farm property owners.

**D. Natural Resources (MAP 4)**

The Town's natural resources comprise a rather large part of the appeal of the island, featuring various natural assets, including but not limited to, waterbodies, forests, wetlands, floodplains, and state parks. These various resources have played important roles in the development of the Town from shaping the way people interact with the island to its development patterns and potential.

**Topography**

The Town is relatively flat in comparison to other areas in the immediate vicinity which are influenced by the Niagara Escarpment and the steep cliffs or rock outcroppings that are prominent. The high point of the island is near the center with some depressions scattered throughout and slight sloping near riverbanks.

**Forest and Vegetation**

Larger forested areas are found in the southwestern and northeastern portions of the Town, consisting of older growth woodlands with less mature understory vegetation and ground cover that is usually left undisturbed. Generally, both State Parks contain these conditions, with larger areas of mature woodland juxtaposed against manicured lawn and landscaped area that provides areas for interaction for visitors within the overall natural setting. Cleared open spaces are limited and scrub-shrub vegetative conditions exist in most non-forested locations.

**Water Resources**

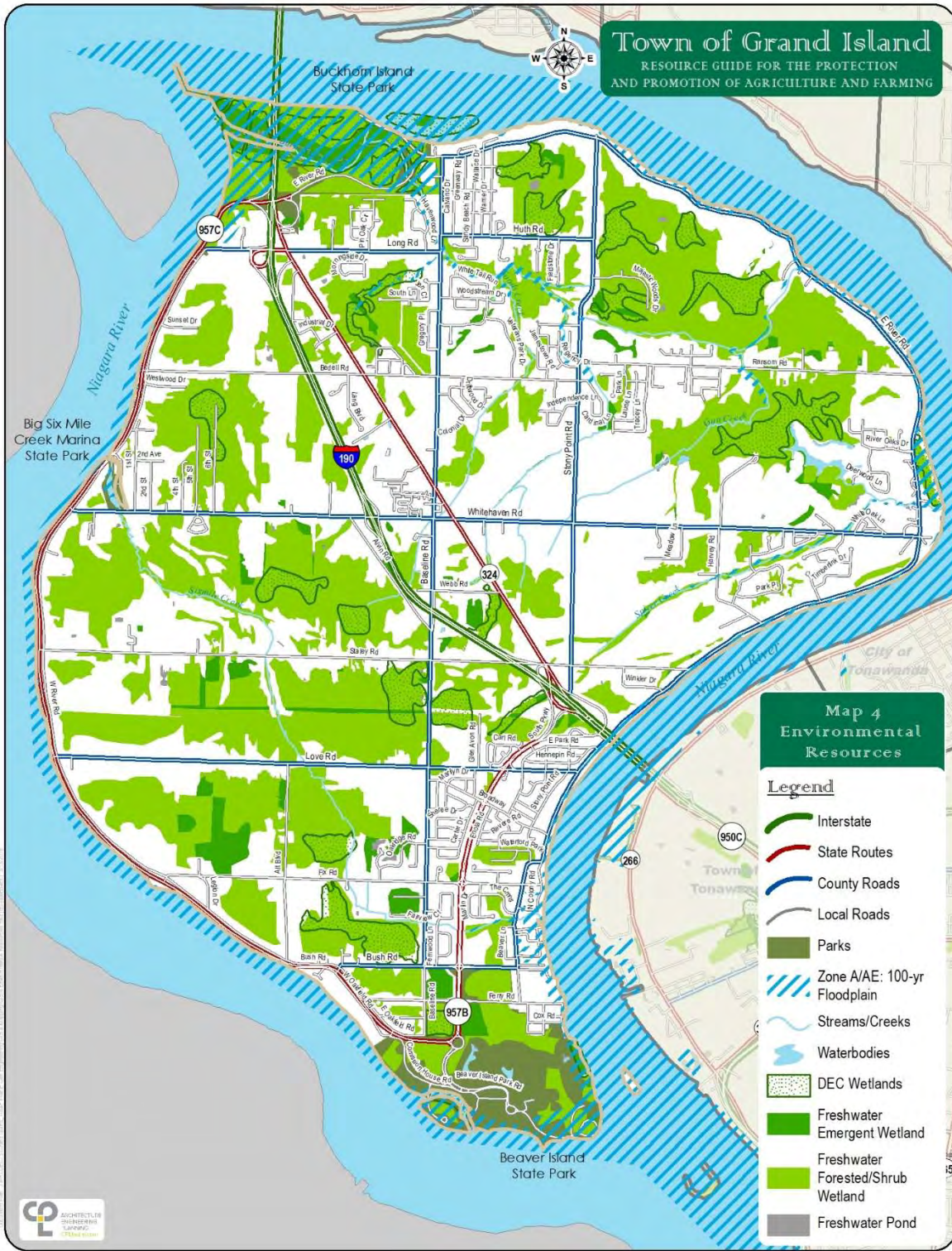
Being an island and surrounded by water, the Town enjoys a wealth of water resources and opportunities available to it from active recreational use to ecotourism and more. The Niagara River surrounds the Town and several creeks are found within including Woods Creek, Gun Creek, Six-mile Creek, Spicer Creek, and Burnt Ship Creek, among other smaller tributaries. Adjacent to many of these waterbodies are wetlands which provide valuable habitat for various plant and animal life as well as acting as a "natural filter" for pollutants and sediment prior to reaching the water. Federal and State wetlands are scattered throughout the Town with the only areas truly absent of these found in the vicinity of Whitehaven and Stony Point Road in the





# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

center of Town. Wetlands are typically categorized by hydric soils which do not drain well and generally consist of saturated soil, ponding, and, in some instances, higher flooding potential. However, these soils are also high in nutrients and conducive to a variety of agricultural pursuits as well. Regulated floodplains are primarily found along the Niagara River and a portion of Buckhorn Island State Park to the north, but do not come very far inland.

#### **E. Infrastructure Services (MAP 5)**

##### **Transportation Network**

Prior to 1935, transportation options to and from the island were limited, with access to Grand Island via Ferry boat. Construction of the north and south bridges started in 1933; with a dedication of the bridges in 1935. The second south bridge was completed in 1962 and the second north bridge opened in 1965.

Interstate 190 extends through the center of the Town, connecting it to the mainland - Buffalo/Tonawanda to the south and Niagara/Niagara Falls to the north – with three exits off the highway providing access into the Town. Grand Island Boulevard, which runs parallel less than half a mile to the east of the Thruway, is considered the “main street” of Grand Island. The remainder of the street network is built on a traditional grid system with occasional curvilinear, suburban-style roads in some of the more recent subdivisions. The Town maintains a total of 76 miles of roadway, while the County maintains approximately 33 miles. East River Road and West River Parkway provide an external loop road around the perimeter of the Island. In April 2018, the West River Parkway was converted from a road to a dedicated, multi-use bike/pedestrian trail connecting the northern and southern Island parks and the regional Niagara River Greenway Trail system.

##### **Local Gas/Electric Utilities**

The Island is serviced by public utilities including natural gas and electric. Transmission corridors for each of these utilities traverse the Town, connecting on one side of the island both at Erie and Niagara County. On the other side of the Island an international connection is made with the Canadian province of Ontario for natural gas transmission.

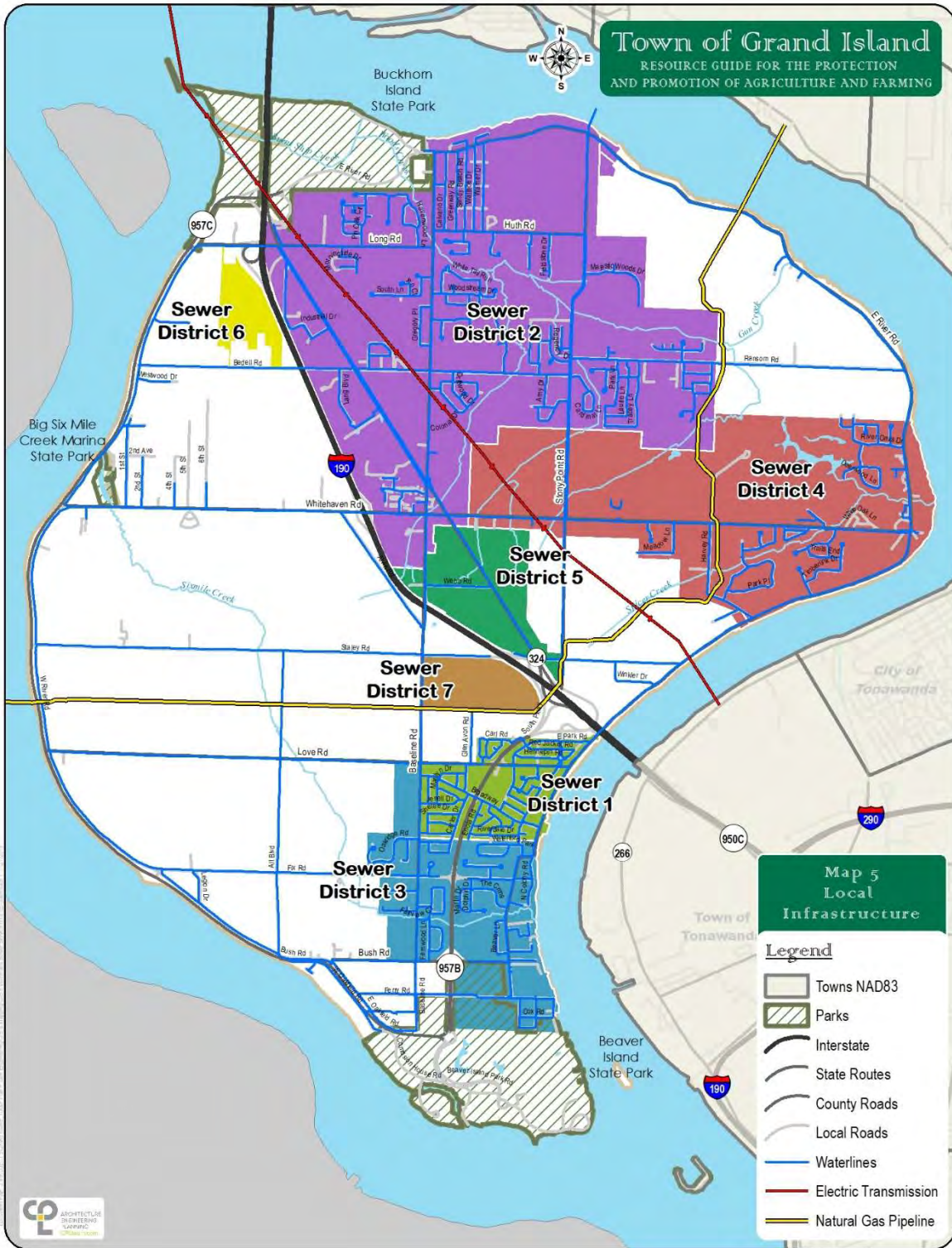
Section 407-165.1 of the Zoning Code allow for the development of solar energy facilities. Major solar energy facilities (those that can transfer and sell electricity to the public grid, as well as for





# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

on-site use) are permitted in the R-1A district with a minimum lot size of 25 acres. These facilities are also permitted in the R-1B, C and D districts with a minimum lot size of 15 acres. Agricultural uses are permitted in these zoning districts.

#### **Public Water Supply**

The Town operates an independent water treatment facility with the intake on the Island located roughly 400 feet off the West Oakfield shoreline in the west branch of the Niagara River and additional water from the Niagara County Water District. The water department serves the Town through over 150 miles of pipeline that includes over 7,350 service connections. Approximately 850 MG (million gallons) are provided to residents and businesses each year.

#### **Wastewater Management**

In terms of wastewater treatment, however, services are not provided to the entire Town. The existing treatment facility, located in the southeast corner of Buckhorn State Park, has a capacity of 3.5 MGD (million gallons per day) with a modern system that includes advanced secondary treatment and disinfection. Effluent is then discharged into the Niagara River through an outfall approximately 1,500 feet north of the Park. Sewer districts are primarily located on the east side of the Island, bounded by Interstate 190; only a smaller portion of the east end of Ransom Road to the northeast and the east end of Staley Road are not within existing districts. Additional sewer districts are located in and around Ferry Village and Grandyle Village to the south. The remaining portions of the Island west of I-190 between Bedell Road and Bush Road (except for the “village” neighborhoods noted above) are serviced by private septic systems.







***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**SECTION IV – AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND RESOURCES**

Within the Town of Grand Island, like many other suburban communities, residential uses are predominant, comprising approximately 40 percent of the total land area with vacant lands making up the second highest at 33 percent – agriculture only accounts for a mere less than one percent (around 109 acres). Commercial and industrial uses are found along the Grand Island Boulevard corridor as well as in some of the hamlets along the edges; residential uses ranges from smaller village-sized lots to large lot frontage properties, with the latter attributed to areas where public sewer is not available.

By the numbers, agriculture does not comprise a significant amount in the Town, though this does not tell the full story of farming enterprises on Grand Island. Like many other semi-rural communities, a lot of the vacant land is used for agriculture (field operations), though classified as vacant, forested areas serve double duty as timber harvesting operations, and larger residential properties rent out lands to local farmers for field crops. Taking these elements into account, farming operations in the Town account for over 1,116 acres of land or almost 7 percent of the total land area. These farms range in size and intensity from beehives and micro-greens to greenhouses and field crops to wineries. Agriculture on Grand Island is not as prominent as it once was, but it continues to remain an important enterprise within the Town and is continuing to experience a resurgence with a variety of businesses and operations popping up.

The Town is within USDA hardiness zone 6A, with an average growing season of about 140 days in the season (early May through early October) and an average precipitation level of approximately 38.5 inches. The growing season can be extended using high tunnels and greenhouses.

**A. Agricultural Soils (MAP 6)**

Grand Island is unique in that it is an island community bounded by the east and west branches of the Niagara River and situated between Erie County to the south and east, Niagara County to the north, and Canada to the west. The Town is relatively flat with drainage flowing into the many creeks and streams that all empty into the Niagara River. Most of the soils on the Town consist of Odessa silt loam (32 percent), Odessa-Lakemont complex (23 percent), and Schoharie silt loam (14 percent), followed by a variety of other soils making up five percent or less of each. Odessa series soils (including Lakemont complex) are somewhat poorly drained and found throughout the Town, notably in areas where hydric soils (i.e. wetlands) are present, while the Schoharie series are well to



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

moderately well drained. Though these soils have a higher clay content, they remain somewhat friable with silty loam within the 0 to 13-inch range of soil depth.

#### Prime Farmland

Prime farmland, as defined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), consists of *“land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is also available for these uses. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce economically sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods, including water management. In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding.”* Approximately 3,017 acres of land in the Town (11 percent) are considered prime farm soils. These soils are mostly found around the existing creeks and drainage areas surrounding them in the north-central portion of the Town as well as in the southeast, though this is not necessarily where most farming activities occur. As noted above with the type of soils found on the island and their poor draining characteristics, it is not surprising that there is a larger component of soils that would be considered prime if drained – over 12,330 acres or 45 percent of the Town. This mirrors what local farmers and homeowners note about ground conditions and the need for improving and maintaining drainage both from an agricultural perspective as well as general property maintenance.

#### Soils of Statewide Importance

In addition to prime farm soils, around 1,730 acres of land is classified as “soils of statewide importance,” generally considered to be nearly prime farmland quality that economically produce high yields of crops when managed in accordance with acceptable farming practices. Although important to agricultural activity in the State, these soils exhibit certain characteristics, such as seasonal wetness or erodibility, and do not meet all the criteria to qualify as prime farm soils. These soils are found in the northeastern portion of the Town.

## **B. Agricultural Districts (MAP 7)**

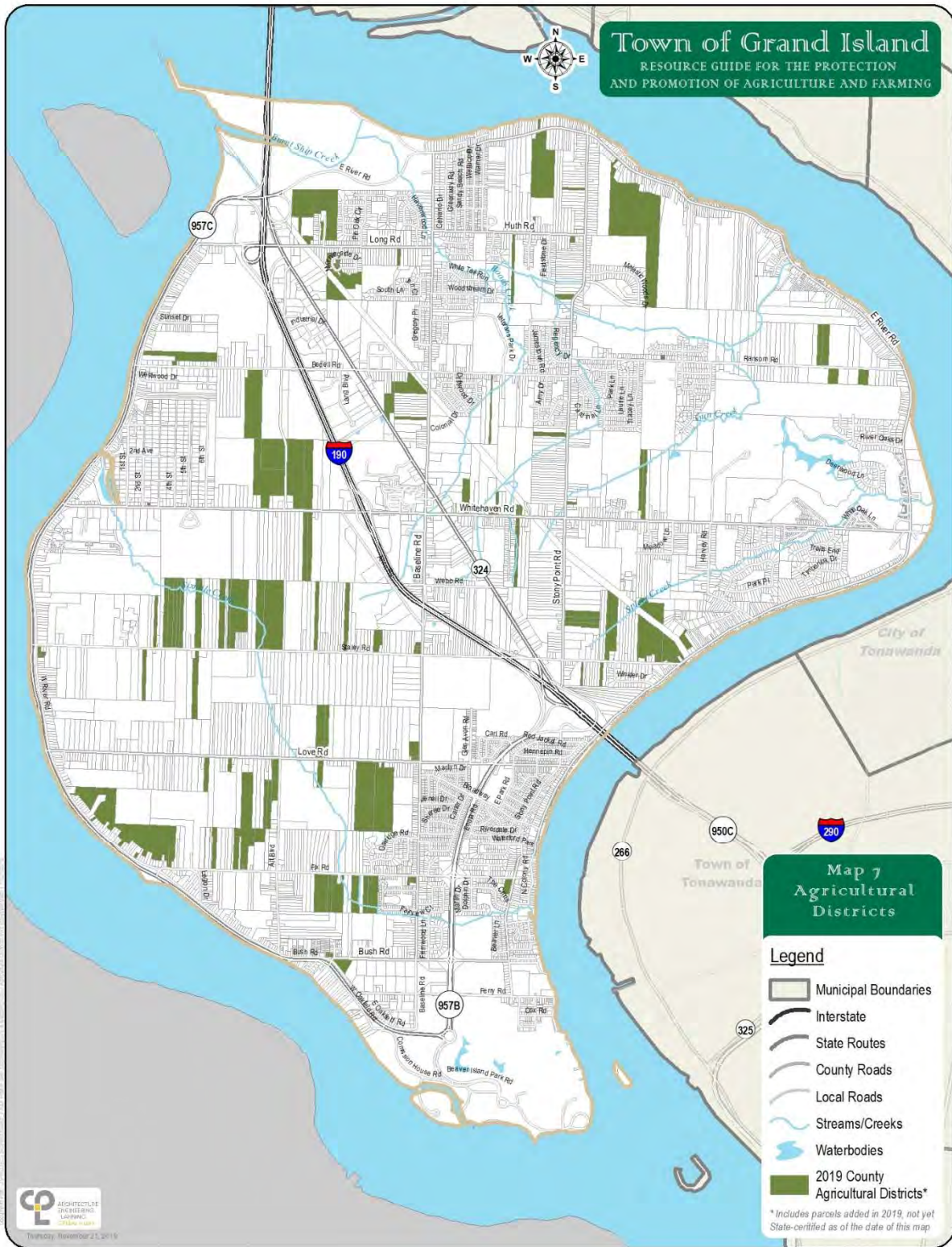
Since agriculture is not a predominant land use in the Town, the extent of the Agricultural Districts on Grand Island is small as of the publication of this guide – 91 parcels, encompassing 1,307.3 acres of land, are within Erie County Agricultural District No. 17 (Amherst). These parcels are scattered





# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

throughout the Town, but primarily found in the western portion (west of Interstate 190). New York State Agricultural Districts Law mandates that governmental agencies must avoid or minimize potential adverse impacts to farming operations when undertaking or acting upon any project within an Agricultural District that involves the acquisition of land or the use of public funds for construction purposes.

The benefits of being in a County Agricultural District include:

- Local laws may not unreasonable restrict farm operations within the District and existing and proposed laws are subject to review by the State Department of Agriculture and Markets to ensure that they comply with the law and are not overly restrictive;
- Real estate agents are required to disclose to potential buyers that the property they are about to acquire is located in an Agricultural District or within 500 feet of any farm operation and/or farmland; and
- any application for development of lands located within an Agricultural District, or land located within 500 feet of any farm operation and/or farmland must submit an agricultural data statement to the Town as a part of the land development application.

#### Agricultural Data Statement

Pursuant to Section 283-a.2. of Article 16 of NYS Town Law, any application for a special use permit, site plan approval, a use variance, or approval for subdivision of land that requires review and approval by the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals or Town Board, which involves an action that would occur on property that is located within an agricultural district and contains a farm operation, or on property situated within five hundred feet of a farm operation that is located in an agricultural district, shall include the preparation of an Agricultural Data Statement as part of the application. The information required by an agricultural data statement may also be included as part of any other application required by local law, ordinance or regulation.

The Town Clerk or other representative for the Board reviewing the application request must mail a notice to all owners of land as identified in the Agricultural Data Statement (Appendix D). This notice shall include a description of the proposed project and its location and may be sent in conjunction with any other notice required by state or local law, ordinance, rule or regulation for the project. The cost of this mailing can be borne by the applicant. In addition, the Town must refer all applications that require an agricultural data statement to the Erie County Department of Planning and Development, as required under Section 239-m (for site plan review) of the NYS General Municipal Law.





***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

The local reviewing board must evaluate and consider the Agricultural Data Statement as a part of its overall review of the proposed action to determine the potential impacts that the action may have on the farm operations. This board should also determine present and future farming conditions to ensure the proposed land use does not conflict with current or future farming activities on the land. A farmer's knowledge of local agricultural conditions is fundamental for the local review board's evaluation and determination of appropriate mitigation measures and whether the action proposed could conflict with ongoing and future farming practices.

**C. Farm Operations, Farm Statistics and Economic Contributions of Farming (MAP 8)**

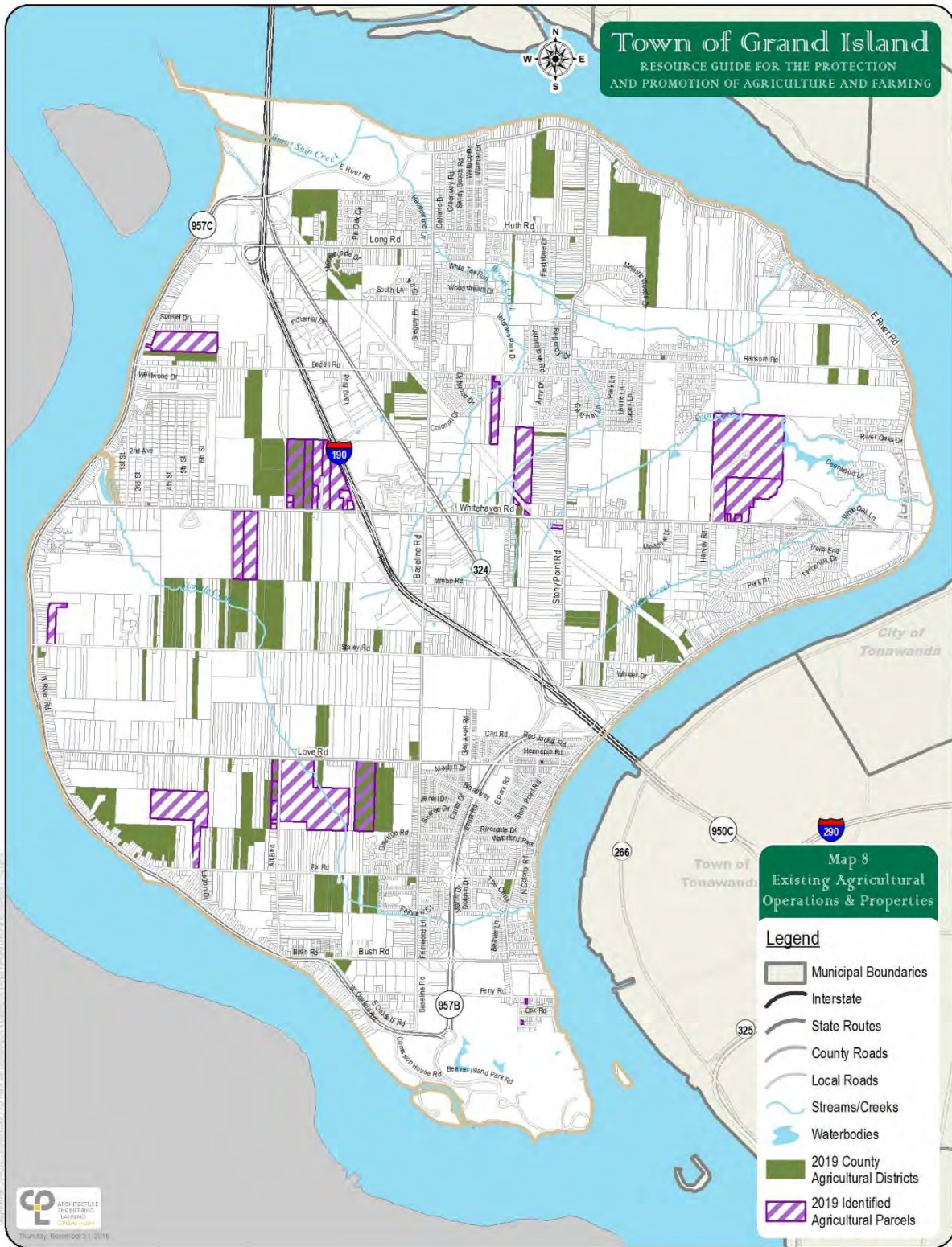
Real property data available from Erie County, in conjunction with the Town of Grand Island Assessor's office, indicates that there are some properties that are classified as agricultural, with a few dedicated to field crops and others operating as horse farms and nurseries. Additional parcels are classified as residential with leased land for field crops. However, the real property agricultural land data only shows a small part of the true picture of agriculture in the community, as noted in the Introduction. During the development of this *Resource Guide*, the farming community on Grand Island identified numerous parcels being used for agricultural activity, although not all these properties were noted to be located within the County Agricultural District (see Map 8). Comments offered from the public and local stakeholders indicate that there are numerous properties being used for agriculture, at various sizes and scales, although their locations were not identified. Based on public input and discussions with local farmers and the Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, the following agricultural activities or crops being raised were identified on Grand Island:

- Hardwood forest/timber harvesting
- Field crops (hay, buckwheat, wheat, straw, feed/sweet corn)
- Grapes and Vineyard/Winery
- Horse stable/boarding
- Livestock (beef, pigs, goats, sheep/lambs)
- Alpacas/sheep (fiber)
- Fruit trees/produce (apples, pears, berries, grapes, other)
- Poultry (chickens, ducks and turkey – meat and eggs)
- Perennials/flowers



# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Herbs/garlic
- Vegetable crops and Pumpkins/small-scale produce
- Greenhouses/nursery
- Hemp
- Apiary/Beehives
- Microgreens/mushrooms
- Rabbits
- Maple syrup
- Firewood and Christmas tree sales
- Hydroponics

#### Overview of Grand Island Agricultural Sector

The US Census of Agriculture conducts an agricultural survey every five (5) years that, much like the centennial US Census, collects data on agricultural operations (farms and ranches) throughout the United States, down to the zip code level. By comparison, larger communities with a more robust agricultural sector will have a greater depth of information than Grand Island, but a review of the local zip code (14072) does yield some statistical data on local operations. As more farming operations come to fruition, more data will become available as farmers take part in the survey. The most recent survey data, which is gathered at the zip code level, was collected as part of the 2007 Census of Agriculture (more recent data from the 2012 Census of Agriculture was only level only).

As of 2007, there were a total of eight (8) farm operations within the Town of Grand Island, four (4) in the one to 49-acre range and four (4) in the 50 to 499-acre range. Of these operations:

- Two (2) are cattle operations and sales
- One (1) is equine, horses, and ponies
- Two (2) include berry crops
- One (1) includes cut Christmas trees and short-term woody crops
- Five (5) include field crops, including hay and haylage
- One (1) notes grain storage capacity, on farm
- One (1) includes grain operations with sales

It is worth noting that multiple operations may be contained on a single farm as diversification of operations is one of the more economically important business practices that farmers today can and



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

should undertake. As noted in earlier sections of this guide, there are several farming operations that exist in the Town of Grand Island ranging in size from a half-acre up to over 50 acres, cultivating and managing a variety of agricultural goods (animal and crop). Not all the local farmers take part in the US Census of Agriculture, so the data above, while useful for larger, more commercial operations, does not provide the full snapshot of agriculture in the Town.

#### **D. Agricultural Markets and Support Businesses**

Unlike other communities with a more prominent agricultural presence or capacity, the Town of Grand Island has few existing agricultural markets available. Through the work of Grand Island Farms, Inc., a farmer's market is currently available and being expanded upon at the newly opened Western New York Welcome Center on Whitehaven Road. Other markets noted by local farmers, including existing or potential, include on-farm or at-home sales direct to consumers, restaurants and stores, throughout New York, Canada, and New Jersey.

##### Support Services

There are few support businesses available to local farmers directly on Grand Island for equipment, supplies/materials, and repairs – most facilities are found outside of Buffalo (southtowns and further west) as well as parts of Niagara County. The following support businesses that were commonly used by local farmers are noted below:

- George DeGlopper (Grand Island farmer) – hay & straw (feed and bedding)
- Birkett Mills (Penn Yan) - seed
- W.H. Reinhardt, Inc. (Middleport) – seed & feed
- Turnkey Equipment Sales
- Harrie's Plants, Fairview Nurseries and Ball Plants
- Tractor Supply (Niagara Falls, Lockport, Alden, Hamburg)
- John Deere dealer (Springville)
- Gramco (Springville) – seed & feed
- International Harvester (IH) dealer/Lamb & Webster, Inc. (Springville)
- Ford dealer
- BFG



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

Other businesses noted in the region that may not be known or utilized by Grand Island farmers include Agway (Wrights Corners, Lockport), Niagara Frontier Equipment Sales (Wrights Corners, Lockport), Niagara Implement, Inc. (Newfane).

In addition to equipment and material support, various agencies are available within the region that provide assistance to local farming interests including, but not limited to:

- Erie County Farm Bureau - The Farm Bureau is a membership organization that offers a number of benefits to members, including insurance and banking, automotive, business and family and health, among other things. The Farm Bureau also monitors state and national legislative priorities and provides information of this nature to members in support of agricultural protection and prosperity. Visit their website at [www.ecfarm.com](http://www.ecfarm.com).
- USDA Farm Service Agency – The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides assistance and support to farmers through five key mission areas: programs, loans, commodity operations, management, and State operations. The predominant programs and services revolve around commodity protection and conservation, the latter through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). FSA programs are funded through the Federal Farm Bill and subject to reauthorization every five years or so. Each State has its own office and individual contacts within each County. Visit their website at [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).
- Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District – The County Soil and Water Conservation District (ECSWCD) is a local government organization that focuses on programs for the conservation of soil, water, and related resources in conjunction with other State and Federal agencies. More specifically, *“Districts work with landowners, land managers, local government agencies, and other local interests in addressing a broad spectrum of resource concerns: erosion control, flood prevention, water conservation and use, wetlands, ground water, water quality and quantity, nonpoint source pollution, forestland protection, wildlife, recreation, waste water management and community development.”* The Erie County SWCD works with local farmers on establishing Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) plans, streambank stabilization, environmental education, agricultural assessment, and agricultural conservation assistance, among other programs. At a much larger scale, the SWCD can work with municipalities on watershed planning and other conservation assistance. Visit their website at [www.ecswcd.org](http://www.ecswcd.org).



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension – Using the knowledge network and strength of Cornell University, the Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension provides programming and education for existing and new farmers including business development, marketing, farming practices, technology, resource protection, and other avenues. Visit their website at [erie.cce.cornell.edu](http://erie.cce.cornell.edu).
- New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets – The primary intent of the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets is to provide State-level regulation and protection of farms within State-certified, County-adopted Agricultural Districts. Local right-to-farm laws are typically derived from and relate to the State’s section 305 regulations. The Department also promotes New York agriculture within the State and throughout the country, and lists a wealth of information on their website (<http://agriculture.ny.gov>).

#### **E. Grand Island Comprehensive Plan (Map 9)**

The Town of Grand Island adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan (“Bridging the Future” Town of Grand Island 2018 Comprehensive Plan Update) in September 2018. This plan includes specific goals and recommendations for farmland and agricultural protection. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that while the local economy may be geared toward recreation and ecotourism, other industries should be encouraged, including but not limited to, local agriculture, light industry and hospitality services. Economic diversity helps encourage year-round activity and provides residents with a variety of needs within the confines of the Island.

The Comprehensive Plan Update includes a Future Land Use Map (Map 9) that illustrates targeted development areas, as well as valuable natural and cultural resources that contribute to the character of the Grand Island community. The Comprehensive Plan Update recognizes that these resources, which include prime and important agricultural lands (previously discussed in Subsection A.), should be preserved, and commercial or residential growth in these areas should be limited in areas designated for rural residential land use.

#### **F. Agricultural Protection Issues on Grand Island**

##### Development Pressure/Conversion

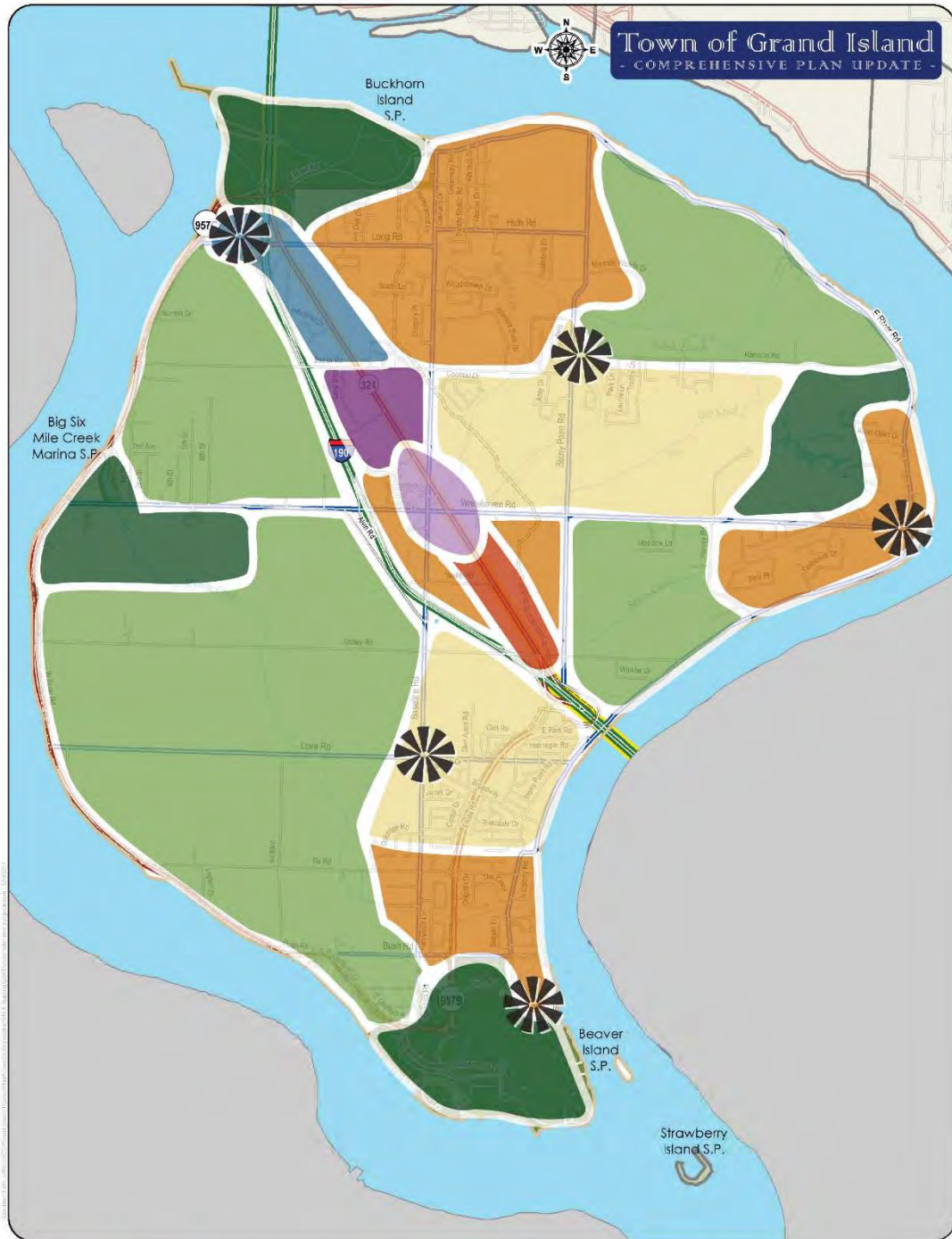
Competition for land is a typical issue that farmers contend with, especially in high demand areas where residential development is on the rise. Projections for the Town of Grand Island continue to show growth over the next decade, albeit not as robust as other Erie County communities such as





# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming



**Map 9**  
Future  
Land Use  
(From 2018  
Comprehensive Plan)

- |                            |                           |                              |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Recreation/Conservation    | Town Center               | Neighborhood Commercial Node |
| Rural Residential          | Commercial Corridor       |                              |
| Medium-Density Residential | Entertainment/Hospitality |                              |
| Hamlet Residential         | Industrial                |                              |



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

Amherst, Elma, or Lancaster, but development pressure and conversion of land is always an aspect at the forefront. In the American Farmland Trust report *Farms Under Threat: The State of America's Farmland* (2018), research notes that “between 1992 and 2012, almost 31 million acres of agricultural land were irreversibly lost to development. That is nearly double the amount of conversion previously documented and is equivalent to losing most of Iowa or New York. As alarming, this loss included almost 11 million acres of the best land for intensive food and crop production.”

The landscape of New York itself has constantly been changing just as well. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, New York State lost the equivalent of 9,000 acres of farmland a year between 2002 and 2010 – the equivalent of one farm every three days. Typically, development pressure is found on lands that are on the border of areas that have public sewer and water available, though in New York lateral restrictions in Agricultural Districts can put limits on development without oversight and review by a local and/or County agricultural board.

In the case of Grand Island, several farms have been developed or exist within public sewer districts, notably in the northeastern portion and just west of Interstate 190. Having active farming operations *in proximity* to sewer districts makes land more attractive to development – lands *within* sewer districts would likely experience even greater potential and pressure for conversion as development density can be increased. Developed lands further west of Interstate 190 are still on private septic systems and are not experiencing development pressure in the same capacity, though other natural constraints exist that impact land farming operations, including drainage.

#### Agriculture and Ecology

It is important to accentuate the relationship that agriculture has with the natural environment. The basic tenet is that farming and agriculture should be undertaken in a manner that demonstrates environmental stewardship. This is important in order to strengthen the commitment and relationship between agriculture interests and ecology on Grand Island as farming activities continue to grow and prosper. Farmers and agricultural interests own a considerable amount of land in the community and in that capacity, they influence the natural environment, whether through maintaining woodlots, planting perimeter shrubs to provide food, cover and nesting sites for wildlife, or managing surface water runoff to protect water quality and reduce sedimentation of creeks and streams that are tributary to the Niagara River. Integrating the relationship between agriculture and the environment into this Resource Guide allows for the application of expertise for better land use and water management and expands the scope of future project and implementation possibilities.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

Water quality concerns related to livestock feed lot management should also be mentioned. The concentration of large groups of livestock in small penned areas resulted in concentrations of animal waste. The nutrient laden waste is easily mobilized in stormwater runoff that finds its way into creeks and streams and ultimately, the Niagara River. This issue should be addressed through coordination with the various agencies that are available to assist farmers, as well as through the implementation of best management practices that address point and nonpoint source pollutions and water quality.

#### Drainage

Another critical local issue in Grand Island is inadequate drainage as a result of extensive wetlands, poorly functioning/maintained ditches, and overall soil conditions. As noted in Section III, most of the soils on Grand Island are classified as prime farmland *if drained* and although they may have higher organic matter that is beneficial for cultivation, poor drainage makes them unsuitable for growing all but water-loving crops, such as rice or cranberries. While drainage ditches were created and creeks utilized for moving stormwater from upland areas, maintenance of these ditches has not been sufficient or as consistent as in the past. Historically, local farmers would clear obstructions in creeks and ditches and the Town would budget for cleanup; however, with the increase in State and Federal regulations pertaining to waterbody and streambank disturbance, as well as budgetary constraints, this practice has all but ceased. As a result, sedimentation has increased along with wetland growth, creating more obstructions to natural water flow and flooding of upland areas.

Local farmers and property owners have noted that localized flooding around ditches and overall drainage conditions are an on-going and increasing problem in the community. Other aspects that may contribute to drainage issues on the island include the construction of Interstate 190 in the early 1950's, which severed some headwaters, created new wetlands, and/or modified drainage patterns that have contributed to the drainage issues. The increase in development also has resulted in more impervious land and runoff. Other improvements that are being sought to remedy infrastructure issues, such as inflow and infiltration (I&I) and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) at the Town's wastewater treatment facility, may exacerbate surface water drainage and flooding by removing water that previously flowed underground. Flooding and drainage on Grand Island are a comprehensive issue that requires a fuller understanding of patterns and functions for long-term action, but also requires drainage maintenance to make lands, especially agricultural lands, viable for use in the short-term.





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

#### Public Water Use Regulations

Public water is found throughout the Town of Grand Island with water mains found along almost all major roadways except within the State Parks. According to the Town Engineering Department, all water users are billed on the same level – no tiered or high-user rates exist for higher capacity users such as farmers. Each property has a single meter for their water use regardless of the number of buildings or users that meter services. Several issues arise for farmers under this situation.

First, for farmers that have land within a sewer district, sewer rates are based on water usage indicated by meters. Farmers who utilize high volumes of water for livestock/dairy operations or hydroponics, for example, would have higher sewer bills although their actual sanitary sewer use is far lower. Recently, the Town has allowed for net metering in these circumstances, which permits users to install a submeter to track water for non-sewered use, providing some flexibility and relief to farmers. Those who utilize this resource are restricted from installing any bathroom or wastewater facilities that are connected to this submeter. The amount of water usage required, however, is excessive and cost prohibitive, as most farming operations on Grand Island are small. Water use costs on Grand Island are also higher than what is charged in surrounding farm areas.

Chapter 400 of the Town Code regulates public water supply and mains in Grand Island and includes regulations on connections, meters, maintenance, discontinuance, and fire protection. In some instances where equipment or processes or large quantities are used that could create pressure greater than those present in the water distribution system, backflow prevention protection may be required by the Town Engineering Department on a case-by-case basis. For farmers using large quantities of water, this may result in additional design and costs for water equipment to protect the public water system.

#### Local Agricultural Regulations

The Grand Island Town Code contains various local regulations that pertain to agriculture on Grand Island, but these regulations provide limits and restrictions on agricultural operations.

- ***Chapter 145- Farming***

While the Town has established itself as a “Right to Farm” community, the existing Farming Law (Chapter 145) only provides protection and support for “*grown*” agricultural products per the intent and definition; keeping of livestock is excluded from the standard definition and further called out in subsequent sections.





## **Town of Grand Island**

### **Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

§145-1, Legislative intent and purpose - *It is the general purpose and intent of this law to maintain and preserve the rural traditions and character of the town, to permit the continuation of agricultural practices, to protect the existence and operation of farms, and to promote new ways to resolve disputes concerning agricultural practices and farm operations. In order to maintain a viable farming economy in Grand Island it is necessary to limit the circumstances under which farming may be deemed to be a nuisance and allow agricultural practices inherent to and necessary for the business of farming to proceed and be undertaken free of unreasonable and unwarranted interference or restriction.*

§145-2, Definitions - **AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS:** *Those products as defined in § 301(2) of Article 25-AA of the State Agriculture and Markets Law, including but not limited to:*

- A. Field crops, including corn, wheat, rye, barley, hay, potatoes and dry beans.*
- B. Fruits, including apples, peaches, grapes, cherries and berries.*
- C. Vegetables, including tomatoes, snap beans, cabbage, carrots, beets and onions.*
- D. Horticultural specialties, including nursery stock, ornamental shrubs, ornamental trees and flowers.*
- E. Maple sap.*
- F. Christmas trees derived from a managed Christmas tree operation, whether dug for transplanting or cut from the stump.*
- G. Woody biomass, which means short rotation woody crops raised for bioenergy, and shall not include farm woodland.*
- H. Nothing in this section shall be read as authorizing any agricultural activity not permitted by the Town Code.*

NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) uses the term “farm operation” to identify the breadth of agriculture, which includes crop types, livestock, products, equipment, buildings, and other facilities that contribute to operations. When administering Agriculture and Markets Law (AML), the Department compares the local definition of “farm,” “agriculture,” “farmland,” or any other similar term to the State’s definition. If the definition does not encompass the same breadth of activities as the State, the local law may be deemed to be unreasonably restrictive and in violation of AML §305-a(1). By comparison to the Town’s right-to-farm law and definition, the omission of livestock from the listing of agricultural products in §145-2 would be considered unreasonably restrictive to local farm operations.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- ***Chapter 407 – Zoning***

Chapter 407 includes several provisions that apply to farming and agriculture in the Town that are restrictive to farming and not necessarily consistent with, or supportive of, the changing agricultural practices that are occurring in the community. Additionally, land use districts and practices for rural development and open space preservation do not acknowledge farming as a viable means of achieving these objectives. The full text the zoning regulations is provided in Appendix B.

Pursuant to §407-22, agricultural uses are permitted in the R-1A Low-Density Single-Family Residential District, as is the keeping of up to ten (10) agricultural animals by permit. Agricultural uses are also permitted in the Open Space and Enhanced Environmental Overlay Districts. The statement of purpose for the R-1A district indicates that this district delineates areas where rural atmosphere will be maintained, and low-density development can occur. It provides for the development of neighborhoods that consist of primarily single-family housing for larger yards and larger homes; there is no mention of farming or agricultural use in the statement of intent. Commercial riding stables and nurseries (including facilities for the retail or wholesale sales of plants) are allowed in the R-1A district by special use permit. Principal and accessory agricultural uses permitted in the R-1A district are also permitted by right in the R-1B through R-1E zoning districts, with a minimum lot size of five acres.

The purpose of the Open Space (OS) district is to delineate areas where substantial development of buildings and structures is not desired. Principal uses in the OS district include parks, boat docks and other river access facilities; wildlife and nature preserves; and farms and non-livestock operations. While usual farm accessory buildings are permitted in this district, dwellings or building housing farm animals or fowl are not allowed.

The purpose of the Enhanced Environmental Overlay District (EED) is to protect the valuable ecosystems identified in the Town’s land use plans. Farming is allowed in an EED if it is permitted in the underlying zoning district. Where single-family dwellings are proposed, a minimum lot size of 5 acres is required unless substantive land is being set aside for the protection of environmental resources. Here again, no non-residential structures are permitted.

An “Agricultural Use” is defined in §407-10 of the Zoning Code as: *“The commercial cultivation of the soil for food products or other useful or valuable growths of the field, garden or tillage. It includes necessary structures appurtenant to such use. This definition shall not include dairying or raising of livestock, fowl or other animals, which is only allowed pursuant to the rules for*



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

*agricultural animals.*” This definition makes it clear that only the growing of crops is permitted; keeping of animals is addressed under separate provisions (as follows). The definition also does not address other non-traditional farming activities, such as beekeeping or timber harvesting.

Article XXX of the Zoning Code (Supplemental Regulations) includes §407-144, which regulates the keeping of agricultural animals. Agricultural animals are defined in §407-10 as *animals normally found on farms including horses, cattle, poultry, swine, goats, sheep, mules and donkeys, and not including domestic animals such as cats and dogs*. Section 407-144 specifies that up to ten (10) agricultural animals may be kept for “noncommercial” purposes only in the R-1A district and with a Special Use Permit in the R-1B, R-1C and R-1D districts. These special uses permits must be renewed annually, and annual on-site inspections are also required. These requirements apply to all properties in the identified zoning district, regardless of their status as designated agricultural districts.

Special use permits for agricultural animals require an application and payment of a \$150 fee (\$50 renewal). The special use permit process entails a recommendation by the Planning Board to the Town Board within 31 days of application receipt, a public hearing within 31 days of receipt of recommendation to the Town Board, and a final decision within 62 days of the public hearing. Conditions may be imposed to ensure compatibility and findings of the Board are subject to evaluation of specific factors. A special use permit may be issued with an expiration date, subject to Town Board discretion and any other applicable regulations.

Agricultural uses are further regulated in the Zoning Code under §407-145 (Article XXX Supplemental Regulations), which establishes a minimum lot size of three (3) acres and regulates nuisance activities. Section 407-149 regulates commercial riding stables, with a limit of 50 horses that can be boarded at one time. Section 407-167.1 regulates community gardens used to grow seasonal flowers, vegetables, herbs and fruit. These gardens are permitted in any zoning district upon review by the Code Enforcement Office and Town Board approval. No minimum lot area is specified for community gardens, which are considered temporary uses that require a permit, which is valid for one year. The on-site sale of produce is allowed per site plan approval where parking and a location for such sales are adequate.

Additionally, the Zoning Code allows two techniques that are considered useful for agricultural protection and preservation. These include incentive zoning and cluster development. While §407-20 is permitted, the goal of these provisions is to increase access to the Niagara River waterfront and to preserve and expand available open space resources. A density increase of up



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

to 25%, an increase in permitted building height or building setback reductions are allowable in exchange for land dedication or on-site access improvements. Incentive zoning is a useful tool for preserving farmland that should be considered as an option under these regulations.

Similarly, cluster development is a beneficial means of protecting farmland. While §407-123 of Article XXVII recognizes the value of clustering for open space preservation, the use of this technique for farmland preservation should also be acknowledged in the regulations, particularly where farmland is located within a sewer district.

If the Town of Grand Island is committed to agricultural and farmland protection, the existing land use regulations are, in many ways, working against this goal. These regulations must be enforced by the Code Enforcement Office, which is a source of continuing frustration in the farming community. It is evident that while the Town of Grand Island will permit larger farms for crop cultivation or other similar uses, as well as small-scale, hobby-type crop farming activities, there are no provisions in the Town Code that permit the keeping of livestock for traditional farming or hobby farming purposes. Existing farming operations that raise dairy or beef cattle or other livestock, regardless of the number of animals being kept, are non-conforming uses under the law. Furthermore, any resident who keeps poultry in accordance with the provisions of §407-144 is restricted from selling their eggs. Here again, such regulations could be interpreted by NYS DAM as unreasonably restrictive.

Hobby farming (small scale, non-commercial activities) for the keeping of livestock or growing of crops is an increasing trend on Grand Island. The Town, however, has no current process for allowing these activities in residential areas, as the keeping of livestock requires one acre of land per animal or poultry (e.g., one acre per chicken, even with a special use permit). People moving to Grand Island are told that they are eligible to apply for a USDA loan, which is available only in approved agricultural rural zones. This implies that the Town supports agricultural use within these areas.

All of the items outlined above indicate that there is a need to revisit the Town's land use restrictions and regulations to identify opportunities to make Grand Island more farming-friendly, promote agricultural activity, protect the environment, and make it clear that farming does not need to be a "hidden" activity in the community. Without such changes, the future of farming and agriculture, at any scale, will continue to be stymied through unnecessary and unrealistic constraints.







***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**SECTION V – FINDINGS RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES**

**A. Summary of Issues Relating to Farming, Farmland and Agricultural Protection**

Farming in the Town of Grand Island has been practiced since the early settlement of the community. Today, farming continues as a way of life and economic driver in the Town, but agricultural activity, as a whole, has been greatly diminished over the years. The preparation of this Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island is a means of ensuring that existing agricultural activities remain active and viable in the Town, that the expansion of hobby and small-scale, non-commercial agricultural activities are encouraged, and that productive farmland is protected to ensure the continuation of existing and future farming activities. The intent of this Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming is to bring about local regulatory changes that provide protections for agricultural uses. Therefore, the need to be included in the Erie County Agricultural District becomes less crucial. The goal is to make Grand Island self-sufficient and self-enforcing of its unique agricultural environment.

As noted in Section I, the Town of Grand Island adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan in September of 2018. That Plan includes goals and recommendations for managing future growth and development in the community. To undertake the update of the Comprehensive Plan and, thereafter, achieve the goals and implement the recommendations outlined in the Plan, the Grand Island Town Board established a Long-Range Planning Committee. Understanding that farmland protection was an issue of growing importance in the Town, as identified in the Comprehensive Plan update, the Town established the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee as an extension of the Long-Range Planning Committee to evaluate and address farmland preservation issues and oversee the development of the Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming on Grand Island.

As the Town of Grand Island is committed to the idea that a critical and necessary element of the planning process is continuous and effective public participation, an ongoing public outreach program was established as part of the development of the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. This effort included regular meetings of the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee and recognition of issues important to local stakeholders, acknowledgement of public concerns, and the identification of potential issues and opportunities for farmland protection in the Town.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

The public participation program for the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan consisted of public meetings and stakeholder outreach, survey questionnaires, public comment forms, and postings on the Town’s website, as noted on section II of this plan.

#### **B. Vision for the Future**

As noted in Section IV, the Town of Grand Island adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan (‘Bridging the Future” Town of Grand Island 2018 Comprehensive Plan Update) in September 2018. That plan includes specific goals and recommendations for farmland and agricultural protection. The plan establishes a foundation for the vision for the future of agricultural on Grand Island, as supplemented by the findings of this Resource Guide. Two of the five goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan update included objectives that apply to agricultural protection, as follows:

##### *Goal – Natural Resources*

Supporting the preservation of Grand Island’s many natural resources due to their contribution to the overall character of the Island, as well as the numerous economic opportunities they can provide.

- *Objective* – Encourage agricultural ventures in appropriate areas of the Town to conserve rural landscapes and support local agricultural business opportunities. Promote practices that balance farm productivity with green space protection and sustainability.

##### *Goal – Economic Development*

Maintain a strong and diverse economy that capitalizes on the existing assets of the community (built and natural), provides a business environment that retains and attracts new ventures, and complements the “Island character” that is unique to Grand Island.

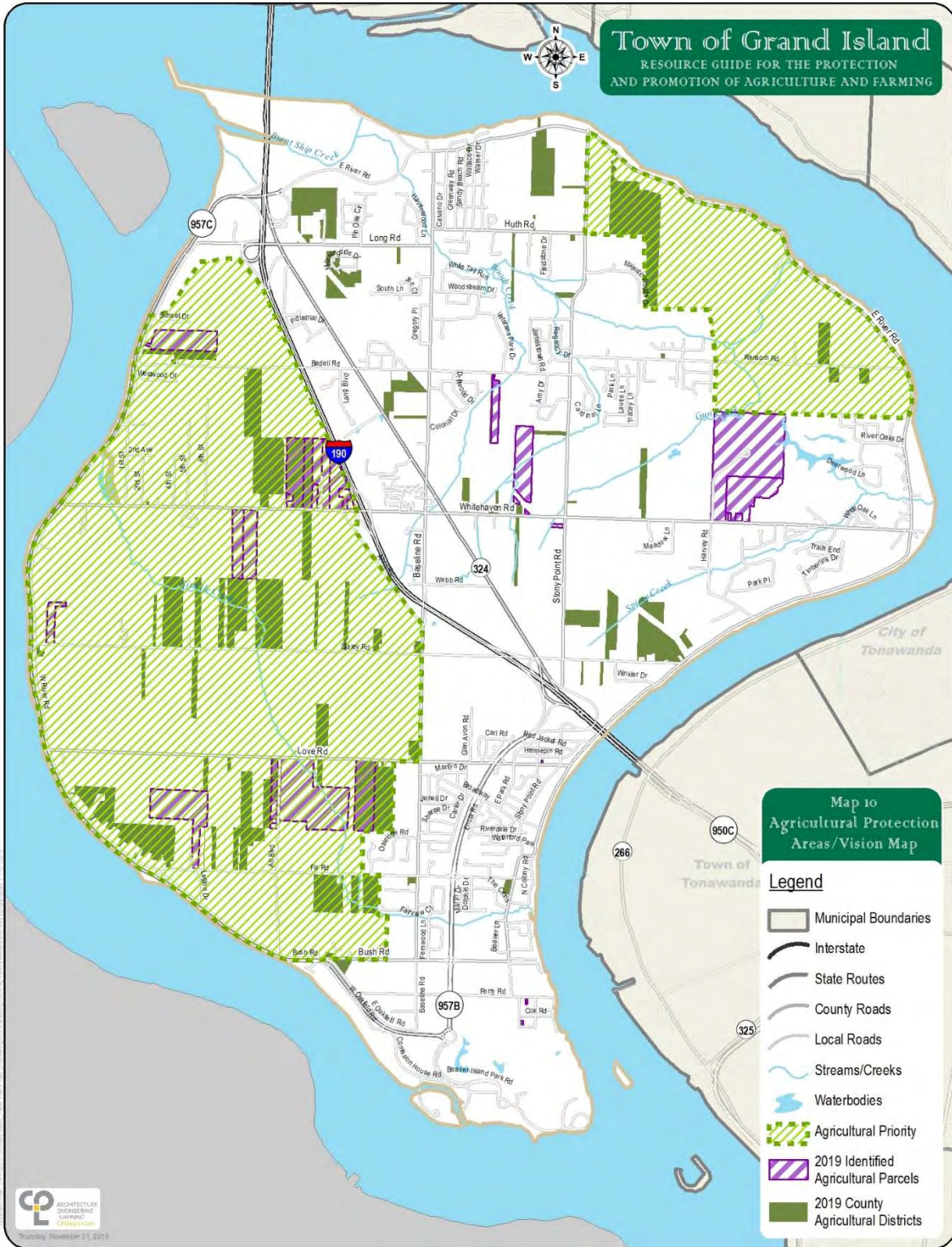
- *Objective* – Encourage agricultural pursuits within the Town to continue to build up existing local farms and support new economic opportunities.
- *Objective* – Encourage the development of a local Farmland Protection Plan to support agricultural businesses and farms on Grand Island.





# Town of Grand Island

## Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming





## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

The Comprehensive Plan update also includes a number of recommendations that further support the goals and vision for the future of agriculture and farming on Grand Island set forth in this Guide.

#### Recommendations

- Where farming is encouraged, ensure zoning regulations that allow for flexibility in agricultural operations in conjunction with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets guidelines. The intent is to create an environment in which the community and agricultural activities can co-exist.
- Develop a Farmland Protection Plan to guide farmers and provide direction for an agricultural economy on Grand Island.
- Identify opportunities for new businesses in agritourism that are valuable to residents and visitors.
- Identify hobby farming opportunities for residents who want to raise crops or livestock for their personal or small-scale, non-commercial business use.

These goals and recommendations inform this Resource Guide, highlighting the need for the identification of areas for future agricultural and farming activity through revisions to zoning, Town policies, and other means. Using the future land use map from the Comprehensive Plan as a basis, and building off the data analysis and findings, goal and strategy development, and community input generated from this project, priority protection areas have been identified on shown on Map 10 – Vision Map. These areas are where the majority of agriculture and farming presently occurs in the Town, from larger commercial operations to smaller hobby farms, and where land use policies or updates to local regulations should encourage and support future farming enterprises. The priority areas shown on the Vision Map are areas where public infrastructure is more limited and, thereby, experience less pressure for development or conversion of lands. The Vision for the future, as supported by this Resource Guide, is to protect and promote agriculture and farming, of any size or scale, on Grand Island, and to strengthen and diversity farming enterprises for long-term success.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

#### **C. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

The following SWOT analysis was prepared using the comments and other input gathered from discussions with farmers and other stakeholders, the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee, and the public, as well as the findings of the analysis of existing conditions and agricultural resources. This analysis identifies what are considered to be the strengths and weaknesses that affect farming and agriculture in the Town of Grand Island (internal factors over which you generally have some measure of control), and the opportunities and threats that come from outside the community (external factors over which you have little or no control). This analysis is useful in helping to identify strategies for helping the Town achieve its goals and objectives for the future.

#### **D. Tools and Techniques for Farmland Protection**

There are several techniques, programs, activities and strategies that can be used to protect farming and promote the continuation and increase of agricultural activities in a community. The choice of which mechanisms to utilize can be based on the extent of agricultural activities in a community, as well as the amount of development pressure that exists. The following is an overview of programs and techniques that may be helpful for protecting and promoting farming on Grand Island.

##### **Farmland Protection**

- ***Agricultural Zoning and other Land Use Regulations***

The main purpose of zoning is to separate land uses that might result in threats to public health, safety or welfare, or reduce a landowner's enjoyment of their land. Zoning also promotes orderly growth of a community, which can help control the cost of public services and maintain a pleasing visual quality in the community. Zoning should strike a balance between the right of a property owner to use their land and the right of the public to a healthy, safe and orderly living environment.

Agricultural zoning is aimed at reducing conflicts between farmers and non-farmers. Many normal farming practices can generate irritants, such as dust or odors for neighboring residents. Similarly,



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

**SWOT Analysis**

<b><u>Strengths</u></b>	<b><u>Weaknesses</u></b>
<p><i>Right to Farm Law</i></p> <p><i>Extent of productive farmland</i></p> <p><i>Good / productive farm soils</i></p> <p><i>Strong farm traditions and commitment</i></p> <p><i>Farmers (proactive, knowledgeable, adaptable)</i></p> <p><i>Increasing interest in urban farming</i></p> <p><i>Increasing public support for farming</i></p> <p><i>Reintroduction of 4-H the Youth Program in Grand Island schools</i></p> <p><i>County and regional support/programs</i></p> <p><i>Availability of support services in vicinity</i></p> <p><i>Recognition of the value of agricultural land</i></p> <p><i>Few farmer/neighbor conflicts</i></p> <p><i>Interest in utilizing alternative farming techniques and energy sources</i></p>	<p><i>Soil conditions</i></p> <p><i>Right to Farm Law</i></p> <p><i>Stable Town population</i></p> <p><i>Wetlands / wetland regulations</i></p> <p><i>Drainage / potential loss of farmland</i></p> <p><i>Zoning / land use regulations</i></p> <p><i>Limited business management skills/training</i></p> <p><i>New farmers with limited experience</i></p> <p><i>Market channels</i></p> <p><i>Lack of trust in local government and Code Enforcement</i></p> <p><i>Lack of community awareness about farming</i></p> <p><i>Lack of available information and local support on urban agricultural</i></p>
<b><u>Opportunities</u></b>	<b><u>Threats</u></b>
<p><i>Market trends</i></p> <p><i>County, regional and state programs/support</i></p> <p><i>Infrastructure / support businesses</i></p> <p><i>Stable County population</i></p> <p><i>Increasing interest in buying local produce</i></p> <p><i>Growing agritourism industry</i></p> <p><i>Introduction of new crops/crop varieties driven by climate change</i></p> <p><i>No new sanitary sewer districts are proposed</i></p> <p><i>Increasing emphasis on the importance of conducting agricultural and farming activities in concert with environmental stewardship</i></p>	<p><i>Market trends</i></p> <p><i>Price volatility</i></p> <p><i>Erie County Farmland Protection Board restrictions</i></p> <p><i>Increasing land costs</i></p> <p><i>Competition for limited resources</i></p> <p><i>Lack of awareness about farming by the non-farm public</i></p> <p><i>Agricultural land in sewer districts</i></p> <p><i>Lack of agency guidance and resource knowledge with respect to urban agriculture</i></p> <p><i>Climate change</i></p>

non-farm neighbors often do not respect private property, and farmers report problems with dirt bikes or all-terrain vehicles in fields or litter and vandalism.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

Agricultural zoning provides some protection for farmers by limiting the number of non-farm dwellings that can be built in the area. Agricultural zoning is used to protect valuable and productive farm soils and other resources that have value to the public, such as open space, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. Therefore, zoning is one of the best mechanisms to support, promote and protect agricultural pursuits in the Town.

Agricultural zoning is the most commonly used land use technique for limiting the development of farmland into non-farm uses and has become the first line of defense in most communities that have successful farmland protection programs. Agricultural zoning involves the creation of a zoning district that designates farming and other agricultural activities as the primary, preferred land uses. This type of zoning district generally targets the most productive soils and large contiguous areas of active farms. The minimum lot size may vary from a minimum lot size of 2 acres to over 40 acres, depending on the average size of farm properties in the area. Agricultural zoning districts can incorporate “density averaging” or “sliding scale” provisions to limit the number of dwellings permitted. The regulations may also specify maximum (as well as minimum) lot sizes for non-farm development. Regulations for this type of zoning district usually allow farm-related businesses and home-based businesses and limit non-agricultural development and uses. Agricultural protection zoning may be combined with purchase of development rights (discussed below) or incentive zoning to achieve greater success.

Agricultural zoning provisions intended to support farms and protect farmland should be designed to:

- Support a farm-friendly business environment;
- Protect a critical mass of agricultural land to encourage the continuation of crop production and other activities;
- Discourage land uses that would cause conflicts with farming operations;
- Allow family farm-related businesses that generate extra income for the owners, but are secondary to the farm operation;
- Establish setbacks for farm building from property lines to limit the spillover of odors, chemical sprays, dust and noise that could cause conflicts with neighbors;
- Prevent the conversion of the Town’s most productive farmland or the division of the land into tracts that are too small to farm profitably;





## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

- Provide some assurance that the public investment in farm property tax breaks and in the potential purchase of conservation easements on farmland will be protected;
- Help to keep land more affordable for farmers to purchase; and
- Allow farmers to raise crops or livestock without undue restriction.

Additionally, zoning provisions should support and promote smaller, non-traditional farm activities that are becoming more prominent on Grand Island. Regulations must be more flexible with minimum lot sizes (farming activities permitted on lots less than three acres in the R-1A district) and should allow for more than just keeping of agricultural animals. Uses such as beekeeping, raising of seasonal flowers and herbs, hydroponics, and other smaller-scale, hobby-type activities should be enabled.

The Town may also want to consider the adoption of a new Agricultural or Agricultural-Residential zoning district that lends preference to farming and agricultural activities, as previously mentioned. The zoning regulations, as well as the Right-to-Farm law, should be revised with respect to the keeping of animals' restriction; existing regulations should be consistent with State regulations and provisions. Another option could be to revise the R-1A zoning district to be more farm-friendly and limit non-farm uses in this district. Furthermore, exclusions for the keeping of animals on active farms, particularly on properties in designated agricultural districts, must be revisited. Keeping of animals is considered a standard farming practice.

It is important to note that Section 305-a of the Agriculture and Markets Law protects on-farm production, preparation and marketing of livestock from unreasonable local restrictions. This law defines livestock and livestock products to include, but not be limited to: cattle, sheep, hogs, goats, horses, poultry, ratites (ostriches, emus, rheas and kiwis), farmed deer or buffalo, fur bearing animals, wool bearing animals, milk; eggs and furs. When required, the Agricultural Districts Law authorizes the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets to issue opinions, upon request, concerning the soundness of specific agricultural practices. If the Commissioner determines that a practice is sound, it shall not constitute a nuisance and cannot be unreasonably restricted.

Other zoning revisions that should be considered include supplementing the definitions section in Chapter 407. For instance, consideration should be given to the inclusion of new definitions,



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

including commercial farming operation, start-up farm operation, hobby farm, urban farm. There should be differentiation between large farming operations, small farms, urban farms and hobby farms – operations that generate revenue and those that do not. Other zoning law revisions that lend greater recognition to the protection of farmland should be considered. Revising the Incentive Zoning and Cluster Development regulations to include these practices as a viable means of protecting farmland is recommended.

In general, making zoning more flexible and farm-friendly will help to alleviate tensions between the Code Enforcement Office and the farming community, instilling more trust in Town government. Such changes are warranted to effectively protect and promote farming and agriculture on Grand Island.

It should be noted that a good zoning classification is not necessarily enduring. Property owners may be granted variances from the zoning restrictions under certain conditions by a Zoning Board of Appeals or lands may be rezoned by a Town Board. Therefore, it is suggested that the Board charge the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee with keeping track of changes to farmland in the area(s) zoned for agriculture. This Committee could help the Town Board consider the compatibility of rezoned land with neighboring properties, the public benefits of rezoning agriculture land to another classification, and if the rezoning is in compliance with the Town's Comprehensive Plan and Resource Guide for the Protection Promotion of Agriculture and Farming. This Committee could also assist the Town Board with potential residential/farmland neighbor conflicts that may arise in the future.

Agricultural zoning provisions must also enable flexibility and create a supportive business environment as the agricultural industry is frequently changing as farmers adapt to new market and operating conditions. As globalization continues to accelerate, it is likely that the rate and extent of change within the agricultural industry will increase as well. These changes may include the production of different agricultural products or adoption of new production practices, as well as the continued proliferation of smaller farming activities. For instance, there is an increase in the use of tunnel greenhouses or other temporary structures for the production of fruits, vegetables, horticultural products and livestock housing. While these structures may not conform to some traditional views of farms, they are valuable to producers and hobby farmers as they are a cost-effective means for controlling growing conditions, which



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

is of great importance in New York given the State's limited growing season and varied (and often challenging) weather conditions.

Additionally, Section 407-165.1 of the zoning allows major solar energy facilities in the R-1A district with a minimum lot size of 25 acres and in the R-1B through R-1D districts with a minimum lot size of 15 acres. Such uses should not be allowed on properties that contain prime farm soils or soils of Statewide significance.

- ***Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)***

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), also known as purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE), is a voluntary approach for farmland protection that compensates landowners for permanently protecting their land for agricultural use. In general, landowners possess a variety of rights to their property, including the right to use water resources, harvest timber or develop their property consistent with local regulations. Some or all these rights can be transferred or sold. PDR programs essentially pay landowners to extinguish their rights to develop their land. Landowners retain other ownership rights to the property, the property remains on the tax rolls, and its taxable value is based on these remaining rights.

A PDR program places a deed restriction, commonly known as a conservation easement, on the property that is being preserved. In most cases, conservation easements are permanent agreements that are tied to the land and apply to all future owners. These binding agreements provide certain government agencies and/or qualified private, nonprofit organizations, the right to prevent non-farm development or activities that could interfere with the existing or future agricultural use on the property.

The goal of agricultural conservation easements is to protect land to help support the business of farming and conserve productive soils for future generations of farmers. Land that is subject to an agricultural conservation easement can still be farmed or used for forestry and other uses compatible with agricultural activities. Since agriculture is constantly evolving, agricultural conservation easements typically provide opportunities for farmers to construct new farm buildings and farm worker housing, or to change commodities and crops that are grown or farm practices on the land.



## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

In general, the value of a permanent conservation easement equals the fair market value of a property, minus its restricted value, as determined by a certified real estate appraiser. PDR is popular with many landowners in part because the payment is financially competitive with development offers.

#### Advantages:

- Permanently protects farmland, while keeping it in private ownership;
- Program participation is voluntary;
- Farmers can transform land assets into liquid assets that can be used for other purposes;
- Can protect a variety of agricultural and natural resources; and
- Helps keep agricultural land affordable for farmers.

#### Disadvantages:

- Can be expensive;
- Can be difficult to fund adequately; demand for the program is usually far greater than available funds;
- May not protect some important farms where property owners choose not to participate.
- Can be complex and time consuming; and
- Requires an ongoing investment of time and resources to monitor and enforce conservation easements.
- PDR does not allow public access to protected lands (e.g., for recreational use, etc.).

A PDR program can be an important “carrot” to counterbalance the “stick” of land use regulations. This is especially true in communities that are experiencing high development pressure, where there is a need for farmland protection alternatives that are financially competitive with development proposals. A PDR program can allow communities to permanently protect significant blocks of land as a resource for local farms. This protected land can also be a community resource, providing local food, rural character and cherished scenic landscapes. However, PDR programs are not a panacea. They will not solve all the problems that challenge local farms. The programs are often expensive, and PDR program implementation typically takes considerable time and requires specific knowledge and skills. Towns debating whether to start or support a PDR program should consider what land should be protected and how to determine which lands have the highest resource value.





## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

Due to the voluntary nature of a PDR program, landowners largely determine which properties end up being enrolled for protection. However, there is a benefit to having a ranking system, map and/or other plan that guides local farmland protection priorities. A local prioritization strategy can add legitimacy to PDR efforts, ensure that limited public funds are spent strategically, and address landowner or resident questions about the rationale for project selections. The specificity of a ranking system will differ by community. Realistically, the comprehensiveness and complexity of a local strategy should be balanced by the community's available time and resources. Because PDR programs tend to be landowner driven (based on voluntary participation), not all properties that are identified by the community as priority sites for protection may be included. However, it is helpful to identify and evaluate farmland properties and resources of value to determine local priorities. Appendix F includes information on some local PDR programs in the Western New York region.

How PDR preservation efforts will be funded is one of the most significant challenges for towns that want to establish a PDR program. Purchase of development rights is attractive because it offers a significant financial incentive for landowners. However, communities often are faced with significant landowner interest, as well as rising real estate prices. Without a consistent source of PDR funding, local programs can be stifled and may make slower progress than originally anticipated. Some of the traditional funding sources for local PDR programs in New York State include:

- New York State Farmland Protection Program
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS),
- Town bonds
- Town property taxes
- Town real estate transfer taxes

All these funding sources have benefits and drawbacks. State and federal programs provide grants to eligible governments, which is an attractive option for local governments since the grants can bring hundreds of thousands of dollars to local projects. The downside is that they are currently significantly oversubscribed and require cost-share funds. Information on Purchase of Development Rights can be found in Appendix F.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- ***Transfer of Development Rights***

Another land preservation program that has proved useful for farmland preservation is Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). This type of program is most effective in communities that are under significant pressure for development and that have lands available to enable the actual transfer of development rights from agricultural lands to be preserved to areas approved for denser development. While this program is not recommended for implementation in the Town of Grand Island, a time may come where it might warrant further consideration. Therefore, information on TDR has been included in Appendix G.

- ***Estate and Transition Planning***

For many farm families, passing the farm on to the next generation can be a major challenge. Transferring a farm involves more than just passing on land. A will is an important part of an estate plan, but a will alone cannot guarantee a secure future for a farm family's land and business. Estate planning is needed to address inheritance tax and settlement issues that may arise because land is not a liquid asset.

Estate planning can accommodate the needs of all family members, even those who leave the farm operation. A good estate plan can accomplish at least four goals:

- Transfer ownership and management of the agricultural operation, land and other assets.
- Avoid unnecessary income, gift and estate taxes.
- Ensure financial security and peace of mind for all generations, and
- Develop the next generation's management capacity.

Frequent changes in tax laws highlight the need for estate planning that is tailored to individual circumstances and addresses the uncertainty about future tax legislation. There are many sources of information on estate and transition planning, including attorneys, accountants and other financial advisors.

NY FarmNet, which is affiliated with Cornell University and coordinated with Cornell Cooperative Extension, is a commonly used resource that offers no cost and confidential consulting services to any farm located in New York State. This entity has no political or financial agenda so farmers can feel comfortable using this service. They help farmers with any personal and financial issues and have a network of professional consultants available who work one-on-one with farm families to help resolve problems and concerns.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

American Farmland Trust (AFT) has published “Your Land Is Your Legacy: A Guide to Planning for the Future of Your Farm”, which is a useful tool for farmland ownership transition. AFT also coordinates the “Farmland for a New Generation New York” program. This program helps farmers seeking land and landowners who want to keep their land in farming. Their website – <https://nyfarmlandfinder.org> offers links for finding a farm, finding a farmer, local and statewide events and other resources that offer direction and assistance to farmers at any stage in their career.

#### **Learning to Farm and Developing Farm Plans**

With the expansion of smaller farming activities on Grand Island, problems and conflicts can arise where residents and hobby farmers lack the experience required to undertake the farming activities they are pursuing. Whether it involves cultivation crops, beekeeping, livestock or other farming pursuits, having the knowledge and experience to manage a farm and properly conduct an agricultural activity is important. Helping residents understand agricultural practices and what is required to successfully operate small farming activities on Grand Island will help to promote and expand the agricultural industry and economy in the community. Furthermore, helping farmers understand and capitalize on opportunities for new practices, crops and/or markets can help sustain their operations, particularly during downturns in the farm economy, and provide greater potential for success. The following programs and information can help farmers with a wide number of agricultural issues and opportunities. Additional information can be found in the appendix to this report.

- ***Cornell Small Farms Program***

Cornell University offers the Cornell Small Farms Program helps farmers get expert assistance to facilitate all phases of small farm business development, from initial growth to optimization to maturity (<https://smallfarms.cornell.edu>). This program envisions a future where diverse and vibrant urban and rural farms build human capacity, revitalize communities, supply regional food systems and foster ecological resilience in a changing world.

The Small Farms Program offers a wealth of information, expertise and resources. This includes online tutorials and training courses for all skill levels; resource guides and other training programs. This information covers initial farm planning, business and market considerations and other general resources. Of note, is the *Urban Guide for Farming in New York*, which is designed to inform urban farmers about advocating for urban agriculture, accessing and



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

reclaiming land, producing food and farm products in urban and suburban areas, marketing, financing and other information required to launch, continue and expand farm businesses. Information about the Small Farms Program is included in the Appendix I.

- ***Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension***

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County (CCE Erie – [erie.cce.cornell.edu](http://erie.cce.cornell.edu)) offers a wealth of information on farming in the region, such as agriculture (beginner farmer resources, field crop resources, growing hemp and farm to school, among other things); food and nutrition; gardening, 4-H youth programs and invasive species. CCE Erie uses local experience and research-supported solutions to build stronger communities. CCE Erie provides educational programs to Erie County residents in Agriculture and Food Systems, 4-H Youth Development, Nutrition and Consumer Horticulture. Currently educators work throughout the County on projects as diverse as connecting farms to schools in Buffalo and elsewhere in the County, providing technical assistance to an agricultural development project in partnership with Journey’s End Refugee Services, and connecting farmers to consumers at the Taste NY Market on Grand Island.

CCE Erie educates farmers about business and production best practices, including helping new farmers to map their path to starting a farm. As a regional navigator, CCE Erie will support new farmers with resources specific to finding farmland, help an aging generation of farmers understand their options for transferring their land, and facilitate the connection between the two with one-on-one assistance, workshops and training. Connection a new generation of farmers with available land can stem the loss of farmland in urban-edge communities in Erie County and continue to growth of a vibrant local farming industry. Additionally, CCE Erie promotes the previously mentioned “Farmland for a New Generation New York program”, which is coordinated by American Farmland Trust.

- ***Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District***

The Erie County Soil and Water Conservation Service (ECSWCD) is a resource management agency that was established by law to carry out a program for the conservation, use and development of soil, water and related resources ([www.ecswcd.org](http://www.ecswcd.org)). The ECSWCD coordinates and implements resource and environmental programs at a local level in cooperation with federal and state agencies. The district works with landowners and others to address a broad spectrum of concerns, including erosion control, flood prevention, water use and conservation,





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

wetlands, groundwater, water quality and quantity, nonpoint source pollution, forestland protection, wildlife, recreation, wastewater management and community development. Its primary focus is on soil conservation and water quality, providing information, technical and financial assistance to agricultural, urban and suburban constituents.

The ECSWCD can provide technical assistance to farmers for the implementation of best management practices that are aimed at decreasing the transfer of soil and nutrients to local waterways. They can also oversee a number of agricultural programs (e.g., Agricultural Environmental Management and Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement and Control) and provide information and assistance on a host of other items, such as agricultural tax relief, integrated pest management, agritourism, organic farming, stream management, energy conservation, biofuels, wetland conservation, wildlife habitat improvement and nuisance wildlife control.

- ***Other National Programs***

*Farm Answers* - There are several other sources of guidance and information where farmers and other interested in agriculture and farming can learn more. Farm Answers (<https://farmanswers.org>) is sponsored by the University of Minnesota Center for Farm Financial Management and the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This website provides materials and toolboxes on several things, including direct marketing and local foods, organic farming, farm financial management, farmland access, business planning, farm transition planning, urban farming, food safety and commodity marketing. The urban farming toolbox offers useful information for new farmers and small operators in suburban and urban areas. The toolbox is designed to help anyone who wants to be a farmer in their own neighborhood.

*National Young Farmers Coalition*

The National Young Farmers Coalition ([www.youngfarmers.org](http://www.youngfarmers.org)) is an advocacy network of young farmers fighting for the future of agriculture. They have chapters around the country, including New York State (the closest chapter is in Ithaca, NY). This organization is focused on changing policy, building networks, supporting sustainable farm practices and providing business services to young, independent and prosperous farmers to enable them to succeed. The goals of the Coalition are to:



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- ensure that farming remains a desirable and profitable career and livelihood;
- encourage farming practices that sustain resources and protect the climate for the next generation of farmers and consumers;
- help ensure a supply of high-quality farmland that is affordable for fulltime farmers to purchase and farmland ownership;
- advocate for fair labor practices;
- support an apprenticeship model of farmer education and farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities;
- support inclusiveness and diversity in the farming professions to maintain a strong and vibrant agricultural sector; and\
- encourage cooperation and friendship among farmers to ensure that land, skills and place-based knowledge is transferred from generation to generation.

*New Farmers* – The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides information for farmers and others interested in farming activities. The New Farmers website <https://newfarmers.usda.gov> has links for new farmers, women in farming, young farmers and veterans. It also provides information for farmers looking for land and those who wish to keep their land in farming. The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (<https://nifa.usda.gov>) also offers extensive information on all aspects of food and food science, nutrition, natural resources and the environment, animals and plants and farming and ranching for new and beginning farmers. This includes information on organic farming, small and family farming and sustainable agriculture.

*Beginning Farmers* – This organization hosts a website ([www.beginningfarmers.org](http://www.beginningfarmers.org)) that provides a wealth of information on starting a farm, types of farming, farm resources and farm jobs and internships. It includes links to workshops and other learning opportunities, funding, business planning, “AG Daily” agricultural news and more.

*Alternative Farming Systems* – The USDA established the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) to focus on sustainable, urban and organic agriculture ([www.nal.usda.gov/afsic](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic)). This Center provides information related to sustainable and alternative agricultural systems, urban agriculture, crops and livestock. The Center specializes in library services, locating, accessing, organizing and distributing information and guidance on various topics, including:



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Sustainable and regenerative crops (vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains, legumes, viticulture, specialty crops) and livestock (grazing and pasture management, aquaculture, beekeeping, organics, specialty livestock) farming systems and diversification;
  - Production practices (sustainable, organic, biodynamic, permaculture, hydroponics, aquaponics, certification and marketing);
  - Small farm guidance and management (beginner, women and minority farmer issues; business planning, farm preservation and transitioning, funding);
  - Urban agriculture (backyard, rooftop, community gardening and other small-scale activities);
  - Marketing practices and local food systems (direct marketing, added value, farm to institutions, community supported agriculture, cooperatives/food hubs, agritourism, farm markets, farm certification);
  - Natural resource management (pests, soils, water and whole farm systems);
  - Renewable energy options for farms (wind, solar, bioenergy, geothermal, hydropower, energy policy, funding);
  - Local food and community (community gardens, urban agriculture, local food systems, food security); and
  - Education and research.
- ***Grand Island Farms, Inc.***

Grand Island Farms, Inc. was founded in 2016, as part of an effort to establish agricultural districts on Grand Island. Grand Island Farms, Inc. has been operating for about four years and has received 501c3 status. The goal of this organization is to help support and educate farmers; throughout the winter and spring, they offer educational events for farmers and community members alike. They also manage the Grand Island Farmers' Market. As the goal of establishing agricultural districts in the community has been achieved, the mission of Grand Island Farms, Inc. has shifted to more prominently focus on educating and training farmers and promoting agricultural start-ups to raise livestock and grow crops. Grand Island Farms, Inc. relies on support from the Town's Agriculture and Farming Planning Committee to help with their efforts. They believe in promoting local fresh food sources and connecting those sources with the community. They want to expand participation at the Farmers' Market and better promote smaller scale hobby and non-commercial farms on Grand Island, which they believe can help build the agricultural tourism industry in the community. Small-scale hobby farms are viewed as the future for agriculture and farming on Grand Island because it is a unique suburban town.



## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

#### **Agricultural Education Opportunities**

There are a small number of colleges and universities in the western and central New York regions that offer degree programs in farming and agriculture programs.

- ***Alfred State College of Technology***

[www.catalog.alfredstate.edu/current/department/agriculture-veterinary-technology](http://www.catalog.alfredstate.edu/current/department/agriculture-veterinary-technology)

The Alfred State College of Technology has a department of Agriculture and Veterinary Technology that offers Associates degrees in Agriculture Automation and Robotics, Agricultural Business, Agricultural Technology and Veterinary Technology, as well as a degree in Agricultural Technology. The mission of this department is to facilitate learning and engage communities in the practices of sustainable food production and animal welfare. Entrepreneurship. Students participate in hands-on experience with crops, plants, animals, facilities and equipment. The college has an 800-acre farm that serves as a field laboratory to provide practical instruction in production agriculture and to produce feed for the college's livestock. The college also operates a Center for Organic and Sustainable Agriculture.

- ***Niagara County Community College*** [www.niagaracc.suny.edu/programs](http://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/programs)

The Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts Program at Niagara Community College offers Associates of Applied Science degrees in Brewery Operations and Winery Operations; they also offer a Certificate in Wine and Beverage Management. The brewery program offers students the opportunity to learn management of a labor-intensive industry that incorporates the science of growing hops and making beer. This program is designed to give students hands-on preparation and knowledge necessary to be successful in the field of beer making and brewery management. Under the winery operations program students will learn and perform the necessary skills for seasonal vineyard operations and management. This program incorporates the science of wine making with knowledge on marketing cool-climate wines.

- ***Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences*** <https://cals.cornell.edu/>

The Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences offers a number of degree programs, both major and minor. Bachelor of Science degrees are offered in Agricultural Sciences, Plant Sciences, Viticulture and Enology, Entomology and Animal Science. Students can also minor in agricultural business management, crop management, plant sciences, viticulture and enology, animal science, horticulture, plant breeding, soil science and entomology to enhance their major degree program and career studies.





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

#### **Tax Relief Programs**

Tax relief is an important issue for farmers. Farms need land to operate, and property taxes on farmland often are a considerable expense. Not only do property taxes add significantly to business costs for farmers, farms tend to pay more in property taxes than they require in public services. As farmers often say, “Cows don’t go to school and corn doesn’t dial 911.” Increasingly, state and local governments are recognizing that keeping farmland in production may help control the cost of providing expensive community services. In response, New York State has established programs to reduce property taxes on farmland that meets certain eligibility requirements. Certain of these programs are utilized in the Town of Grand Island, others are lesser known, and farmers should be made aware of their potential value for tax relief.

- ***Agricultural Use Assessments***

Agricultural assessment provides “use value” assessment for eligible farmland. This allows farmland to be taxed for its agricultural value, rather than its market (i.e., non-farm development) value. Any owner of land that is used for agricultural production may qualify if the land meets the requirements or is rented to an eligible farm operation. Landowners must file for this agricultural tax exemption annually with the Town Tax Assessor’s office. Land placed under agricultural assessment and then converted to nonagricultural use is subject to conversion fees. It should be noted that agricultural assessments and agricultural districts are mutually exclusive.

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets has established a formula to determine the Agricultural Use value of property based on soil types and projected crop yields. In areas where the land is valuable for development purposes, the agricultural use value will be much lower than the market value, resulting in significantly lower property taxes. However, in areas where farming is the “highest and best use” of the property – where a farmer is likely to pay as much for the land as anyone else - the agricultural use value is the same as the market value. While agricultural use assessments are applied automatically to property taxes levied by municipalities and school districts, fire districts must “opt in.” To do so, the governing body needs to pass a resolution agreeing to utilize agricultural use assessments.

To qualify for an agricultural assessment:



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- Enrolled land must generally be a minimum of seven acres and farmed by a single operation.
- Land must have been used in the preceding two years for crop production, commercial boarding of horses or livestock production.
- Farm operation must gross an average of \$10,000 or more in sales per year.
- Land of fewer than seven acres may qualify if the operation has an average gross sales value of \$50,000 or more per year.
- Support land, land set aside in federal conservation programs or farm woodland (up to 50 acres per eligible tax parcel) may qualify.

Non-farmers who rent land to farmers are eligible to receive an agricultural assessment if the rented land satisfies the basic eligibility requirements described above. If the rented land does not satisfy the average gross sales requirement, but does satisfy the other requirements, it may still be eligible if it is farmed under a written rental agreement of at least five years, with other farmland that satisfies the eligibility requirements.

The agricultural assessment program may not be widely known among non-farmers and is something that the Town of Grand Island should promote as another means of preserving farmland and assisting farmers. Farmers interested in applying for an agricultural assessment should contact the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District to fill out all necessary forms and paperwork, as well as contacting the local tax assessor for additional guidance.

- ***Farmers' School Tax Credit***

This Property Tax Credit enables farmers to receive a tax credit against the state personal income tax or the corporation franchise tax to reimburse some or all the school district property taxes paid by the farmer. An eligible farmer or corporation must own qualified agricultural property, must pay eligible school taxes during the year, and their income must be below the income limitation amount of \$250,000. Eligible farmers must receive at least 2/3 of their excess federal gross income from farming. Excess federal gross income is federal gross income, reduced by up to \$30,000. In other words, take gross income and subtract \$30,000. If 2/3 of the remaining amount is from the farm, you generally will qualify. Farming is defined as an individual or corporation that cultivates, operates or manages a farm for gain or profit, even though the operation may not produce a profit each year. Many commodities are included in the definition of farming, as well as commercial horse farms and Christmas tree farms. Also



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

included in the definition of farming are members of a limited liability company, a shareholder of an S or C corporation, and the beneficiary of an estate or trust that is engaged in the business of farming.

This program allows eligible farmers to receive credit refunds of up to 100 percent of the school taxes paid on agricultural property up to 350 acres in size, and 50 percent of school taxes paid on acreage in excess of 350 acres. The school property tax credit should be claimed annually on the farmer's personal NYS tax return (complete Form IT-217-I, *Claim for Farmers' School Tax Credit*). Additional information on this program is included in Appendix H and at the following website [www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/farmers\\_school\\_tax.htm](http://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/farmers_school_tax.htm).

- ***Farm Building Exemptions***

Several provisions in New York's Real Property Tax Law exempt farm buildings or structures from property taxes. Section 483 exempts new or reconstructed agricultural buildings, such as barns or farm worker housing, from any increase in assessed value that results from the improvement. Farm worker housing is exempt provided that the facility meets all safety and health standards set by the State building code and the NYS Department of Labor. An application for a tax exemption for newly constructed or reconstructed farm buildings must be made within a year following the completion of construction work. The exemption continues automatically for 10 years, as long as the building continues to be used for farming. Sections 483-a, 483-c and 483-d permanently exempt certain agricultural structures from taxation. Some of the structures that qualify for the exemption include silos, bulk tanks, manure facilities and temporary greenhouses ([https://www.tax.ny.gov/pubs\\_and\\_bulls/orpts/farmbltd.htm](https://www.tax.ny.gov/pubs_and_bulls/orpts/farmbltd.htm)).

Structures must be located on parcels of at least five acres and used for profitable agricultural production. Structures used for processing, retail merchandising, personal use or residences of applicants and their immediate families do not qualify for the exemption. The owner of the building or structure for which an exemption is sought must file application form RP-483, which is available from the Town Tax Assessor or the Erie County Office of Real Property Services, with the Town of Grand Island or Erie County.

- ***Historic Barn Rehabilitation Tax Credit***

There are income tax credit programs available from the federal government and New York State that can help farmers save a considerable portion of costs required for the restoration of



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

historic barns. Each program has certain requirements and criteria that apply to determine eligibility (See Appendix I).

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax incentive program allows a tax credit equal to 20 percent of the amount spent rehabilitating historic barns that are listed on or determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This federal program has been administered by the National Park Service since passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1979. To date, over 30,000 buildings have been rehabilitated, including many barns.

Additionally, the New York State Farmer's Protection and Farm Preservation Act, enacted by New York State in 1996, was designed in part to preserve the historic barns that dot the State's landscape. In order to qualify for an Historic Barn Rehabilitation Tax Credit, which is equal to 25 percent of the cost of rehabilitating historic barns, the barn must have been built or put into agricultural service before 1936 and the rehabilitation must be designed to house farm equipment, livestock or agricultural products or used for commercial activities (structures restored or converted for residential use are not eligible). The restoration cannot "materially alter the historic appearance" of the barn; only costs incurred after January 1, 2003 are eligible. In addition, the barn must meet the tax definition of income production. Interested farmers should file tax form IT-212-ATT. For more information on this program, contact the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation or visit their website at [www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/historic\\_barns\\_credit.htm](http://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/historic_barns_credit.htm).

- ***Sales Tax Exemptions for Farmers and Commercial Horse Boarding Operators***

New York tax law now exempts certain items or services used in farm production and commercial horse boarding operations from State and local sales and use taxes. The items must be used "predominantly" (more than 50 percent) for farm production in order to qualify. Some of the exempt items include personal property used for production/operation; building materials used for farm buildings or structures; services to install, maintain or repair farm buildings or structures; motor vehicles used predominantly for production/operation; and fuel, gas, electricity, refrigeration or steam used for production /operation. Farmers seeking a sales tax exemption must utilize form ST-125 (more information on this tax exemption can be found at [https://www.tax.ny.gov/pubs\\_and\\_bulls/tg\\_bulletins/st/farmers\\_exemption\\_cert.htm](https://www.tax.ny.gov/pubs_and_bulls/tg_bulletins/st/farmers_exemption_cert.htm)).





## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- ***Forest Land Exemption***

To encourage the long-term ownership of woodlands, Section 480-a of the Real Property Tax Law allows eligible owners of forest land to receive reductions in tax assessment. Landowners must own a minimum of 50 acres of contiguous forestland and be willing to commit the land to forest crop production. In addition, landowners must follow forest management plans that have been prepared by qualified foresters and approved by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Owners of tracts certified by NYSDEC must apply annually to their local assessors for the exemption (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5236.html>). Landowners must comply with the program for nine years following the last year of commitment. Penalties may be imposed if a landowner fails to follow the approved management program or converts the land to a use that prevents continued forest crop production.

#### **Environmental Management Programs**

Farmers have played an important role in the stewardship of New York's natural resources for generations. There are several voluntary programs aimed at helping farmers keep land in active agricultural use while protecting water, soil and air quality and achieving other natural resource goals. An example of some of the programs that could be helpful to farmers on Grand Island include the following.

- ***Agricultural Management Assistance***

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers voluntary Farm Bill programs that benefit both agricultural producers and the environment (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov>). One such program is the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service oversees the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, which provides Farm Bill funding to 16 states (including New York) where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program has typically been low. The AMA program offers cost-share assistance to agricultural producers to address issues such as water management, water quality and erosion control, and to manage financial risk through crop diversification or transition to organic farming. Program priorities may vary from year to year. The AMA program funds up to 75 percent of the cost for producers to install and maintain eligible conservation practices.



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

AMA assistance helps agricultural producers manage financial risk through diversification, marketing or natural resource conservation practices. The NRCS works with farmers to develop an AMA plan of operations for the construction of water management structures to improve water quality, plant trees for windbreaks or to mitigate risk through crop diversification or resources conservation practices (e.g., integrated pest management, erosion control or transition to organic farming). The local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (affiliated with the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District) and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets can be contacted for more information on this program.

- ***Environmental Quality Incentive Program***

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is another program offered by the NRCS under the Farm Bill that provides technical and financial assistance to farmers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits, such as improved water quality, water conservation, and reduced soil erosion (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov>). Through the EQIP, the NRCS offers one-on-one help and financial assistance to plan and implement structural and management improvements (conservation practices). EQIP funding may also establish conservation practices, such as nutrient management, integrated pest management, forest management, manure management and wildlife habitat management. Other EQIP initiatives include funding and/or technical assistance for high tunnel (hoop house) systems, organic farming, on-farm energy efficiency and conservation innovation. The 2018 Farm Bill increased funding available for EQIP cost-share and the incentive payments and extended eligibility to conservation practices directly related to organic production or transition. The local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (affiliated with the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District) and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets can be contacted for more information on this program.

- ***Agricultural Environmental Management***

Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) is a voluntary State program offered to help improve management of local farmland, water supply and environmental conditions. The program is run by the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District ([www.ecswcd.org](http://www.ecswcd.org)) and offers technical, educational and financial resources. This assistance provides response to essential environmental needs, while providing farms and communities with cost effective improvements. AEM is implemented to achieve the best sustainable farming practices for each



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

individual farm and increase profitability, while improving the condition of the surrounding environment.

- ***New York State Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement and Control Grant Program***

This grant program was established by New York State in 1994 to assist farmers in preventing water pollutions from agricultural activities by providing technical assistance and financial incentives. The Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District (ECSWCD) applies for competitive grants on behalf of farmers and coordinates funded activities. Grants can cover up to 75% of project costs or more if farm owners contribute to the environmental planning and implementation (construction or application of management practices). For more information contact the ECSWCD or visit their website at [www.ecswcd.org](http://www.ecswcd.org).

- ***Organic Farming***

The 2018 Farm Bill continues and expands opportunities for organic agricultural operations that were established under the 2014 Farm Bill. The EQIP Organic Initiative provides financial assistance to organic producers looking to address resource concerns by implementing and installing conservation practices tailored to organic crop production. Examples of activities for funding include the development of conservation plans, the establishment of buffer zones, planning and installing pollinator habitat, improving irrigation efficiency, and enhancing crop rotations and nutrient management, among other things. Organic, transitioning-to-organic, and producers that are exempt from National Organic Program certification requirements are eligible to contract with the USDA National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to install and implement organic-specific conservation activities that are consistent with an organic system plan. The EQIP Organic Initiative allows eligible agricultural producers to apply for \$20,000 annually, and \$80,000 over a maximum of six years.

Additionally, the funding allocated for the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program offsets the costs of annual certification for organic farmers and handlers. This program provides assistance to producers, handlers and processors who are applying for National Organic Certification for eligible agricultural products. Producers may be reimbursed for up to 75 percent of their organic certification costs, not to exceed \$750. The 2018 Farm Bill renews funding for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative at the previous \$20 million per year level, and funding for the Organic Production and Market Date Initiatives at \$5



## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

million over five years. The National Organic Program also receives \$5 million for technology upgrades. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov>) or the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (<https://agriculture.ny.gov>) can be contacted for more information on these opportunities.

- ***Biomass Crop Assistance Program***

The 2014 Farm Bill continues a program established in 2008 that provides incentives to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to establish, cultivate and harvest eligible biomass crops for heat, power, bio-based products, research and advanced biofuels. Individual farmers or farmers working as a group can propose a project for funding assistance. There is no minimum acreage requirement. Landowners must enter into five-year contracts for annual and perennial crops, and 15-year contracts for woody biomass. Program participants receive cost-share payments to support production, and funding to assist with the collection, harvest, storage and transport of materials. For more information visit the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov>).

- ***Climate Resilient Farming***

As noted in Section IV, climate change preparedness makes good business sense. Planning to minimize risks and capitalize on opportunities is wise for the future of local farming as certain commodities that dominate the New York State agricultural landscape will be adversely impacted and operational changes may be necessary as a result of warming trends predicted in the coming century. Opportunities to introduce profitable new crops and new crop varieties will also result as temperatures rise and the growing season lengthens.

Climate change trends include changing precipitation (increased precipitation, drought and heat stress), increasing greenhouse gas emissions and an increase in invasive insects and vegetation/weeds. More extreme, short-term rainfall events (2+ inches/48 hours) are expected to continue and increase. Some areas are predicted to experience increased short-term droughts, with increasing temperatures and a longer growing season increasing water demand. Crop cultivation for corn, wheat, soybeans, hay and other grains is an increasing source of nitrous oxide and carbon emissions. Heat stress from a lengthening growing season (the growing season has already increased by approximately eight days) is a concern as the number of heat stress days, with temperatures exceeding 90 degrees Fahrenheit, increases and winters grow milder. Heat stress can also have devastating impacts on livestock and increase water use





## *Town of Grand Island*

### *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming*

demands. Additionally, while the relationship between climate, crops, insects, diseases and is complex, there is evidence that changes will require farmers to invest earlier and more intensively in pest and weed management strategies.

While climate change trends present challenges, there are also solutions that can be implemented to mitigate adverse impacts. Farmers can get guidance and assistance from the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (see Appendix I), the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee Climate Farming Resiliency Program and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services. More information on climate change can be found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/climatechange/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/climatechange/) or at the NYSDEC website ([www.dec.ny.gov/energy/44992.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/44992.html)).

#### **Farm Viability Assistance**

There are several programs available to help farms and farmers to be economically viable and sustainable over the long term. There are several programs offered at the federal and state level to assist farmers. These include the following:

- ***New York State New Farmer Grant Program*** – provides grants to help beginning farmers improve profitability by expanding or diversifying agricultural production, expanding the agricultural season and advancing innovative agricultural techniques that increase sustainable practices (<https://esd.ny.gov/new-farmers-grant-fund-program>);
- ***New York Farm Viability Institute Grants*** – funding for farm-based projects, including applied research and education (<https://nyfvi.org>);
- ***The New York State Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program*** – This program is offered to encourage recent college graduates to pursue careers in farming in New York State. It provides loan forgiveness awards to individuals who obtain an undergraduate degree from an approved college or university in New York State and who agree to operate a farm in the State on a fulltime basis for five years (<https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/nys-grants-scholarships-awards/new-york-state-young-farmers-loan-forgiveness-incentive-program.html>);



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

- ***Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)*** – grants funding assistance for innovative approaches and projects that advance good land stewardship, improve farm profitability and strengthen rural communities (<https://www.northeastsare.org>);
- ***Farm to School*** – facilitates connections between New York State farmers and food service managers in educational facilities across the state ([www.agriculture.ny.gov/farming/farm-school](http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/farming/farm-school));
- ***USDA Farm Service Agency*** – offers direct and guaranteed loans and microloans to help start, improve, expand, transition or strengthen family farming operations; help beginning, minority and women farmers; support value-added, direct sale, organic and specialty crop operations; support urban farmers and roof-top producers; and fund operations using alternative farming methods such as hydroponics, vertical farming, aeroponics and freight container farming ([www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/far-loan-programs/index](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/far-loan-programs/index));
- ***Rural Development Grants and Loans (USDA)*** – offers farm labor housing loans and grants, value-added producer grants and rural microentrepreneur loans for farming interests (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services>);
- ***Small Business MicroLoans*** – the Small Business Administration offers several financial assistance programs ([www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans](http://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans)); and
- ***Climate Resilient Farming Program*** – As previously noted, this program is offered by the Soil and Water Conservation Service to help farmers reduce the impacts of agriculture on climate change/mitigation and to increase the resiliency of farms in New York State in the face of a changing climate/adaptation (<https://www.nys-soilandwater.org/programs/crf.html>).

#### **Drainage**

In discussions with the Advisory Committee and local farmers, issues of flooding and debris in local creeks were raised that are the result of inadequate drainage, extensive wetlands, poorly functioning and maintained ditches, and overall soil conditions. As discussed in Section IV, historically, local farmers would clear obstructions in creeks and ditches and the Town would also budget for creek cleanup; however, with the increase in State and Federal regulations pertaining to waterbody and bank disturbance, as well as budgetary concerns, this practice has all but ceased. As a result, siltation and sedimentation has increased along with vegetation, creating obstructions



## ***Town of Grand Island***

### ***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

to natural water flows and flooding uplands. As creeks flood more regularly and wetlands expand, farmland is being taken out of production.

To gain a better understanding of this issue and evaluate potential solutions, Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee organized a meeting with agency representatives, including NYSDEC, the Army Corps. of Engineers and the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, to discuss existing conditions, regulatory requirements and possible remedies would be helpful to keep existing farmland viable and potentially bring other lands back into production. The results of this meeting pointed to the fact that the drainage issues in the Town are vast. To truly address the existing problems there is a need to gain a comprehensive understanding of hydrology on Grand Island – its historic patterns, how those patterns have changed or been impacted by man-made actions, how the system functions now and what/where problems exists, and what can be done moving forward. Without such a study, actions could be (or will continue to be) undertaken haphazardly, without an understanding of how one action may affect another and/or by pushing problems out further. Added to this need is the fact that the Town is working with DEC to remedy inflow and infiltration and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) that are impacting capacity at the wastewater treatment plan. By removing stormwater from the sewer lines, the water must be discharged to the ground surface, which adds to drainage and flooding issues. Therefore, one problem is compounding another. Hence, it is important for the Town to gain a comprehensive understanding of hydrology on the Island. Until such a study is undertaken, the Town must continue to work in partnership with the NYSDEC, Army Corps. and Waterkeeper to be pro-active about drainage issues. The Town should also use SEQR as a tool to help address drainage issues. Requiring expanded analysis of drainage conditions as part of the environmental assessment form can help to identify and mitigate existing drainage conditions on or near proposed development sites or, at the very least, not make them worse.

#### **E. Recommendations and Implementation Strategies**

The following recommendations and implementation strategies provide a variety of options that can be utilized by the Town to protect and grow farming and agricultural activities in the community. These recommendations and strategies are outlined under each of the four goals, which are aimed at protecting and enhancing important agricultural resources and the long-term viability of farming in the Town; increasing public awareness of agriculture on Grand Island; and protecting, enhancing and expanding the agricultural economy. The options that follow provide a toolbox of strategies that can be employed by the Town, as needed, to address issues and



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

concerns, capitalize on opportunities and ensure the continued and increasing presence of farming activities on Grand Island.

***GOAL 1: Protect Lands and Resources Critical to the Long-Term Success, Viability and Resiliency of Farming and Agriculture of any Size or Scale***

The Town recognizes that the protection of farming and agricultural activities, regardless of their size or scale, contributes to the preservation of open space and maintains the rural community character and heritage of the area. Protecting and promoting agriculture in the Town, which includes field crops, the keeping of animals, and numerous other pursuits, is of primary importance to the local economy and future of farming on Grand Island.

1. Adopt the Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agricultural and Farming as a demonstration of commitment to maintaining farming as an important part of the Grand Island community.
2. Update the Town of Grand Island Website to include a webpage specific to agriculture and farming in the community. Ensure that this webpage is prominently displayed on the website homepage. Post the adopted Resource Guide on this site.
3. Maintain and better utilize the Agriculture and Farming Planning Committee as a means of implementing the *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agricultural and Farming*, advocating for agricultural protection, assisting the Town Board with land use decisions that may affect agricultural lands, mediating potential conflicts and, in general, protecting the rights of farmers in the Town.
4. Revise the Right-to-Farm Law, as well as the zoning regulations, to better protect farming and farming operations to keep livestock, particularly farms located in agricultural districts, but not excluding hobby farms in residential areas.
5. Authorize the development of a Comprehensive, Town-wide drainage study to evaluate localized drainage problems and identify viable solutions to help retain and expand the amount of productive farmland in the Town.





***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

6. Work with Erie County and neighboring communities to identify mutually beneficial ways to carry out the goals and objectives of the *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agricultural and Farming*.
7. Continue to work with local farmers and Erie County to incorporate more properties and increase the size of the State Agricultural Districts on Grand Island. These efforts should be continued to ensure that the number of farms located in the district is sustained and increased well into the future.
8. In an effort to promote the Town’s commitment to agricultural and farmland protection, post the adopted *Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agricultural and Farming*, along with maps of local agricultural districts, a copy of the adopted (and revised) Right-to-Farm Law, and any other information pertinent to agricultural protection in the community, on the Town of Grand Island website to educate and facilitate access to this information for local real estate brokers, realtors, lawyers and others in the Town.
9. Support programs offered by the Cornell Small Farm Program and Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, which provide business planning and financial management assistance to farmers to keep farmland in the Town in use and production, expand farming practices and activities and help new farmers build their businesses and be successful.
10. Support the American Farmland Trust “Farmland for a New Generation New York” program that assists local farmers and/or startup operations who are seeking land and existing farmers and landowners who want to keep their land in farming.
11. Encourage farmers to utilize services and resources offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation Service and Cornell University for issues related to climate change and climate resiliency farming.
12. Adopt a new agricultural zoning district or revise the R-1A zoning classification, and update definitions and other appropriate sections of the Zoning Code to be more farm-friendly in support of agricultural activities in the community.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

13. In revising zoning for agricultural purposes, include provisions that enable hobby, small-scale and non-commercial farming activities as allowable uses. Additionally, restrictions on the construction of farm buildings as principal uses or the need for an existing principle structure in order to construct other farm buildings (barn, greenhouse, etc.) should be removed.
14. Revise the Town of Grand Island Incentive Zoning and Cluster Development regulations (Sections 407-20 and Article XXVII of the Zoning Code) to incorporate and recognize farming as a means of preserving and protecting open space.
15. Ensure that notice requirements under the NYS Agricultural District Law are being followed (use of Agricultural Data Statements) in the Town.
16. Continue to support local farmers markets to help keep farmers keep farming, support small farms and non-commercial operations, and expand the availability of local farm products.
17. If pressure for land development increases in the future, explore the feasibility of enacting a local tax abatement program in exchange for term or permanent conservation easements for farmland protection. This kind of program provides a percentage reduction in property taxes as a part of the agreement between the landowner and the Town for farmland preservation.

***GOAL 2: Promote the link between farms and food, and farms and secondary income, to increase awareness by the non-farm community, grow the industry and help ensure the long-term sustainability of farming activities on Grand Island***

Farming provides several benefits, including the production of local food, jobs and other economic benefits to the community at large and the region; preservation of scenic vistas and rural character; potential for secondary income for residents, and a more balanced tax base. Strengthening and increasing public awareness and understanding of how agriculture positively impacts a community is essential for achieving public support for the existence and continuance of farming activities.

1. Be supportive of an “Eat Local” campaign to increase awareness of the availability of local farm products and opportunities.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

2. Update the Town of Grand Island Website to include a webpage specific to agriculture and farming in the community. Ensure that the existence of this webpage is prominently displayed on the website homepage.
3. Promote the Farmer's Market as a means of supporting local farmers and introducing residents and others to the benefits of local agriculture.
4. Utilize the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee and Grand Island Farms, Inc. to promote the Cornell University Small Farms and Farmland for a New Generation New York Programs to residents and local farmers to help educate and strengthen the farming community on Grand Island.
5. Promote the availability of existing information that is posted on the Erie County, Soil and Water Conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension websites on local farming, farm stands and farmers markets in the Town and region.
6. Ensure that Grand Island Farmer's Markets are included on the New York State Farmer's Markets Federation listing, including their location, products and availability, prices, etc.
7. Promote the establishment of community supported agriculture (CSA) cooperatives on Grand Island to provide fresh, local produce to residents and establish a direct relationship between local farmers and the community.
8. Create a "Farming on Grand Island" packet to be distributed to new and existing residents that identifies the benefits of farming and the resources, such as fresh food, available in the community.
9. Develop a public education campaign to help residents and others understand the benefits of farming for maintaining rural character and open space, contributing to the local economy, balancing the tax base, as well as how farms operate, to build local support for farming on Grand Island.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

***GOAL 3: Enhance and Expand the Agricultural Economy of the Town and its Capacity to Respond to Economic and Climate Trends and Changes***

Although it has changed in size, scale and nature, agriculture remains an integral component of the character and economy of the Town. Agricultural related businesses support farming and contribute to the local and regional economy. The existing economic base of farming in the community and the viability of existing businesses should be enhanced and expanded because a strong base is good for farmers, the Town and the region, as well as for the long-term success of agriculture.

1. Promote the importance of programs, organizations and agencies that support and assist farmers and farmland property owners, such as Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Furthermore, advocate for the continued funding of these programs at appropriate levels.
2. Promote educational programs and training offered by the Cornell University Small Farms Program and other entities in the region to help existing farmers and those interested in farming careers gain a greater understanding of agricultural practices and small business management. Furthermore, encourage Erie County and other local agencies and organizations to offer/expand training in basic business management techniques.
3. Encourage Erie County Department of Environment and Planning , Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Soil and Water Conservation District to create a clearing house of information (“one-stop shopping”) for farmers and others (website, training opportunities, seminars on state and federal programs of benefit to farmers, funding opportunities, etc.) in support of farming and agricultural business in the community.
4. Encourage retired farmers and non-farm property owners of vacant land to rent/continue to rent their properties to other farmers to maintain and expand the amount of land in agricultural use on Grand Island.





***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

5. Encourage farmers to work with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and local agencies to explore new markets, opportunities and crop diversification to maintain viability, better manage market/economic downturns, and increase their potential for success.
6. Promote the use of small-scale, on-farm solar technology, wind turbines and other energy efficient measures to help farmers conserve resources, reduce costs and stay up to date with farming practices and technology.
7. Promote the use of the American Farmland Trust “Farmland for a New Generation New York” program by local farmers and/or startup operations who are seeking land and existing farmers/landowners who want to keep their land in farming.
8. Encourage farmers and other agricultural interests who could benefit from business and financial planning assistance or other farm planning or operational assistance to utilize the services of the Cornell Small Farms Program and Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, as well as guidance from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.
9. Work with Erie County to improve access to broadband communication service in the Town to further assist local farmers and agricultural businesses.
10. Work with Erie County and other local farming organizations to help farmers expand local markets for locally grown products.
11. Ensure that farmers are advised on the various tax relief programs that are available to help reduce their tax burden, as well as viable environmental management programs.
12. Encourage farmers to explore and take advantage of federal and State programs that assist with the transition to organic farming or other farm technologies that could be of benefit.
13. Explore the potential for establishing a Farm to School Project program to encourage the Grand Island School District to purchase locally grown produce and other farm products.
14. Encourage farmers to utilize the Climate Resiliency Farming Program offered by the Soil and Water Conservation Service to assist with climate change related issues and opportunities.



***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

***GOAL 4: Ensure a Better Educated Community***

Farming on Grand Island has transitioned to smaller activities and enterprises, with a growing number of individuals new to their craft. It is important that local farmers understand what they are doing and are aware of the resources available to help them educate themselves to become better at what they do. Additionally, it is important for the public to understand agricultural practices and how farms operate to help achieve local support and acceptance.

1. Utilize the Agriculture and Farmland Planning Committee and Grand Island Farms, Inc. to promote educational programs and training offered by the Cornell University Small Farms Program, Farmland for a New Generation New York, and other entities in the region to help existing farmers and those interested in farming careers gain a greater understanding of agricultural practices and strengthen the farming community on Grand Island.
2. Encourage Erie County and other local organizations to offer training in basic business management techniques for farmers.
3. Ensure that farmers are advised on the various tax relief programs that are available to help reduce their tax burden, as well as viable environmental management programs.
4. Utilize the Farmer's Market and other similar events to help educate residents on the benefits of local farming.
5. Encourage farmers to explore and take advantage of federal and State programs that assist with the transition to organic farming or other farm technologies that could be of benefit.
6. Have clear information available at the Grand Island Town Clerk's and Code Enforcement offices on allowable farm uses.
7. Help to educate residents living in subdivision who keep animals to be conscientious and considerate of the quality of life of their neighbors.





**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

**Implementation Matrix**

This section outlines the action plan to achieve the goals and implement the Resource Guide’s various recommendations. The matrix shown on the following pages does not cover each and every possible action nor the exact method for carrying it out; it is intended to give direction and give insight into level of effort, parties that can lead or help carry out the action, and its level of importance/priority. The Resource Guide is intended to be a working document that lays out the recommendations to protect and promote agriculture and farming on Grand Island in the following manner:

1. **Goal** – These tie the recommendations back to the original goal outlined in earlier sections of the Resource Guide and provides background.
2. **Recommendation** – The specific recommendation to help achieve the noted goal.
3. **Action Type** – The guide calls out several recommendations that involve policy decisions, initiating programs and committees, regulatory changes, communication and coordination with agencies, and securing funding for future undertakings. Each recommendation is categorized by various action types, including:
  - a. **Funding or Capital Improvement:** An action that requires the need for an investment on behalf of the Town, whether through a Capital Improvement Program, budget lien item, grant funding, or a combination thereof.
  - b. **Policy:** Actions that result in the establishment of a specific policy enacted by the Town Board to govern future decision-making regarding agriculture and farming promotion and protection.
  - c. **Program:** A plan, activity, committee, proposal or similar action.
  - d. **Regulation:** An action that consists of the development of a new or amended local regulation in the Town Code to further the protection and promotion of agriculture and farming on Grand Island.
4. **Time Frame** – The level of importance of the action or priority; some actions can be achieved right away while others may require a multi-year effort. An annual review of the Resource Guide can help to identify actions to undertake based on this scale as well as refine the time frame listing based on funding and/or other initiatives. The time frame is based on the following scale:
  - a. **Near-Term:** To be implemented immediately following adoption (within the first year)
  - b. **Short-Term:** An action to be implemented within 18 to 24 months of adoption



## Town of Grand Island

### Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming

- c. **Long-Term:** A longer-term action that would likely follow the implementation of other actions and/or take up to 3+ years to carry out
  - d. **Ongoing:** An ongoing action item
5. **Estimated Costs** – The estimated level cost for implementing the recommendation ranging from \$ (low) to \$\$\$ (Near-Term)
  6. **Participants & Partners** – Those local groups, agencies, Boards, who have a stake in or the potential to influence an action through funding, review, permitting, technical assistance, etc., including internal and external entities. This may not include all those that could be involved, but at least gives an idea to who should be “at the table” to coordinate efforts.

#### Goal 1: Protect Lands and Resources Critical to the Long-Term Success, Viability and Resiliency of Agriculture of any Size or Scale

Recommendation	Action Type	Time Frame	Est. Cost	Participants & Partners
Adopt the Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agricultural and Farming and post it on the Town’s website	Regulation	Near-Term	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Clerk, Erie County Planning and Development, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Maintain and Better Utilize the Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee	Program	Near-Term	\$	Grand Island Town Board
Amend the Town’s Right-to-Farm Law to comply with State requirements	Regulation	Near-Term	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Erie County Planning and Development, NYSDOS
Encourage farmland owners to seek designation or to remain in the Erie County Agriculture District	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Revise Residential-Agriculture 1 zoning district or adopt a new A-Agriculture District to effectively allow and protect agricultural uses	Regulation	Near-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Agricultural Advisory Committee and Planning Board, Erie County Planning and Development

**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>Goal 1: Protect Lands and Resources Critical to the Long-Term Success, Viability and Resiliency of Agriculture of any Size or Scale</b>					
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>	
Update zoning to include provisions for small-scale (hobby) and non-commercial agricultural uses	Regulation	Near-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Agricultural Advisory Committee and Planning Board, Erie County Planning and Development	
Eliminate zoning restrictions on farm buildings as principal structures	Regulation	Near-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Agricultural Advisory Committee and Planning Board, Erie County Planning and Development	
Revise Incentive and Cluster zoning regulations to recognize farming as a means for open space preservation	Regulation	Near-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Agricultural Advisory Committee and Planning Board, Erie County Planning and Development	
Ensure that notice requirements in the NYS Agricultural District Law are followed (proper use of agricultural data statements)	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Clerk, Building Department	
Support local farmers markets to expand the availability of local farm products	Policy	Ongoing	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Grand Island Chamber of Commerce	
Work with Erie County and other Towns to carry out goals of AFPP	Policy	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board and Planning Board, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Farm Bureau	
Encourage farming interests to take advantage of programs offered by USDA and NRCS, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water District and American Farmland Trust	Policy	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc.	
Amend incentive zoning regulations to include conservation easements	Regulation	Short-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board and Planning Board, Erie County Planning	

**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>Goal 1: Protect Lands and Resources Critical to the Long-Term Success, Viability and Resiliency of Agriculture of any Size or Scale</b>				
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>
In future, if needed, explore feasibility of local tax abatement program for conservation easements	Program	Long-term	\$\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Town Tax Assessor, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Western New York Land Conservancy

<b>GOAL 2: Promote the link between farms and food, and farms and secondary income, to increase awareness by the non-farm community, grow the industry and help ensure the long-term sustainability of farming activities on Grand Island</b>				
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>
Be supportive of an "Eat Local" campaign and support Grand Island Farmers' Markets	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Town Board, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, Cornell Cooperative Extension
Update the Town's website to include a recognizable icon/link on the homepage for the Resource Guide and important information on farming in the Town	Program	Immediate	\$	Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee Assistance
Encourage farming interests to take advantage of information and programs offered by USDA and NRCS, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water District and American Farmland Trust	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development

**Town of Grand Island**

**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>GOAL 2: Promote the link between farms and food, and farms and secondary income, to increase awareness by the non-farm community, grow the industry and help ensure the long-term sustainability of farming activities on Grand Island</b>					
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>	
Work with Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Bureau and others to enhance/strengthen the information they offer on local farmers markets	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development	
Work with Erie County and others to expand markets for locally grown products	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	
Promote the establishment of Community Supported Agriculture cooperatives on Grand Island	Program	Short-Term	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc. Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	
Establish a public information campaign to educate residents and others on the benefits of farming on Grand Island and build local support	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	
Develop a "Farming on Grand Island" packet to provide to new and existing residents on Grand Island	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Grand Island Central School District, Chamber of Commerce	
Promote the use of small-scale, on-farm alternative energy technologies	Policy	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, NYSERDA	
Encourage creation of a "one-stop" source of information on resources to support farms and agriculture	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce	



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>GOAL 3: Enhance and Expand the Agricultural Economy of the Town and its Capacity to Respond to Economic and Climate Trends and Changes</b>					
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>	
Encourage farming interests to take advantage of information and programs offered by USDA and NRCS, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water District and American Farmland Trust	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development	
Be supportive of an “Eat Local” campaign and support the Farmers’ Market	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Town Board, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Grand Island Chamber of Commerce	
Work with Erie County and others to expand markets for locally grown products	Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension. Grand Island Farms, Inc.	
Encourage farmers to explore and take advantage of programs that assist with transitioning to organic farming or crop diversification	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	
Encourage farming interests to take advantage of business and financial planning assistance offered by Cornell University	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cooperative Extension	
Encourage farmers to utilize the ECSWCD Climate Resiliency Farming Program	Program	Short-Term	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District	
Explore the potential to establish a Farm to School program with school district	Program/ Funding	Short-Term	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development,	

**Town of Grand Island  
Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>GOAL 3: Enhance and Expand the Agricultural Economy of the Town and its Capacity to Respond to Economic and Climate Trends and Changes</b>					
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>	
Work with Erie County to improve broadband communication services in the Town	Program/ Funding	Short-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development,	
Encourage rental of vacant lands to local farmers for agricultural use	Policy	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	
Advise farmers on available tax relief programs and environmental management programs	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District	
Promote the establishment of Community Supported Agriculture cooperatives on Grand Island	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc. Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	
Use Erie County and Grand Island websites to post events, newsletters, other info on benefits of farming	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development	
Ensure that Grand Island Farmer's Markets are included on the New York State Farmer's Markets Federation listing	Policy	Short-Term	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, New York State Farmer's Markets Federation	
Promote information on Erie County and Cornell Cooperative Extension websites about farms, farm stands, farm markets, etc.	Program	Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension	

**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>GOAL 4: Ensure a Better Educated Community</b>						
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>		
Have clear information on Town regulations and policies available at the Grand Island Town Clerk's and Building Department offices	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning, Town Clerk, Building Department		
Encourage farming interests to take advantage of information and programs offered by USDA and NRCS, Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water District and American Farmland Trust	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development		
Promote the use of the American Farmland Trust "Farmland for a New Generation New York" program to keep land in farm use	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension		
Encourage retired farmers and owners of large vacant properties to lease land for farming	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension		
Encourage Erie County and other local agencies and organizations to offer training in basic business management for farmers	Program	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension		
Update the Town's website to include a recognizable icon/link on the homepage for the Resource Guide and important information on farming in the Town	Program	Near-Term	\$	Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee Assistance		
Advise farmers on available tax relief programs and environmental management programs	Program/ Funding	Short-Term	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District		

**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

<b>GOAL 4: Ensure a Better Educated Community</b>						
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Type</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Est. Cost</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Partners</b>		
Establish a public information campaign to educate residents and others on the benefits of farming on Grand Island and build local support	Program	Short-Term	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc., Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension		
Develop a “Farming on Grand Island” packet to provide to new and existing residents on Grand Island	Program	Short-Term/ Ongoing	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Grand Island Central School District, Chamber of Commerce, local realtors		
Encourage the Grand Island school district to participate in the “Agriculture in the Classroom” program to increase agricultural literacy	Program/ Funding	Near-Term	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Grand Island Central School District, Grand Island Farms, Inc.		
Install “Grand Island is a Right-to-Farm Community” signs at entries to Town	Funding	Short-Term	\$\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Highway Department, New York State Department of Transportation, Grand Island DPW		
Use the Agriculture and Farming Planning Committee to help educate property owners in residential subdivisions, who keep animals or undertake other farming activities, to be conscientious and considerate of the quality of life of their neighbors	Program/ Policy	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Grand Island Farms, Inc.		
Use the Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee to help mitigate conflicts and disputes between farmers and non-farm residents	Program/ Regulatory	Near-Term/ Ongoing	\$	Grand Island Town Board, Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee		
Encourage creation of a “one-stop” source of information on resources to support farms and agriculture	Program	Short-Term	\$\$	Town Agricultural and Farming Planning Committee, Erie County Planning and Development, Erie County Cornell Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce		





***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**SECTION VII – GLOSSARY, RESOURCES AND REFERENCES**

**Glossary**

ACOE – US Army Corps. of Engineers

AEM – Agriculture Environmental Management

AFPB – Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board

AFT – American Farmland Trust

AMA – Agricultural Management Assistance

AML – Agriculture and Markets Law

CCE – Cornell Cooperative Extension

COCS – Cost of Community Services Study

EED – Enhanced Environmental Overlay District

EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentive Program

FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency

GBNRTC – Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRI – Natural Resources Inventory

NYS – New York State

NYS DAM – New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

NYS DEC – New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

NYS ERDA – New York State Energy Research and Development Agency

OS – Open Space

PACE – Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement

PDR – Purchase of Development Rights

REDC – Regional Economic Development Council

SARE – Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education

TDR – Transfer of Development Rights

USDA – US Department of Agriculture



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

**Resources**

Agricultural Marketing Services

[www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-sector/urban-agriculture](http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-sector/urban-agriculture)

Alfred State College of Technology

[www.catalog.alfredstate.edu/current/department/agriculture-veterinary-technology](http://www.catalog.alfredstate.edu/current/department/agriculture-veterinary-technology)

American Farmland Trust

New York State Office

(518) 581-0078

[www.farmland.org/newyork](http://www.farmland.org/newyork)

Farmland Information Center

(800) 370-4879

[www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org)

Western New York Office

(716) 652-0100

Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Science

<https://cals.cornell.edu/>

Cornell Cooperative Extension

(607) 255-2237

[www.cce.cornell.edu](http://www.cce.cornell.edu)

Erie County Office

(716) 652-5400

[erie.cce.cornell.edu](http://erie.cce.cornell.edu)

Farm to School

(607) 255-2730

<http://farmtoschool.cce.cornell.edu>

Cornell Small Farms Program

Cornell University

<https://smallfarms.cornell.edu>

Erie County Department of Environment and Planning

(716) 858-8390

[www2.erie.gov/environment](http://www2.erie.gov/environment)

Erie County Farm Bureau

(716) 652-5151

[www.ecfarm.com](http://www.ecfarm.com)

Erie County Soil and Water Conservation Service

(716) 652-8480

[www.ecswcd.org](http://www.ecswcd.org)

Farm Answers

University of Minnesota Center for Farm Financial Management/

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

<https://farmanswers.org>

“Farmland for a New Generation New York” Program, American Farmland Trust.

<https://nyfarmlandfinder.org>



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

Internal Revenue Service

(800) 829-4933

[www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)

Land Trust Alliance, Northeast Office

(518) 587-0774

[www.lta.org](http://www.lta.org)

National Agricultural Statistics Service

<https://www.nass.usda.gov>

National Young Farmers Coalition

[www.youngfarmers.org](http://www.youngfarmers.org)

New Farmers

<https://newfarmers.usda.gov>

New York Farm Bureau

(518) 436-8495

[www.nyfb.org](http://www.nyfb.org)

New York FarmNet

(800) 547- 3276

[www.nyfarmnet.org](http://www.nyfarmnet.org)

New York Farm Viability Institute

(315) 453-3823

<https://nyfvi.org>

New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee

(518) 457-3738

[https://agriculture.ny.gov/soil-and-water/soil-water-conservation-committee?utm\\_medium=301&utm\\_source=www.nys-soilandwater.org](https://agriculture.ny.gov/soil-and-water/soil-water-conservation-committee?utm_medium=301&utm_source=www.nys-soilandwater.org)

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

(518) 457-3880

(800) 554-4501

<http://agriculture.ny.gov>

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Region 9

(716) 851-7000 General

Water quality (716) 851-7070    Permits (716) 851-7165    Forests (716) 851-7010

[www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)





**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
(518) 237-8643  
[www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/tax-credit-programs/](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/tax-credit-programs/)

New York State Department of State  
(518) 474-4752  
[www.dos.state.ny.us](http://www.dos.state.ny.us)

New York State Energy Research and Development Authority  
(866) NYSERDA  
(518) 862-1090  
[www.nyserda.org](http://www.nyserda.org)

New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation  
(800) 200-2200  
[www.nysefc.org](http://www.nysefc.org)

New York State Farm Service Agency  
(315) 477-6300  
[www.fsa.usda.gov/ny](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ny)

New York State Department of Taxation and Finance  
[www.tax.ny.gov](http://www.tax.ny.gov)

New York State Office of Real Property Services, Agricultural Unit  
(518) 486-5446 / (518) 474-2982  
[www.orps.state.ny.us](http://www.orps.state.ny.us)

New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee - NYS Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
(518) 457-3738  
[www.nys-soilandwater.org](http://www.nys-soilandwater.org)

Niagara County Community College  
[www.niagaracc.suny.edu/programs](http://www.niagaracc.suny.edu/programs)

Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE)  
(802) 656-0471  
[www.nesare.org](http://www.nesare.org)

Small Business Administration  
(800) 827-5722  
[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)



**Town of Grand Island**  
**Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming**

USDA Alternative Farming Systems Information Center  
[www.nal.usda.gov/asfic](http://www.nal.usda.gov/asfic)

USDA Farm Services Agency  
(716) 652-1400 (Erie County Office)  
<https://fsa.usda.gov>

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
<https://nifa.usda.gov>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/urbanagriculture/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/landuse/urbanagriculture/)

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – New York  
(315) 477-6504  
[www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov)

USDA Rural Development - USDA Rural Business Cooperative Service  
(315) 477-6400  
[www.rurdev.usda.gov/](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/)

Western New York Land Conservancy  
(716) 687-1225  
<https://wnylc.org>

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***Town of Grand Island***  
***Resource Guide for the Protection and Promotion of Agriculture and Farming***

**References**

*Agricultural Census*, USDA, 2007 and 2012.

*Agricultural Landowners Guide*, American Farmland Trust, 2010.

*American Fact Finder*, U.S. Census Bureau.

*Article 25-AAA of the Agriculture and Markets Law*, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

*Bridging the Future – 2018 Town of Grand Island Comprehensive Plan*; Clark Patterson Lee.

*Cost of Community Services Fact Sheet*, American Farmland Trust, August 2004.

*Erie County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, 2012*; American Farmland Trust.

*Erie-Niagara County Framework for Regional Growth, 2006*; Wendel Companies.

Erie County Real Property Tax Service.

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/economics/economics.cfm>

*Farms Under Threat: The State of America's Farmland, 2018*; American Farmland Trust.

*Grand Island Town Code*; Town of Grand Island, New York.

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

*Strategy for Prosperity – Western New York Regional Economic Development Plan*; New York State Regional Economic Development Council.

U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers, Buffalo District Office.

*Western New York Regional Sustainability Plan*, New York State Regional Economic Development Council.

*Your Land Is Your Legacy: A Guide to Planning for the Future of Your Farm*; American Farmland Trust.

