

# **Agriculture Committee**

## **Emergency Executive Order 01-05022020**

### **FINAL REPORT | January 18, 2021**

On July 20, 2020, the following Executive Order was adopted by City Council.

#### **Emergency Executive Order 01-05022020**

In order to secure the health of the residents of Auburn during this emergency, and to prepare for future events in which dependence on locally sourced food products would be needed. The Agriculture Advisory Committee (AAC) will focus on the below list of critical tasks for the betterment of the entire city. In order to facilitate communications between the City Council and the AAC, Councilor Katie Boss will act as the Interim Chair of the Committee for the duration of the emergency plus 120 days or until a final report is submitted and accepted by the City Council.

- Inventory current commercial farm production, and assess ability and needs of local farms to rapidly increase production of current products and diversification potential.
- Assess food systems impacts from COVID, and projected disruptions/shortages in food access.
- Calculate the short and long term food consumption needs of our residents.
- Investigate and provide recommendations on zoning and economic incentives needed to attract commercial infrastructure including: storage, refrigeration, processing, or any other type of food infrastructure.
- Propose zoning amendments that would facilitate, with minimal conflict, subsistence and commercial agriculture production in all non ARP zones.
- Formulate a plan for increasing local and regional market opportunities and corresponding marketing initiatives to help Agriculture operations grow.
- Create a local/regional awareness campaign surrounding Auburn's food products so that as production increases, residents and visitors are aware of new sources of local food.

Other tasks can be added at the discretion of the Chair as long as they do not prevent a timely handling of the initial tasks delegated.

# Responses and Updates to Emergency Executive Order 01-05022020

- **Inventory current commercial farm production and assess ability and needs of local farms to rapidly increase production of current products and diversification potential.**

The Agriculture Committee partnered with several sources to inventory commercial farm production.

- The Lewiston Auburn Chamber of Commerce Inventory found that there are over 80 farmer/producers in Androscoggin County. See Appendix A
- Blackie's Farm Fresh Produce sells to approximately 220 buyers. See Appendix B
- Blackie's Farm Fresh Produce purchases from 35 farms and 19 producers See Appendix C
- A list was compiled of farmland and open space in the City of Auburn. See Appendix D
- Auburn's agriculture hub brings Ag Zone data to life. Through GIS technology, the City of Auburn is able to share data in a whole new way. Using "ArcGIS Hub," Auburn has created a data portal through which we can share information, mapping, reports, and much more. [Auburn's Agriculture & Resource Protection Zone Hub.](#)

- **Assess food systems impacts from COVID, and projected disruptions/shortages in food access.**

The current food system in Auburn is highly dependent on the national and international supply chain systems. There have been many supply chain disruptions, but to date, they have not had a severe impact on the food supply in Auburn, but there has been an impact on prices.

The U.S. Department of Labor Statistics provides information monthly on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on price indexes and data. [See Monthly Report Here](#)

- **Calculate the short and long term food consumption needs of our residents.**

The committee was able to gather data on food insecurity needs from the Good Shepard Food Bank and food consumption needs from the [USDA Economic Research Service](#), as well as the average number of pounds of foods eaten by the [average American adult per year](#). After reaching out to state and federal agriculture departments and organizations the committee determined that it is not realistic for a local agriculture committee to have the capacity to accurately calculate the short- and long-term food consumption needs of the citizens of the City of Auburn.

- **Investigate and provide recommendations on zoning and economic incentives needed to attract commercial infrastructure including: storage, refrigeration, processing, or any other type of food infrastructure.**
  - Zoning Recommendation:
    - While the committee continues to work on zoning recommendations through our working group, it has been determined that at this point in time the city should not reduce the amount of land that is currently zoned for agriculture.
  - Economic Incentives Recommendation:
    - The city already participates in the State of Maine Municipal Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Tax Increment. TIFs can be utilized to further develop commercial infrastructure including storage, refrigeration, processing, or any other type of food infrastructure.
    - The State of Maine Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program can be utilized in Auburn
      - The State has invested approximately \$20 million in federal funds to help Maine farmers and food processors improve critical infrastructure. This funding will enable farms and agricultural businesses to pursue upgrades that will mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19, increase the supply of Maine-grown food, enhance supply chain resilience, and help grow and sustain one of Maine's heritage industries. Learn More [Here](#)
    - The State of Maine also provides grants and loans for agriculture that include:
      - [Agricultural Development Grant](#)  
This program provides cost-share grants to conduct market promotion, market research and development, value-added processing and new technology demonstration projects.
      - [Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund](#)  
The Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund (AMLF) provides financing to help Maine agricultural businesses undertake projects to enhance the viability and vitality of the farm, and improve the manufacturing, marketability and production of their products.

### Dairy Improvement Fund

The Dairy Improvement Loan Fund (DIF) provides financing to help Maine agricultural businesses undertake projects to enhance the viability and vitality of the farm, and improve the manufacturing, marketability and production of their products. Note: At this time all available funds in the program have been committed.

### Maine Farms for the Future

The Maine Farms for the Future Program is a competitive grant program that provides selected farms with business planning assistance and investment support.

### USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

The USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBG) program is a competitive grant program, solicited once a year, which funds market research, market promotion and new technology projects specifically to benefit specialty crop producers. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and a Review Committee select projects to fund through a local, competitive proposal process. Selected projects are submitted to the USDA for review, and the Maine DACF administers the Specialty Crop Block Grant each year. Grants typically are provided to projects that will help a number of businesses, rather than support individual businesses.

### Maine and the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Each year, the Maine DACF accepts applications for Specialty Crop Block Grants, evaluating proposals in a competitive, statewide process. The program provides federal funding to projects identified as critical at the local level. Past and current awards have supported research into Maine's most crucial agricultural commodities, development of pest management strategies, school initiatives, and food safety projects.

- **Propose zoning amendments that would facilitate, with minimal conflict, subsistence and commercial agriculture production in all non ARP zones.**
  - The Committee has a working group that is still investigating zoning amendments.
- **Formulate a plan for increasing local and regional market opportunities and corresponding marketing initiatives to help Agriculture operations grow.**

- This is this in the research and development stage. At this point we believe the plan will include the need for the city to educate residents and farmers on the incentives and programs available for increasing local and regional market opportunities and corresponding marketing initiatives to help agriculture operations grow.
  
- **Create a local/regional awareness campaign surrounding Auburn's food products so that as production increases, residents and visitors are aware of new sources of local food.**
  - To date, the committee has done the following awareness campaigns.
    - Created Story Walk presentations
      - Our committee worked on and collaborated with the Conservation Committee to present a vibrant and thoughtful story walk to help visitors understand some of the challenges facing our city in our efforts to be self-sustaining in woodlot production, local foods, invasive species and conserving and preserving our natural resources.
    - Local Farm Snapshot Tour
      - The committee organized a diverse three farm tour in South Auburn in October featuring:
        - Bell Farm - a large, multi-generation farm specializing in potato and corn growing. The tour included the caves and processing facilities that have been incorporated to support their operation.
        - The Farmers Garden at Caron Farm - another multi-generational farm that specializes in creative small plot vegetable production offering a diversity in vegetable crops of high quality. This operation specializes in hot peppers that they process into a tangy powder to add to various types of culinary dishes.
        - Compassionate Composting  
Michelle Melaragno guided attendees through her newly expanded large and small animal composting facility - one of only 2 in the state that successfully composts large animals, turning those remains into an eco-friendly garden compost for home gardens.

- Auburn School Meals Program
  - The committee is in communications with the Auburn School Department food procurement staff to discuss their needs and initiate a conversation to begin the process of incorporating local foods into their school meals menus.

**Other tasks can be added at the discretion of the Chair as long as they do not prevent a timely handling of the initial tasks delegated.**

### **Work Plan**

The Agriculture Committee has developed a work plan that we continue to prioritize based local recommendations and City Council requests.

See Appendix E