

# AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONS



*Tobacco Fields in Hadley*

## **What are the objectives of Agricultural Commissions?**

To create programs to protect prime farmlands, and incentives to encourage the growth and development of farm-related businesses.

## **Why do we need an Agricultural Commission?**

The incremental loss of farmlands and agricultural heritage is one of the major issues facing the Pioneer Valley region. Suburban sprawl is consuming acres of farmland and open space. The American Farmland Trust listed the Connecticut River Valley as one of the twenty “most endangered agricultural regions in the

United States”. The protection and maintenance of farmlands in agricultural use is important in maintaining the region’s ties to its farming history, preserving open space and promoting smart growth.

## **What does an Agricultural Commission do?**

An Agricultural Commission is an appointed town standing committee, usually comprised of farmers, that provides a voice for the agricultural community and improves the visibility of farming in the community. Agricultural commission can tackle a whole variety of tasks, depending on the community. Here in the Pioneer Valley, Ag Commissions have sponsored Right-to-Farm bylaws, inventoried and identified agricultural properties in the community, created guides and brochures for community farms, researched information and educational resources for farmer, and have hosted community agricultural events. Ag Commissions can also advocate at the local and state level for zoning and regulatory changes that benefit existing and future farming, and work with other town boards and committees, such as the Planning Board, to ensure that the community actively retains agricultural and forest land and agricultural businesses.

## **DID YOU KNOW...**

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission can assist your local Agricultural Commission in developing an inventory of existing farms in your community as well as develop a map with Chapter 61A lands, agricultural lands, prime agricultural soils, and parcel data (if available).

## EXAMPLES FROM THE PIONEER VALLEY

### Town of Hatfield Agricultural Commission

The Town of Hatfield adopted their Agricultural Advisory Committee (ACC) in 2001 and has been extremely active in promoting agricultural activities in their community. In its first year, the ACC sponsored two educational seminars on farm support and farmland protection efforts, one for town officials and another for farm and forest land owners. The ACC also researched and assisted in the implementation of agricultural water rates for farm operations in town.

Other notable activities include a brochure developed by the ACC entitled "Hatfield Farms," which highlights farms and farm stands throughout town with product and sales information for each, including a map locating each establishment. Over 2,500 copies of the brochure were distributed at Town Meeting in 2004, with an update brochure distributed in 2005.

Finally, in 2005, with seed money from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Hatfield ACC commissioned a mural with the town's high school art program depicting farm scenes, activities and farmers in town. The mural was then displayed on a barn in a prominent location in town, then moved to the town's farm museum for the winter. Due to the large success of the first mural, a second mural was recently completed and third mural will be completed next year. The town plans to display the three murals each spring.

For more information on Agricultural Commissions, and to access a copy of the "Agricultural Commission Handbook," please visit the [Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources website](#).

### [MODEL AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION WARRANT LANGUAGE](#)

#### Communities that have established Agricultural Commissions

Amherst  
Belchertown  
Blandford  
Chester  
Chesterfield  
Cummington  
Granby  
Granville  
Hadley  
Hatfield  
Ludlow  
Middlefield  
Monson  
Montgomery  
Northampton  
Plainfield  
Southampton  
Southwick  
Westhampton  
Wilbraham  
Williamsburg