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Seneca County has a humid, continental type climate. The average monthly precipitation in Seneca County is comparatively uniform, with no well-defined wet or dry seasons. Average annual rainfall is 33 inches, with average snowfall of 60 inches. The average annual temperature is 47°F with the average January temperature being 14°-32°F and July 59°-81°F. There is an average of 160 frost-free days.

## Changes in the Agriculture Landscape Over the Last 20 Years

The Agricultural Climate in Seneca County continues to remain relatively healthy. The closure of major industrial operation and the Seneca Army Depot, and the increase of Tourism related Agriculture has brought Agriculture more to the forefront of the public consciousness.

The size of farms continues to be very diverse. Some farms have expanded and become the family/corporation farm so as to take advantage of “economy of scale”, while other family farm operations are working smaller farms “part time” and working off the farms to supplement farm income. As the Amish and Mennonites continue to move into the area in greater numbers they are typically operating smaller farm units. While there has been a small increase in the number of acres farmed – this was a matter of return some land that had been taken out of production to active use. This is not a trend that can continue however, as almost all land in Seneca County that is usable for farm production, and that is not owned by a public entity or developed as residential or commercial use, is now in production.

Meanwhile farmland is taken out of production by the many small cuts. The County Population peaked in 1970, but our number of housing units continues to increase. New home sites have been developed outside of population centers such as Villages, and taken acres out of production. Seneca County’s growth patterns are not the 25 + unit subdivisions that people recognize when a large area is converted to housing. Rather the pattern that we more often see is the single lot here, and there. One of the patterns of development that means that no comprehensive development plans are presented to local community boards and lots of offered for sale in a trickle of development that keeps subdivisions from having to be reviewed by the Dept of Health. The other way that land owners avoid Heath Department review is by sizing the lots they sell at

just over 5 acres. The net result of this action being taking a greater area out of potential production.

As energy costs increase for society as a whole, some sector of the agricultural community have been on the forefront of looking for answers. Two ethanol plants developed in the region, and are an active local market for grain sales. Research is also being conducted regarding other forms of bio-mass for ethanol production, and for the production of other bio-fuels such as soy diesel. More local and regional farmers are considering the use of alternate energies.



### Promote Locally Grown Products

- ◆ Farmers may be able to increase their direct market sales by researching available markets. Markets not being accessed for direct sales may include farmers’ markets, restaurants, supermarkets, and farm stands. In addition, market research may reveal alternative processing markets that are presently untapped. Helping farmers to develop marketing plans could assist in them utilizing previously unidentified sales areas.
- ◆ Expand farmers’ markets in areas that are presently not served. Conduct market research to ensure locations can support a viable market. Farmer commitment to the market is essential to the success of farmers’ markets. Quality products that are predictably available enable the market to build a strong customer base. Promote and advertise farm markets.
- ◆ Fully implement the New York “Buy Local” campaign for Seneca County. The logo and supporting materials are available for farmers in the region to identify their products as locally grown. Wider distribution and use of the logo will enable consumers to identify and choose their neighbors’ products. The mission of the Buy Local campaign is to create awareness, support, and understanding of the importance of local farmers to our region by local consumers and businesses. It also seeks to increase the consumption of locally and regionally grown farm products to the benefit of everyone in the region.
- ◆ Increase sales of locally grown products through supermarkets. Some supermarkets in Seneca and Ontario Counties purchase directly from local and regional growers. These stores feature the farm in the store display and promote the freshness and high quality of local products. Providing lists of local growers and products to the supermarket produce buyers may facilitate local purchases. Continue to supply consistent, high quality products while increasing the variety of products purchased.
- ◆ Develop electronic and printed promotion materials that list agricultural products and services that include their locations. In 2010 Seneca County Cooperative Extension developed a brochure “Experience the Farms of Seneca County”. This brochure may also be found at: [www.senecacountyce.org](http://www.senecacountyce.org). This brochure identified the location and contact information for: Bedding Plants and Nurseries, Farm Markets and Crafts, Livestock Farms, Produce Farms Stands













### Goal 3: Provide an Ongoing Community Education Program for the Non-Farm Public

#### Form an Agriculture Promotion Council

- ◆ An agriculture promotion council for Seneca County or a cooperative of regional counties should be formed to provide leadership in agriculture promotion. This group should be comprised of a cross section of farmers representing every kind of agriculture in the county. Agribusiness and agriservice people would also make a valuable contribution to the group. The agricultural promotion council should organize and coordinate agricultural promotion activities. One of its charges would be to insure that agriculture is represented at the numerous community festivals and events that are already available. The council would build a strong, continuous relationship with the local media to facilitate coverage of farm businesses and agriservice. Initial leadership for this group could come from agriculture agencies such as the Seneca County Farm Bureau or Cornell Cooperative Extension. The long-term goal should be that the agriculture promotion council would be an independent group operating under the leadership of farmers.

#### Develop a Seneca County Agriculture Web Site

- ◆ Develop an educational and promotional web site for Seneca County Agriculture. The primary purpose of this web site would be to provide pertinent information about agriculture for the non-farm community. Secondly, the web site could serve as a marketing tool for attracting new farmers to the area, thereby enhancing the economic stability of agriculture in the county.

#### Produce a Video about Seneca County Agriculture

- ◆ Develop a video geared for the non-farm public about agriculture in Seneca County. The video should address the economic and social contribution agriculture makes to the community. This video should be produced for the adult non-farm public, as there are already several well-done children's videos about agriculture. In addition, the Farmland Protection Action Kit provides videos for government officials. The Finger Lakes Interpretive Center, and especially community festivals and events would be excellent venues for viewing by a large segment of the non-farm public.

#### Encourage Participation in “Agriculture in the Classroom”

- ◆ Encourage participation in the “Agriculture in the Classroom” program in the elementary schools. Cornell University coordinates this integrative curriculum that is designed to be used in conjunction with the state-mandated curriculum, and is especially effective when presented with the assistance of a local farmer.

#### Strengthen Continued Support of “Fun on the Farm” Events

- ◆ “Fun on the Farm” is an excellent on-going agricultural education and promotion program for which the Seneca County Farm Bureau has historically provided leadership. On-farm activities for the non-farm public foster understanding and support for agriculture, and deserve continued and increased support among the agricultural community. The formation of an Agriculture Promotion Council is one strategy to facilitate spreading the workload of organizing this event.

## Goal 4: Acknowledge and Enhance the Environmental Stewardship of Agricultural Businesses

### Acknowledge the Role Agriculture Plays in Environmental Stewardship

- ◆ Involve all stakeholders in the process of protecting the environment. Bring farmers and environmental protection organizations together to discuss and plan methods to protect the environment. While agriculture provides the rural character and aesthetic landscape that county residents and tourists value, it can often be a source of water quality degradation if not managed responsibly. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge and enhance the environmental role agriculture plays.

### Promote Sustainable Agriculture

- ◆ Sustainable Agricultural practices seek to satisfy human needs for food and other fiber, to reduce energy use, and to enhance Environmental Stewardship.

### Implement the Agricultural Environmental Management Program on Seneca County Farms.

- ◆ The Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program is a statewide environmental stewardship program that is coordinated by the NYS Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Cornell Cooperative Extension. The AEM program coordinates partnerships among existing agricultural and environmental conservation programs to reduce agricultural water pollution. AEM helps farmers to:
  - ✓ Assess environmental concerns associated with their farming operations
  - ✓ Implement environmental practices to address identified concerns
  - ✓ Understand and comply with state and federal environmental regulations
  - ✓ Promote to continuously improve soil conservation measures
  - ✓ Reduce fertilizer and pesticide use
  - ✓ Protect drinking water from disease carrying organisms, pesticides, and excess nutrients

- ✓ Improve relations between neighbors and communities
- ✓ Enhance wildlife habitats
- ✓ Maintain and improve water quality within and outside their watershed

Funding to support farmer participation should be made available from state and local sources.

## Goal 5: Preserve Prime Agricultural Land

Effectively Implement and Maintain the Agricultural District Program

- ◆ Maintain the effective implementation of the Agricultural District Program. Provide educational materials and training to town officials so they have a clear understanding of the benefits of the Agricultural District Program. Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau and the County Planning Department are excellent resources for the Agriculture District Program. The Seneca County Agricultural Enhancement Board can provide leadership in working with town officials to effectively implement Agriculture Districts.

Initiate Voluntary Farmland Preservation Programs

- ◆ Prime farmland in areas of increased development is at much risk of being removed from agricultural use. Most farmers prefer to keep their land in farming but in areas of increased development, it is difficult to transfer farm ownership because of the rising value of land. A voluntary Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program or a Lease of Development Rights Program can preserve farmland and its ensuing benefits for the whole community. PDR – which is voluntary and must be agreed upon by the landowner and the participating financial institution(s) - preserves open spaces and agricultural land by compensating landowners, who agree to keep their land in agriculture. The land is then restricted to agricultural use even if the land changes ownership. The restrictions take the form of conservation easements attached to land in perpetuity. Lease of Development Rights works much the same way only the rights are transferred for a set period.
- ◆ As farmland protection has been gaining attention, both the state and federal governments have established financial assistance programs for localities to purchase agricultural conservation easements. Towns developing PDR programs should give consideration to the following factors when deciding priorities for preservation:
  - ✓ Prime and unique agricultural soils
  - ✓ Participation in an agricultural district
  - ✓ Presence of other natural and/or cultural resources important to the community
  - ✓ Proximity to other farmland

- ✓ Proximity to land uses that minimize the potential for neighbor conflicts
- ✓ Land that provides buffering for parks or critical open spaces
- ✓ Importance in maintaining a viewshed
- ✓ Maintaining a base of farmer-owned farmland

#### Encourage Local Towns to Plan for Farmland Protection

- ◆ The Towns of Lodi, Junius and Romulus have worked with the New York State program that provides assistance to local towns for developing Local Farmland Protections. The Towns of Fayette and Varick included a significant Agriculture section in their Comprehensive Plans. Other towns in the County should be encouraged to develop local plans that support the continued viability of agriculture and promote the preservation of Prime Farmland.



## LIST OF APPENDIXES

Appendix A	Copy 2007 Census of Agriculture Summary Sheet for Seneca County
Appendix B	Seneca County Farm Statistics 2009 From NY Agricultural Statistics Service
Appendix C	Model Right to Farm Laws
Appendix D	Membership Seneca County Agriculture Enhancement Board
Appendix E	Policies and Application for Seneca County PDR Program
Appendix F	Reference Materials for USDA Agriculture Programs
Appendix G	Sections of NYS Law relating to Agricultural Fences
Appendix H	Agriculture and Markets Law Section 25AA relating to Agricultural Districts

