

Holden AgComm News



Our Mission Statement: To serve, promote, and enhance agriculture within the Town of Holden; To be a liaison between town officials and residents; To provide a resource to assist local farmers and help preserve the town's open space.

What we are plowing toward:

Working with the Select Board to do better reviews of Chap 61 properties

Creating a priority list of Chap 61 properties

Trying to establish an Open Space Preservation Fund

Our Meetings

Are open to the public and are held once a month on the 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 pm in the Selectman's Room of the Starbard Building

Next Meeting is scheduled for Sept 15th.

Chapter 61 Lands – Update

As mentioned in our last newsletter, the AgComm proposed to the Board of Selectmen a structured review process for lands planned to be removed from the restrictions of M.G.L. Chapter 61. Chapter 61 provides for reduced property taxes if an owner agrees to keep his/her property in agricultural/forest use. We are pleased to report that the BOS formally adopted this proposal as Town policy at their April meeting. We also wish to report that the policy has been used twice to carefully review two properties (both on River St.) proposed for removal from Chapter 61A. In each case, the AgComm solicited advice from other Town Boards and Commissions on the future usefulness of the properties and also asked several land conservation agencies for their interests. In both cases, (April and July) the conclusion was that the properties were not sufficiently unique to require preservation and they were released for development after a formal presentation at the BOS Public Hearing. While we are disappointed at the loss of more agriculture related land in Holden, it is encouraging to know that future requests will be thoughtfully and thoroughly reviewed, instead of the requests being rubber-stamped as they were in the past. Also, in late breaking news, the AgComm has been asked to lead the review of a third property (on Reservoir St) proposed for removal from Chap 61. We will let you know how this works out in our next newsletter.



Land Preservation Fund Initiative

As we reviewed the recent Chapter 61 properties being removed from agricultural use, it became very obvious that all similar future proposals would likely be approved, even if the properties had long term value to the Town, because there is no source of funding in place to match a bona-fide offer (which is a basic requirement of Chapter 61). At their August meeting, the BOS heard a proposal from the AgComm for the establishment of a Land Preservation Fund. This fund would hold monies set aside for land preservation. It would start with an initial deposit of a significant amount (\$100,000 was suggested) and then be added to each year during the normal budget process with a continuing payment (\$50,000 was suggested). The BOS was generally receptive to the idea and asked Selectman Ethier to work with the AgComm over the next several months to come up with a more detailed proposal which could be presented to the Town Manger in early fall as she begins to put together the FY 17 budget. We need your support for this initiative. If you have ideas about how such a fund should be put together, let us know. Write your favorite BOS members! Help us get this into the budget! Next May, we will need help again to vote for the actual funding when it comes up at Town Meeting.



We hope you've enjoyed this latest version of our newsletter. If there is a topic you wish for us to cover please let us know. Also, if you know someone whom you think may also enjoy this periodical, please forward us their information. Thank you, The Hold AgCom. To contact the Holden AgCom you may email us at holden.aqcom@gmail.com or you can reach our Chair Person Denise Cummings at northwoodsfarm@live.com.

Garden Drawing Winner -- Update

The AgComm's Garden Drawing winner had her two raised bed gardens built and filled in early May, just in time for planting. The project was completed quickly with lots of help from AgComm volunteers. The winner, planted her seeds and vegetable plants and they are doing well. She has harvested her first 'crop' too. Tasty cucumbers are just the first vegetables to get ripe.



We Have A Facebook Page!

Like us on Facebook! We are very excited about our new Facebook page. People can follow all the agricultural news, events and happenings within Holden on our page: <https://www.facebook.com/HoldenAgComm> We will still send out our periodic newsletter that has gotten rave reviews from our recipients. You can also view the latest edition on the town's website.

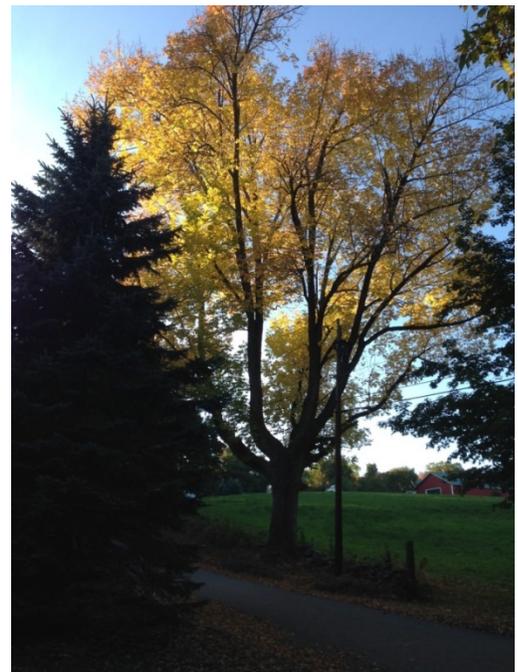
Locally Grown in the Heart of the Commonwealth

The newest way to connect with local farmers, markets, restaurants, and more in Central Mass. View our online directory of agricultural resources & Product Guide at www.centralmassgrown.org! Like & Follow us on Facebook. (<https://www.facebook.com/centralmassgrown>) Visit us at an upcoming event! If you support local food & agricultural products and want to connect with the source — this is the place! If you are a farm (food, livestock, equestrian, etc.), a grower, a farm/garden supplier; retailer; restaurant; or even an individual or business that wants to support us — JOIN US! Anyone can access the public directories (online & in print each March)! We hope to see you soon! Our mission is to promote the purchase of local agricultural products and to foster the education about its benefits to health, communities, the economy, and the environment.

A member of the Holden AgComm happens to be on the Board of Central Mass Grown ~ please feel free to reach out to her if you have questions or suggestions: Maleah Gustafson, maleah@guswebcom ; or info@centralmassgrown.org

New recruits

With all of the above mentioned activities, plus more to come, we are in need of a few good members and alternates. Time invested to our group is entirely up to the individual. We have multiple upcoming goals to accomplish by bringing more agriculture to Holden and would greatly appreciate a few more hands out in the "fields".



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