

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 create an Open Space Preservation Fund.

Creating a priority list of Chap 61 properties

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 May 17th.

Land Preservation Fund Initiative

The Open Space Preservation Fund initiative continues to make progress toward becoming a permanent reality for Holden. On March 30, the Ag Comm made a presentation to the Finance Committee which was followed by a good round of discussion. Later in April, the Finance Committee voted to support the establishment of the OSPF. The Board of Selectmen also voted to put the proposal on the warrant for Town Meeting. Successful completion of these two important procedural steps means that voters will get their say at Town Meeting on May 16. We still need your support to get the proposal put in place. The vote at Town Meeting to create this new vehicle to preserve open space must pass with a 2/3 majority. So every vote counts! Make plans to come to Town Meeting at Wachusett High School at 7PM on Monday May 16 and help make history for Holden. Bring a friend or two as well!!

Chapter 61 Lands – Update

As a part of working towards preserving open space, we are putting together a plan for prioritizing future preservation opportunities. With the help of the Central Mass Regional Planning Council, we have created a map of Holden with all the remaining Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B properties highlighted. This will be an easy visual means to see where clusters of preservation opportunities are located. We are also attempting to create similar maps to highlight State-owned properties, City of Worcester properties, Mass Audubon, and White Oak properties. Lastly, a draft of a numerical evaluation process has been proposed. Properties with high scores would become higher priority candidates for preservation. Having these tools in place before a preservation opportunity arises is key to success, as the 120 day time limit in the State law passes very quickly.

Farmer's Markets Update

The Winter Farmer's Market at Jed's was a big success. Thanks to all who supported the idea and the vendors. The summer version of this market, now called "Market on Main Street", will begin in June, and as before, be open on Friday afternoons. Come out and see what local products will be available. <http://www.jedsonline.com/>

The Holden Farmers Market begins its annual season on Tuesday May 3. As in the past, it is held every Tuesday afternoon throughout the summer season.

Community Garden Update

The Holden Community Garden is going strong! Progress late last year was slowed by the discovery of vast infestations of poison ivy on the Creamer property where the garden was originally sited. The dedicated group persevered however and has worked with Davis Hill School to start with a small area on school grounds to begin this spring. Fence posts and fencing have started to go up, but more help is needed to finish. Seeds started in an after-school program will go into a raised bed garden once the fence is up. Volunteers are needed for the second fence building party.

Connect/follow the activities and photos on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/HoldenCommunityGarden/>



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.

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".

Upcoming Events of Interest

The annual Worcester County Conservation District seedling sale pickup day is Saturday, May 7. Most Holden residents will pick up their orders at the Jordan Dairy Farm on Muschopauge Rd in Rutland. Find out more at:

<http://www.worcesterconservation.org/seedling-sale-15.html>

Lilac Hedge Farm and Lettuce be Local are planning a Farm-to-Table dinner on Jul 24. As plans firm up, keep checking back for details at: <http://www.lettucebelocal.com/local-farmer-dinner-series.html>



Item of Interest for Local Agriculture

For those who hold property in Chapter 61, you should note that the annual land valuation report has just been released. After many years of stable valuations, we are going to see several years of rising valuations. This year's valuation are up 25% (50% for pastureland) over last year. The original release of these valuations had proposed much greater increases and the final version was only reduced by much diligent work of the Mass Farm Bureau and support of local legislators. The tax bills you receive this fall should reflect the changes. For more information see: <http://mfbf.net/Portals/0/pdf/April16WebFinal.pdf>

Support Local Agriculture

Looking for other ways to support local agriculture and farmers. How about:

Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation

The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) is a non-profit association which promotes and represents the interests of farmers in the Commonwealth. It is a federation, or union of smaller organizations, which consists of 11 county Farm Bureaus representing a total of over 6500 member families. MFBF, along with state Farm Bureaus from the 49 other states and Puerto Rico, is a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). The county, state and national organizations are all linked and work closely together, but they remain independent organizations. MFBF has a great record of initiating and changing laws and policies which support farmers. Members and supporters are entitled to lots of discounts on common purchases like insurance and tools. See more at: <http://mfbf.net>

Central Mass Grown

Central Mass Grown is a young organization whose goals are:

To educate farmers, consumers, and the general public on issues about and related to farming;

To support the advancement of knowledge and understanding of farms and farming and their benefits and relationship to the environmental, economic, nutritional and social well-being of persons within central Massachusetts and surrounding areas;

To promote the sales and purchase of agricultural products grown in Central Massachusetts to local markets, restaurants, retailers, aggregators, distributors, general consumers and others.

The 2016 CMG Directory has just been published. Pick one up at a local retailer or check on line for more information: <http://centralmassgrown.org>

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 AgComm. To contact the Holden AgComm you may email us at holden.agcomm@gmail.com or you can reach our Chair Person Denise Cummings at northwoodsfarm@live.com.