

Questions & Answers about agricultural commissions



What is an agricultural commission (AgCom)?

- ◆ AgComs are committees formed at Town Meeting through the passage of a local by-law
- ◆ Each town can decide what the duties and responsibilities of the AgCom will be. These are outlined in the by-law (see “A Guide to Organizing a Town Agricultural Commission” brochure)

Under Massachusetts law, communities can create committees at the town level that serve in the interest of that town.

Today there are 115 Agricultural Commissions serving communities across the Commonwealth (10.01.2008)

What does an AgCom do?

- ◆ Serves as a local voice advocating for farmers, farm businesses and farm interests
- ◆ Provides visibility for farming
- ◆ Works with other town boards about issues facing the town
- ◆ Helps resolve farm related problems or conflicts
- ◆ Protects farmland and natural resources



“Our AgCom gives farmers an opportunity to network with each other and work with town boards on issues that make a difference to Rehoboth and its’ farm businesses.”

~ Richard Pray, 7th generation farmer, AgCom member, Oakdale Farms, Rehoboth

Who can start an AgCom?

Any local resident or group concerned about their communities’ farming, farm businesses, growth, rural character, open space, etc., can start organizing support for an AgCom.

“People move to Plympton to live in the country, but often these new homeowners don’t understand what living next to a farm really means. An AgCom can help educate residents and prevent conflicts. As a farmer I enjoy working the land – I want to ensure that it is preserved.”

~ Rick Burnet, hay producer, AgCom member, Reunion Farm, Plympton

Why are town AgComs forming?

Many towns trying to balance growth and quality of life issues are creating AgComs. The intent of an AgCom is simple: protect agricultural lands, preserve rural character, provide a voice for farmers, and encourage agricultural based businesses.

Who can serve on an AgCom?

Anyone who is a resident of the town is eligible to sit on a town board or commission. However, the by-law created and passed by the town determines the number of members and composition of the commission. In towns with existing AgComs there are several types of members – voting, alternate, and advisory. Usually the voting members are full-time farmers. Each town should decide what type of membership and qualifications are appropriate for their community.

Does an AgCom cost the town money?

Towns provide support for all committees – each town should decide what is an appropriate budget for their AgCom. Existing AgCom budgets range from \$0 to \$1,000 per year.

Are AgComs regulatory?

Unlike some other town committees, AgComs do not operate under any regulatory authority from the Commonwealth. While town conservation commissions implement the State Wetlands Protection Act and planning boards enforce the local zoning code, AgComs are created at Town Meeting to represent farming interests in the town - but they do not have any legal mandate or enforcement authority.

“Sprawl and intense development are changing the landscape of our town and the economics of farming. In today’s world the highest and best use of our land is houses. I want to work with my neighbors and family to keep our farm going for the next generation.”

~ Dawn Gates Allen, 4th generation cranberry grower, AgCom member, Gates Cranberry, Middleborough

What are AgComs doing in Massachusetts?



- ◆ Adopting local right-to-farm by-law
- ◆ Obtaining technical assistance on nonpoint source pollution, conservation farm planning, manure management, environmental stewardship
- ◆ Raising monies for farmland protection and economic development
- ◆ Starting local farmer’s market
- ◆ Providing mediation and conflict resolution on farm related disputes within town
- ◆ Collaborating with other town boards on development proposals
- ◆ Holding educational workshops on intergenerational transfer of property, Chapter 61 lands, farm viability, and Agricultural Preservation Restrictions

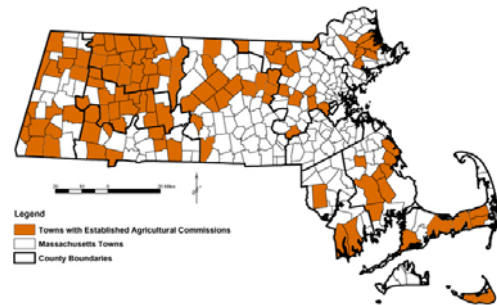
“Our AgCom started in 1988 and was reorganized in 1997. Over the years we watched as support and assistance to farmers, from a variety of sources, was lost. Having an AgCom in Dartmouth allows our farmers and our town to take responsibility for ensuring that agriculture flourishes.”

~ Susan Guiducci, Chair -Ag Preservation Trust Council, AgCom member, Apponagansett Vineyard, Dartmouth

If you live in Massachusetts and are interested in starting and agricultural commission in your town Contact:

Ask for brochures and AgCom informational CDs, materials from existing AgComs and direct organizational assistance.

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For more information about AgComs in the Commonwealth go to:

www.massagcom.org