

May 26, 2010

Winkler Lauded for Contributions to Sustainable Agriculture

Irene Winkler, Coordinator of the USDA - Pilgrim Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program was recognized for her contribution to sustainable agriculture by the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) at their annual meeting on May 26, 2010. The coveted citation award was presented at Benjamin's Restaurant in Taunton to a packed meeting of town officials and professional planners from the 27 towns and cities represented in the district.

This was the 54th annual meeting of SRPEDD, noted for their work in comprehensive land use planning, technical assistance to the region, transportation planning, homeland security planning and natural resource and environmental protection. The agency has enjoyed a long partnership working with the Pilgrim RC&D Council.

In presenting the award, John Bullard of the City of New Bedford noted Irene's long period of contributions to building agricultural partnerships through the establishment of the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), culminating with an unprecedented visit to the region by USDA Secretary Daniel Glickman. SEMAP continues today offering local food promotion and marketing assistance, farm succession planning and business education to farm based business in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Steve Smith, SRPEDD Director and Bill Napolitano, Senior Environmental Planner particularly noted her work beginning with the establishment of Agricultural Commissions (AgComs) in both Westport and Dartmouth, and ultimately leading to 139 agricultural commissions state wide. That number continues to grow. Bill noted her steady perseverance working with individual towns, assisting them with organizing AgComs, passing local Right to Farm bylaws, developing guide books on 'How to Organize an Agricultural Commission' and "Handbooks for Agricultural Commissions;" major contributions to agricultural sustainability for towns in the region.

Dick Ward, Carver Town Selectman, expressed appreciation for the millions of dollars of grant funds that have come to local towns through Irene's work. She organized environmental assessments, secured funds for land acquisitions, rural fire department upgrades, water supply protection, farmer's market establishment, and resource based business support, to name just a few.

The citation on the award presented to Irene reads: "Irene Winkler, Special Recognition Award, recognizing dedicated service and commitment as the Coordinator of the Pilgrim Resource Conservation & Development Area Council, to the farms, natural resources and business of southeastern Massachusetts. The region has benefited greatly from your leadership, perspective and guidance in creating the foundation for sustainable agriculture in the Commonwealth through organization such as SEMAP and the Statewide Association of Agricultural Commissions."