

Farm Notes

More Thanks Due

Editors, Vineyard Gazette:

It is wonderful news to hear that the immediate threat to Thimble Farm has eased, and that it will perhaps be saved in perpetuity for productive agriculture. It has been a cliffhanger. Ownership will give IGI a chance to perfect the problematic agricultural restriction (APR) so that there is no high-end private horse farm or Christmas tree farm in its future, both allowed by the definition of agriculture in the existing vintage APR that the Land Bank purchased from Bud Moskow more than a decade ago. Strengthening the APR by prohibiting those non-food production uses would be a very important first step in bringing the APR into conformity with those reviewed and approved by the commonwealth's food and agriculture department.

Several recent news items, while honoring the very real accomplishments of many who have been recently involved, left out the many hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars contributed by individuals and nonprofit organizations over the past decade to preserve this very productive farm with its over 40 acres of valuable but vulnerable agricultural soils in three towns, plus greenhouses and farm buildings.

At the risk of compounding the errors of omission, and with my apologies to those who have been missed (you will know who you are and how valuable your contributions of time, money, blood, sweat and tears, have been), here are some additional names. Most, if not all, have been involved in this effort for many years.

From the private conservation organizations, Adam Moore of Sheriff's Meadow Foundation, Brendan O'Neill of the Vineyard Conservation Society, Jon Previant of The Farm Institute, the Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society (which funded the consulting work by Jim Oldham who reviewed and recommended various very impressive strategies, with Ag Society leadership provided by Dale McClure, Glenn Hearn, and Trip Barnes), Rob Kendall, who worked tirelessly as a private individual and in his professional capacity as a land planner and broker, Penny Uhlendorf and Alice Early of the Whippoorwill Farm CSA who spearheaded last summer's Vineyard Farm Project initiative, with participation from Philippe Jordi from the Island Housing Trust, various town boards and committees from West Tisbury, Tisbury and Oak Bluffs, town land bank advisory boards and the central board, and of course, Andrew Woodruff who had the original vision for farming once the Moskows sold Thimble Farm, and who has put in more time and effort than anyone will ever know.

Thanks to all including those who have been in the project from the beginning.

Virginia Crowell Jones, West Tisbury

- See more at: <http://mvgazette.com/news/2012/06/22/new-design-new-farm-plan?k=v5238581d2cb88#sthash.uK6Eab7p.dpuf>

Farmers Agree on Slaughterhouse Plan

Remy Tumin *VGazette* Thursday, April 21, 2011 - 9:20pm

The Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society and Island Grown Initiative have joined forces in a venture to build a slaughterhouse behind the fairgrounds in West Tisbury.

The project is still in the very early stages of discussion and no permits have been obtained, but preliminary talks between the agricultural society and the nonprofit IGI are under way to allow a slaughterhouse facility to be built behind the new barn on society land.

"The MVAS is very supportive of your efforts with IGI to facilitate the construction and operation of a USDA-approved and regulated facility that reflects small-scale local, humane, sustainable slaughter and processing of four-legged animals for our farms, members and residents of Martha's Vineyard," agricultural society president Dale McClure wrote in a March 1 letter to Richard Andre, IGI meat coordinator.

"In addition to the \$5,000 we pledged toward the USDA feasibility study, the MVAS is ready to commit to a land access arrangement, whereby a USDA-inspected facility would be built on land owned by the MVAS or land purchased in the future. In the next few months, we look forward to working with you and IGI in investigating all legal, funding, design and cost evaluating for this very important project," Mr. McClure wrote.

The venture comes at a time of growing support for and interest in locally-grown food both nationally and on the Island — including locally grown meat.

A feasibility study for the slaughterhouse project is already under way by the Island Grown Initiative, which received a \$40,000 grant from the state rural business enterprise program last June. The study will evaluate the size and cost of the facility as well as market factors and employment opportunities. It is targeted for completion by the fall. The agricultural society land is zoned for agricultural use, and IGI members are also exploring what sort of permits would be required to build a slaughterhouse.

Farmers and private livestock owners currently must transport their animals off-Island to be slaughtered at places such as Adams Farm in Athol, Blood Farm in Groton and other farm slaughterhouses in the region. If the project becomes a reality, it would mark

the first time in more than 30 years that Vineyard livestock owners would be able to slaughter their animals on the Island.

“We want to do it right, we want it do it where you’re bringing the town and the community with you,” Mr. Andre said. “Whatever process you go through, you want to have the most people behind you.” He continued:

“There are approximately 600 [livestock] animals on the Island that are brought off-Island. It impacts the way people raise their animals and limits the number of animals raised.”

He estimated nearly \$120,000 is being spent off-Island to process Island farm animals. At Adams Farm in Athol, for example, the cost to process one cow is \$65, plus 87 cents per pound for vacuum sealing and 58 cents per pound to wrap the meat for resale. Then there is the added cost of \$150 for the ferry and the cost of gasoline for the truck that hauls the trailer containing animals.

Mr. Andre said it will probably cost the same amount to process animals on-Island as it does to go off-Island for the first few years but he said the stress on the farmers and more importantly the animals will be greatly reduced.

“What we’re hoping to do at some point is — because you’re raising more money [over the years] — we’ll be able to lower the cost of local meat,” he said. “It’s not about people making money off of this thing, it’s hopefully going to be run as a community-based project.”

Mr. Andre said the feasibility study has already determined that the slaughterhouse will likely need five part-time employees including skilled butchers and apprentices, and will be open for eight to 12 weeks in the first two years of operation.

The facility would be open four days a week, during which a USDA inspector would come to the Island.

Mr. Andre said they expect animal production on the Island to increase 30 per cent in the first five years of operation.

He said the size of the facility is envisioned at about 3,000 square feet, but there is no building design yet. He said they are also considering processing chickens and venison at the facility.

“The agricultural society takes pride in what they do and it will be aesthetically pleasing,” Mr. Andre said, adding they hope to develop preliminary designs over the next six months. “However that gets through, it’s going to be tastefully done.”

- See more at: <http://mvgazette.com/news/2011/04/22/farmers-agree-slaughterhouse-plan?k=v5238581d2cb88#sthash.Bee8jtcZ.dpuf>