

## ***ANALYSIS & FINDINGS SPENCER AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT (#1) EIGHT YEAR REVIEW 2021 Pursuant to NYS Agriculture & Markets Law - Article 25AA***

### **Analysis per Section 303-a (2b):**

#### **(1) The nature and status of farming and farm resources within such district, including the total number of acres of land and the total number of acres of land in farm operations in the district.**

The proposed district will have parcels located throughout the Towns of Spencer, Candor, Barton and Tioga. Land uses in this area are principally agricultural and residential. Small areas of commercial and industrial uses exist in the Villages of Waverly, Candor and Spencer and the hamlets of Lockwood and Tioga Center. The extractive industries of farming and logging dominate the landscape. This area has evolved around agriculture, which has been the county's historic economic base. Protection of farmlands by agricultural districting has not negatively affected adjacent uses.

There is a wide range of soils and degrees of slope throughout Tioga County that vary in suitability for farming practices. Most of the largest farming enterprises in the Spencer Agricultural District #1 are located in the terrace and floodplain areas of the Susquehanna River, the Catatunk Creek and the West Branch of the Owego Creek. These deep, fertile moderately well drained, fairly level alluvial and glacio-fluvial soil, without fragipans, have few limitations on crop varieties that can be grown. Supplemental irrigation using nearby water resources can substantially boost crop production. Howard-Chenango, Tioga-Middlebury, Wayland and Chenango-Wayland soils predominate in these intensely farmed areas. Upland farming activities are more limited, depending on slope, soil quality, erodibility, runoff and permeability, and soil depth to fragipan and bedrock. Slope ranges throughout the upland farming areas from rolling, 5 to 16%, to over 35% in extremely steep areas. With the advent of new conservation tillage technology and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service Programs, this becomes a less limiting factor. Volusia-Mardin soils developed by glacial till predominate. Upland farms are generally more suited to growing pasture crops, hay and corn on a non-intensive basis since irrigation opportunities rarely exist.

Limited development has taken place over the past eight years in the municipalities included in this district. Some residential development has occurred and is scattered throughout the area. These scattered residences results in fragmentation on contiguous farmland area.

The total number of acres of land in the Spencer Agricultural District #1 has grown to a total of 49,711, with 32,663 acres of land in farm operations, resulting in 66% of district acreage being actively farmed.

#### **(2) The extent to which the district has achieved its original objectives:**

The purpose of Agricultural District creation is the protection and preservation of viable farmlands. The previous Spencer Agricultural District Review Modification of 2012 reported 46,148 acres in the District. The proposed 2021 district is 49,711 acres. This is a 7% increase in the amount of acreage in the program.

Data collection during this eight-year review show that farmers own a total of 30,442 acres and rent a total of 1,382 acres of land to augment their agricultural operations. Additionally, this current review resulted in 19 more farms enrolled in this agricultural district, an increase from 86 to 105 in the eight-year period.

Methodology for petitioner recruitment was intensive and included direct mailings, key farmer reviews, cross-referencing to previously reported agricultural lands, and follow-up telephone interviews for the purpose of accurate data collection and mapping.

**(3) The extent to which county and local comprehensive plans, policies and objectives are consistent with and support the district.**

Tioga County updated and adopted its Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan in 2015 and is working on implementing many of the recommended actions. Tioga County has created an Agriculture Development Specialist position in order to carry out the actions of the Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan. The towns of Barton, Candor, and Spencer all have written comprehensive plans. Objectives of the plans have been reviewed and when required Town Supervisors contacted concerning their Town Plan and its consistency with district objectives. In general, the plans provide support in preserving and protecting farmland by identification of farmland to be preserved, as well as consideration of agriculture in site plan reviews and zoning proposals. Thus, it has been determined that there are no conflicts between the goals and objectives of the Towns' and County's plans and the Agricultural District.

**(4) The degree of coordination between local laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations that apply to farm operations in the district and their influence on farming:**

Towns and local governing bodies that lie within the district clearly demonstrate a desire for the protection and preservation of viable farmland in their comprehensive plans, town mission statements and municipal codes and laws. The Town of Barton's 360 Code specifically calls for farmland and forest preservation.

Municipal leaders and planning departments within the District remain very conscious of agriculture as a whole in granting site plan reviews and in developing town ordinances. All governing bodies within the district show evidence in their efforts to protect farmland and their agricultural economies.

**(5) Recommendations to continue, terminate or modify such district:**

Farmlands in the Spencer Agricultural District #1 are composed of some of the highest classified soils mapped, particularly in the southern and eastern portion of the district. This natural resource is vital to Tioga County and New York State, and requires the protection that an agricultural district provides.

Based on staff work and the findings in this report, the Tioga County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board recommended continuation with the stated modifications of the Spencer Agricultural District #1 to the Tioga County Legislature.