

Report of the Agricultural Committee

Due to the dramatic expansion of industrial agriculture, U.S. family farms are quickly become a relic of the past. Between 1974 and 2002, the number of corporate-owned U.S. farms increased by more than 46 percent. Between 2005 and 2006, the US lost 8,900 farms (a little more than 1 farm per hour). At the same time, concerns about food safety are at an all time high. As a result of the pervasive use of antibiotics in confined animal feeding operations, antibiotic resistant human pathogens such as, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Escherichia coli*, and *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Cyclospora cayetanensi*, have emerged. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that each year 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the U.S. result from food-borne pathogens.

Food security, the availability of food, is also of increasing concern. While there are a number of national reserves for strategic materials such as rare metals or oil, there is no national reserve for food. Indeed, the entire world has only an estimated 54 days worth of food stores. Recognizing how critically dependent our food supply has become on fossil fuels and an intact transportation system, many cities are actively pursuing plans to meet a significant portion of their food requirements from within their municipal limits. The plans of the District of Columbia, Chicago, and Toronto, for three, are available online.

Although the U.S. produces huge amounts of food, as a nation we are facing food insecurity for the following reasons:

1. Industrialized agriculture is highly dependent on fossil fuel, frequently requiring more energy in fuel inputs than the energy value of the crops grown. Today in the U.S. food is transported an average of 1500 miles between farm and consumer. As a result the entire U.S. food system from beginning to end is critically dependent on the availability and affordability of petroleum fuels. (<http://www.dieoff.com/page40.htm>)
2. A single company, Monsanto, now controls over 90% of the seed genetics in the U.S. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/12/13/monsanto-squeezes-out-see_n_390354.html) For bulk crops it is effectively a monopoly, able to raise its prices at will – 25% for corn and 28% for soy in 2009. Worse, as small seed companies disappear, our crops become ever more monoclonal. Today, epidemic diseases and pests limit the market life of a commercial variety of corn or soy to about 7 years.
3. Half a dozen food processing firms control over 90% of the food stuffs available in U.S. grocery stores. Four companies control 80% of beef processing in the U.S. (<http://www.sustainabletable.org/issues/processing>) 10% of the U.S. domestic food budget now goes to Philip Morris. (<http://www.converge.org.nz/pirm/ctrlfood.htm>)

4. Using the same financial techniques that led to huge run-ups in electricity and oil, global hedge funds are heavily investing in food commodities increasing the likelihood of speculative bubbles and collapses.
(http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/16/opinion/16iht-edpfaff.3.12052202.html?_r=1)
5. Within the next 20 years China alone will require more food than the world produces today. In the next 50 years the world will need to produce more food than it has produced in all of human history.
(<http://www.csiro.au/science/Sustainable-Agriculture-Feeding-the-World.html>)
6. Since 2006, in dollar value, the U.S. has annually imported more food than it exported. We are now a chronic food “debtor” nation.
(<http://postcarboncities.net/node/2295>)
7. In 2009 world food prices rose 45%.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007%E2%80%932008_world_food_price_crisis)

Despite its farming history, family farms have all but disappeared from Winthrop and for many reasons are highly unlikely to return. The alternatives for local food production are sub-commercial community gardens and “backyard” farming. Often measured in fractions of an acre, these alternatives can produce an extremely diverse variety of crops using home grown or heirloom seeds if necessary, and typically require low energy inputs. Their produce can sustain the Farmers’ Markets so often offered as a secondary food supply system and add vibrancy to the downtown.

For those without other access to land, community gardens provide an opportunity for gardening and recreation and should be encouraged and given generous municipal support. However, they do have numerous disadvantages including:

1. Inconvenience of location, requiring a planned “expedition” and usually transportation to do a little gardening.
2. Community gardens are rarely placed on good agricultural land.
3. Access to water and power is usually limited or non-existent.
4. Lack of security leads to theft and vandalism.
5. Conflicts inevitably arise between those who wish to farm organically and those who wish to use chemicals or raise genetically modified crops.
6. The raising of animals under these situations is almost always impossible.

Residential or “backyard” farming avoids many of these problems. Most importantly, the production of high value animal protein is feasible. A review of many zoning ordinances from around the nation indicates that there is little uniformity in regulations concerning the keeping of farm animals in residential areas. If anything, urban areas tend to be more tolerant of livestock. Good examples of “average” residential livestock zoning can be found online in the ordinances of South Windsor and New Milford, Connecticut.

Winthrop's zoning ordinance is Euclidean and somewhat arbitrarily restricts some land uses to particular zoning districts without consideration of lot size. The raising of farm animals is permitted by right in the Stream Protection, and Industrial zones. It is permitted by right up to 50 animal units in the General Commercial and Rural districts but is conditional for additional animals. It is conditional in the Shoreland, General Residential, Public Water Supply and Wetland zones and prohibited in the Limited Commercial, Limited Residential, Village, and Resource Protection zones.

An analysis of lot sizes in the various districts demonstrates that zoning for animals is independent of lot size. For example, both the average and median lot sizes are larger in the Limited Residential zone than in the General Residential zone. It is also worth noting that the median lot size in the Rural district is only 2 acres.

Other impediments to the raising of livestock in the Winthrop Zoning Ordinance are the \$50 Conditional Use Permit and the 50 foot property line setback requirement for buildings and pens used to keep animals. The \$50 fee unduly impacts very small scale animal husbandry and the 50 foot property line setback requirement seems unnecessary given that the ordinance also requires that animals must be kept a minimum of 100 feet away from abutting residences.

While residential agriculture (gardening) does not seem to be regulated at present, it is not addressed in the Winthrop Zoning Ordinance and in principal could be determined to be a prohibited use under Section 3.0.4.

To promote local food production we propose that Winthrop amend its Zoning Ordinance so as to:

1. Establish that residential agriculture (gardening) is permitted by right in all zoning districts.
2. Establish well regulated community gardens in areas where there is sufficient public interest. This could possibly be a function of the Recreation Department.
3. Permit in all zoning districts the keeping of residential livestock by right on the basis of lot size. Odor and insects can be controlled by the proper manure handling that the Zoning Ordinance already requires. Noise, particularly that of poultry, can be minimized by limiting the numbers of roosters and requiring cooping between sundown and sunrise. A complete ban on roosters would unduly hinder the production of fertilized eggs and the raising of chicks.
4. Permit the keeping or stabling of residential livestock in accordance with the following table. One pro-rated additional animal unit would be allowed for each additional one-half (1/2) acre above three-quarters (3/4) acre, subject to the 100 foot setback requirement from abutting residences.

Type of Animal	No. of Animals per Animal Unit	No. of Animals on 1/4 acre	No. of Animals on 1/2 acre	No. of Animals on 3/4 acre
Rabbits, similar	50	12	25	50
Chickens, similar	50	12	25	50
Ducks, similar	12	0	0	12
Geese, Turkeys, similar	8	0	0	8
Sheep, Goats, similar (excluding youngstock)	4	0	0	4 plus youngstock
Pigs, similar (excluding 1 litter under 3 months)	1	0	0	1 plus 1 litter
Horse, Pony, Lama, Cow, similar (excluding youngstock)	1	0	0	1 plus youngstock

5. Require no greater property line setback for barns, animal shelters, or pens than for any other structure in a given zoning district.
6. Avoid overly broad proscriptions on the sales of home raised garden produce and livestock, allowing them latitude similar to that of yard sales.

These recommendations are made with the following caveats:

1. All livestock will be properly and securely confined.
2. The provisions of Winthrop Zoning Ordinance section 4.2.1. (Agriculture) remain in effect.