

Chapter 4: Agriculture and Forestry

Goal: To safeguard Clinton’s agricultural and forestry resources and protect them from any development which threatens those resources.

Purpose: The purpose of this section is to inventory agricultural and forestry resources and to identify their importance to the town both culturally and economically.

Introduction: The Town of Clinton is self-described as “the dairy capital of Maine.” It has a total land area of approximately 24,796 acres. It is located approximately 10 miles northeast of Waterville. There is a small village center located in the southeastern portion of the community, surrounded by rural areas served by an extensive rural road network. Interstate 95 divides the Town, creating a small southern portion which includes the village center, and a larger, more rural north western part. At one time, most of the non-farm dwellings were located in the village center. Within the past 40 years, non-farm development has occurred along the Town's rural road network. The largest concentrations of farms are located north and west of the Interstate along Hill Road, Battle Ridge Road, upper Hinckley Road, and River Road. Although dairy farming is the primary agricultural activity, there are four horse farms, many hobby farms, and one large commercial nursery.

According to Town records in 2019, farmland comprises 4,573 acres. Farm woodland totals 1,361 acres. See Table 4-1. A total of 5,080 acres of land are enrolled in tree growth. See Table 4-2. There are 49 acres designated as open space. Land placed under one of these tax programs are currently removed from being developed. However, a landowner may withdraw from the tax program, usually after paying a monetary penalty.

Agriculture: Farming, and in particular dairy farming, has been the dominant land use activity in the rural areas of Clinton. Farming is important to the local and regional economies because of the farm wages that support families, income to local farm implement dealers, sale of farm products, and the trucking industry. Additionally, benefits include rent/lease paid to area landowners for the use of their land along with tax revenue to the towns. Farms which stay in the same family are often better able to survive, economically, than recently purchased farms because of the high mortgages. The five largest dairy farms in Clinton refer to themselves as family farms, however, in terms of the local economy they are big businesses. The largest dairy farm in the State is located in Clinton. Clinton's farms do not require much in the way of Town services, except roads are maintained for the transportation of agricultural commodities. A methane digester to convert animal waste to a natural gas product is being considered for Clinton. Many farms may ship their animal waste to this digester to be located at the Flood Farm.

According to the Soil Conservation Service, there are 2,964 acres classified as prime farmland in Clinton and 3,997 acres classified as farmland of State-wide importance, for a total of 6,961 acres, or 24% of the Town's total land area. See Map 4-1. Clinton’s cultivated crops, pasture, hay land and open/other land are also depicted on this map.

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Clearly, the agricultural resources of Clinton are a significant element in the rural character of the Town. Farmlands and fields make up a large percentage of the open space in Town. The land is flat and open along many of the Town's rural roads, so that any conversion to houses, subdivisions and other developments would be usually quite noticeable unless concentrated in small areas and screened from view. Scattered development has contributed to an impression of sprawl in some areas.

Many of the Town's farms have been in the same family for generations, and are protected by the Farmland, Farm Woodlands, Open Space, or Tree Growth Tax Laws. They are considered healthy and stable and are not threatened by development. In fact, over 80 percent of the land owned by the Town's dairy farmers is protected by the Farmland, Farm Woodlands, Open Space, or Tree Growth Tax Laws. Many farm holdings consist of a number of parcels acquired over the years. As of this writing, it is anticipated additional farmland could be placed under these categories if the Town conducts a reevaluation, making ownership of land more economically viable.

Table 4-1		
Land Classified Under Agriculture		
Source: Clinton 2019 Municipal Valuation Return		
Classification	Acreage	Total tax evaluation
Farmland in tillage	4,572.53	\$2,378,279.00
Farmland softwood acreage	200	\$57,960.00
Farmland mixed wood acreage	1,070	\$381,348.00
Farmland hardwood acreage	91	\$21,048.30
Total Farmland classification	5,933.53	\$2,838,635.30

A survey was conducted with the five largest dairy farms in 2019. The following is a synopsis of the responses:

- How did the farms best describe themselves?
 - Dairy – 5
 - Livestock – 1
 - Horse – 1
 - Hay – 4
 - Corn – 4
 - None considered themselves organic
- Lease land from others – 4
- Numbers of families supported by these 5 farms – 92

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- Agricultural use estimated in acres (5 farms):
 - Pasture – 51
 - Tillage crop land – 6690
 - Woodlands – 1680

- Possible future opportunities:
 - Corn mazes – 1
 - Petting zoos – 1
 - Farm stands – 2
 - Tours – 2
 - Riding trails – 1

- Allowed recreational opportunities:
 - Snowmobiling – 5
 - ATVs – 2
 - Walking – 5
 - Cross-country skiing – 5
 - Hunting – 2

Forestry: There is approximately 20.4% of the total land area of the community classified as forest land under the Tree Growth Tax Law. All forestry operations come under the regulation of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. See Table 4-2 and Map 4-1.

Classification	Acreage	Total tax evaluation
Softwood acreage	681.50	\$197,498.70
Mixed wood acreage	2,190.70	\$780,765.48
Hardwood acreage	2,207.59	\$510,615.57
Total Tree Growth classification	5,079.79	\$1,488,880.00

Open Space: As of April 1, 2019, four parcels are classified as open space. The number of acres designated as open space is 49.30. Total evaluation of open space is \$20, 977.

Local or Regional Land Trust: Currently there are no farmland or forest land within Clinton in trust.

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Issues:

Updated tax evaluations must be maintained in order to protect state subsidies back to municipalities related to farmland, tree growth, and open space.

Clinton should work with state and regional governments to ensure farming does not decline because of farms economic and cultural importance.

The Town of Clinton should look for ways to promote, stabilize, and support farming.

Clinton needs to be more proactive with education on invasive species in order to protect woodlands, water quality and rural character. See Section 2, Chapter 3, Issue 3-2.

Policies: Minimum policies required to address state goals:

- (1) To safeguard lands identified as prime farmland or capable of supporting commercial forestry.
- (2) To support farming and forestry and encourage their economic viability.

Strategies:

- (1) Minimum strategies required to address state goals: Consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices as required by 12 M.R.S.A. §8869.
- (2) Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.
- (3) Amend land use ordinances to require commercial or subdivision developments in critical rural areas, if applicable, maintain areas with prime farmland soils as open space to the greatest extent practicable.
- (4) Limit non-residential development in critical rural areas (if the town designates critical rural areas) to natural resource-based businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farmers' markets, and home occupations.
- (5) Encourage owners of productive farm and forest land to enroll in the current use taxation programs.
- (6) Permit land use activities that support productive agriculture and forestry operations, such as roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, sawmills, log buying yards, and pick-your-own operations.

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(7) Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation that supports them in local or regional economic development plans.

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Issues identified by the Comprehensive Planning Committee with Strategies:

Issue	Strategy	Responsibility	Action Party	Coordinator	Implementation
Issue 4-1 A property tax evaluation is overdue	Clinton must conduct regular reevaluations	Selectmen	Town Manager and Assessor	Assessing Contractor	Start 2020 Repeat 2030
Issue 4-2 To safeguard forestry or farmland areas when residential or commercial development occurs	Clinton will review State of Maine and Federal guidance pertaining to agriculture and forest management to permit only activities that support productive agriculture and forestry	Selectmen	Town Manager	Maine Forest Service; Soils and Conservation District	2022
	Clinton must take an active role in educating forest and farmland owners about current use taxation programs, other activities that support productive forestry and agriculture	Selectmen	Town Manager	Maine Farmland Trust; Municipal Planning Assistance Office	2022