

Agricultural Districts Profile



Draft horses at the Ulster County Fair
photo courtesy of Ulster County Tourism

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS PROFILE

The first agricultural district in Ulster County was formed in 1973 in response to Agriculture and Markets' Agricultural Districts Law Article 25AA. This first district contained approximately 4,500 acres in the town of Marlboro. Additional districts were formed in succeeding years, with Ulster County having as many as 22 districts. Over the years, the agricultural districts were consolidated to enhance management. In 1989, Districts 1, 2, 3, 5, 19 and 20 were consolidated into District 1, Southeastern Ulster County. In 1990, Districts 4, 7-8, 9, 11, 13 and 18 were consolidated into Agricultural District 2, Wallkill Valley. Also in 1990, Districts 6, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 22 were consolidated into Agricultural District 3, Rondout Valley. In 1995, remaining Districts 10, 17 and 21 were consolidated into Agricultural District 4, Esopus Valley and Saugerties. An agricultural districts map can be found in Appendix E.

The New York Agriculture Districts Law was enacted in 1971 to protect and conserve the state's agricultural resource base. It is based on Article XIV of the state constitution which states it is the policy of the state "...to conserve and protect its natural resources and scenic beauty and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural lands for the production of food and other agricultural products." The state constitution recognizes that agricultural lands are a necessary and irreplaceable resource.

Agriculture districts programs are based on the assumption that land will remain in agricultural production only insofar as an economic and land use climate exist which encourages viable agriculture. A summary of the agriculture districts law, with its subsequent amendments, is included in Appendix C.

Agriculture districts are an effective tool for preserving farmland as they require an eight-year land commitment from participating farmers. Additional benefits include:

- * Limitation on unreasonably restrictive local regulations.
- * State policies that encourage the retention of viable agricultural land.
- * Limitation on eminent domain, public acquisition and advancement of public funds.
- * Limitation to impose benefits assessments in certain improvement districts or benefit areas.
- * Protection from private nuisance law suits.
- * Orchard or vineyard replanting/expansion tax break.
- * Policy commitment to agriculture by local planning and land use decision-making policies through agricultural data statements and disclosure.

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets reported 303 farms, with 51,645 acres in farms and 73,616 total acres in agricultural districts prior to the last district consolidation (1995) in Ulster County. Locally, efforts are currently underway to create a new agricultural district in the western portion of the county, principally in the town of Hardenburgh.

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The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets collects agricultural district data from participating counties. The following data stems from the last recorded agriculture district review profile. Districts are reviewed every eight years.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 1, 1989

Towns in district: Lloyd, Marlboro,
Plattekill

Number of acres in district:..... 21,106
 Number of acres in farms:..... 14,740
 Number of acres cropped: 10,952
 Number of acres owned by farmers: .. 13,316
 Number of acres rented by farmers:.... 1,424

Number of Farms by Principal Enterprise:

Orchard80
 Vineyard.....8
 Cash crop (vegetable).....7
 Livestock (other than dairy).....1
 Horticultural Specialties.....1
 Other7

Comments: Agricultural District 1 has experienced considerable pressure to convert farmland to housing developments. These pressures are expected to continue. The district has helped guide development away from farms. Agriculture is recognized as a priority industry and land use within this district.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 2, 1991

Towns in district: Gardiner, New Paltz,
Plattekill, Shawangunk

Number of acres in district:.....27,221
 Number of acres in farms:.....19,520
 Number of acres cropped:12,033
 Number of acres owned by farmers: ...17,737.5
 Number of acres rented by farmers.....1,782.5

Number of Farms by Principle Enterprise

Dairy20
 Cash Crop (grain).....15
 Cash Crop (vegetable).....5
 Orchard22
 Vineyard.....4
 Livestock (other than dairy).....62
 Poultry2
 Horticultural Specialties.....2
 Other12

Comments: Agriculture is recognized as a priority industry and land use within the district. There has been considerable conversion pressure from residential development. The district has helped direct development away from farmland. 2,263 acres have been removed to reflect areas being developed and publicly owned lands.

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AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 3, 1992

Towns in district: Marbletown, Rochester,
Wawarsing

Number of acres in district:.....15,624
Number of acres in farms.....8,923
Number of acres cropped:.....7,694
Number of acres owned by farmers:8,263
Number of acres rented by farmers:.....660

Number of Farms by Principle Enterprise:

Dairy9
Cash Crop (vegetable).....4
Orchard2
Livestock (other than dairy).....5
Pasture/Hay:.....15

Comments: The district has enabled the region to identify itself as a viable agricultural region during a difficult period of transition. Although some decline in agricultural activity is expected, the dairy and vegetable industry remains stable. The district contributes to this stability. Very limited development has occurred within this district.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT 4, 1996

Towns in district: Hurley, Kingston,
Marbletown, Saugerties and Ulster

Number of acres in district.....9,726
Number of acres in farms.....6,608
Number of acres cropped5,417
Number of acres owned by farmers4,765
Number of acres rented by farmers.....1,689

Number of Farms by Principal Enterprise

Dairy3
Cash Crop (field corn)3
Cash Crop (sweet corn).....6
Livestock (other than dairy).....3
Hay10

Comments: The number of acres in the district has remained the same since the last review. The number of acres farmed has increased by 376 even though the actual number of farms has decreased by 5. The district has enabled the region to identify itself as a viable agricultural region. The majority of Ulster County corn is grown in the broad flat stream valleys, known for their excellent agricultural soils. Limited development pressure exists within this district.