

Agriculture

The first recorded farming practiced in Newfield was by the Saponi Tribe during the early 1700's in the Pony Hollow area. The Saponi had relocated from the Virginia area due to unrest in their native areas and were permitted to settle in this area by the Cayugas. This area was identified by the Natives due to the good draining soils, proximity to year-round creeks and woodlands for materials and hunting.

There were additional stories of natural caves utilized by the Saponi. The Sullivan Expedition removed the tribe and the land was soon used by settlers for agriculture.

By 1847 crops reported included barley, buckwheat, millet, white beans, flaxseed, and potatoes. Livestock included sheep, horses, and cattle. As we look around Newfield's hills and valleys, there are still evidences of the Finns and Czechs that came around the turn of the century and they had to contend with the by then impoverished soils.

Reports show that in 1878 out of 34,892 acres contained in Newfield 25,000 were under cultivation but much of the land was not conducive to long-term use. The most recent Agricultural Assessment from land owners in Newfield in 2007 included 22 active farmers and 8 active renters involving 2,560 acres in production. Most of the old farm land has converted back to forest and old-field meadows.

Today Pony Hollow ushers in Tompkins County from the south as State Route 13 bisects the Newfield valley. On both sides of Route 13 lies fertile farm land, streams, wetlands and thousands of acres of protected State and University owned lands.

Farming activity is very clearly seen throughout the town although farming practices have changed and the number of farmers has declined. According to the Tompkins County Planning Board 30% of the land is agriculture. There are only 3 dairy farms in Newfield as of 2010. Cash cropping of hay, oats, barley, corn and soybeans continues to be a viable option for a number of Newfield's farmers. Other farmers in Newfield maintain fruit orchards, vegetable crops, greenhouse operations, Christmas trees, beef and sheep and chickens occupy a few farms. Organic crop farming has been introduced to several tracts of land in the Township with spelt (similar to wheat), oats, barley, clover and buckwheat as produce. The farmers market in Ithaca provides an outlet for cut flowers, perennials, fruits, and vegetables

Significant increases in back-yard horse owners in Newfield occurred over the last 10 years including some horse farms with more than 10 horses. Creating a demand for continued use of ag lands to provide hay.

Challenges which continue to affect farmers in Newfield include weather problems, plant and animal diseases, weed, insect and wildlife competition along with economic uncertainties. The future of Newfield's agriculture is dependent upon a number of factors and some out of the farmer's control. They include "the farmer's age, health, financial stability, family lifestyle preferences, prices of crops, livestock and land, taxation policies, community support for agriculture, traffic patterns on rural roads and consumer preferences for certain types of food.

The people of Newfield should be made aware that farming is a business as well as a form of land use and a way of life which is important to maintain in the future. Newfield presently has agricultural land in an Agricultural District. Farmland is given a partial exemption from taxes to encourage the continued use of farmland for agricultural production.

The purpose is to forestall conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses. In addition to taxation benefits the law also provides protections against overly restrictive local laws, private nuisance suits involving agricultural practices and government and non-government funded conservation easements or construction projects. There

are also consequences for removing land from use prior to its 8 year commitment. Land in Agricultural Districts is classified according to its value in producing products and not on its potential developmental value.

The agriculture district survey was updated in 2007 and the web address is www.tompkins-co.org/planning/documents/Newfield_000.pdf. This map details all land in Newfield that is part of district, but it includes unfarmed lands like forest, lands that are not currently worked, and residential properties.

Farm Land classification is in three categories:

- 1) “Best” grade soils which grow top yielding crops. These soils are usually gravel based and well drained. Their creation came from glacial activity moving south grinding rock, clay, dirt, and redistributing it in valley regions. These also helped create aquifers and wetlands.
- 2) Second grade soils classified as “fair”. These soils grow good crops but sometimes they have lower yield rates. Soils can be wet during critical planting dates, meaning lost growing degree days, late planting, and early frost risk.
- 3) Third grade soils are usually land on side hills and not under cultivation. This land is close to bed rock, typically requires late planting and is muddy during harvest time. The soil ph is poor due to over cropping and inadequate nutrient replacement.

Agricultural soil mapping can be obtained by the Tompkins County soil survey, identifying soil types, percent, and grade. The Tompkins County natural resources inventory, Tompkins County soil survey, and Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station are additional resources.

The importance of agriculture and open lands in Newfield that could be worked needs to be documented and discussed. Keeping the industry alive required the lands to be worked and in useable condition for future generations. A sustainable food supply is important to all people and farm land contributes to the open space environment. Potential commercial business opportunities and employment are additional benefits

Newfield needs to address the importance of preservation of agricultural lands without unduly infringing upon property rights or the right to farm. Farm land not in the agricultural district that has open land should receive some consideration for assistance to maintain the farming community.

Total Newfield Acres = 34892		
	Farm Land worked under cultivation	Undeveloped Land
1864	23,492	11,400
1878	25,000	9,892
1972	5,300	29,592
2009	4 – 6,000	28,892 – 30,892

Useful websites:

Newfield Ag District Map: <http://www.tompkins-co.org/planning/documents/Newfield.pdf>

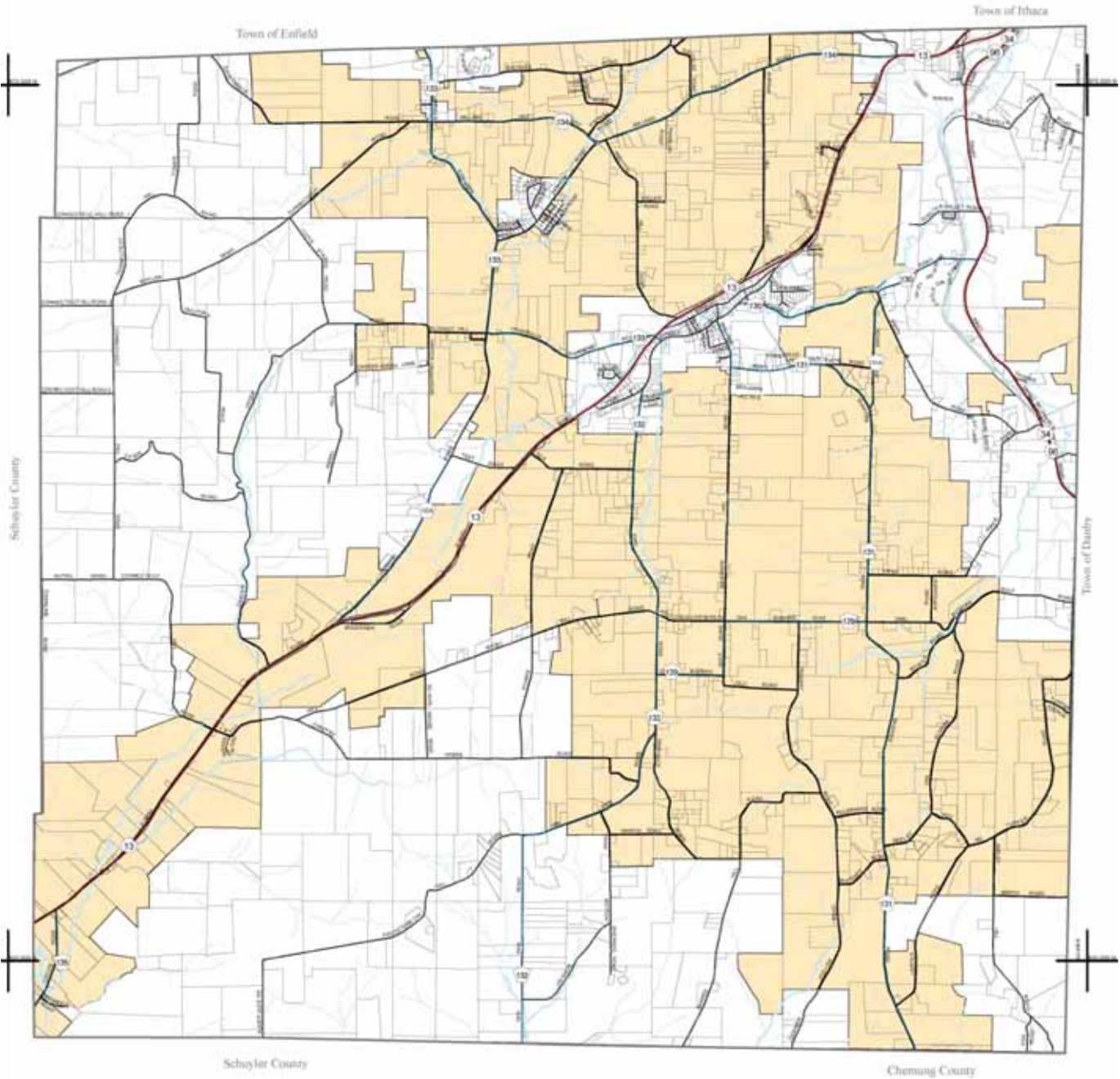
History of Agriculture in Newfield: <http://newfieldhistoricalsociety.org/html/agriculture.html>

New York State Ag Districts: <http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/agsservices/agdistricts.html>

Brochure Local Laws and Agricultural Districts: How Do They Relate?

<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/agsservices/guidancedocuments/305-a2pagePamphlet.pdf>

Newfield Ag District Map

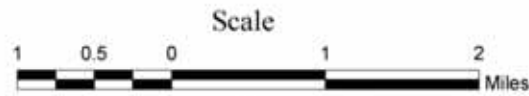


Legend

- State Highways
- County Roads
- Local Roads
- Perennial Streams
- Intermittent Streams
- Tax Parcels
- Agricultural District

References

Roads and Hydrographic Data
 Tompkins County Digital Planning Map, 1996, 1992 & 1978
 2007 Agricultural District Boundaries and
 2007 Tax Parcel Boundaries produced by
 Tompkins County Assessment Department



Scale

1:24,000
 New York State Plane
 Central Projection
 1983 North American Datum



Prepared by the
 Tompkins County Planning Department

Map 3 of 5



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