



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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WHAT IS AN AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION (AGCOM)?

Agricultural commissions (AgComs) are committees formed at Town Meeting through the passage of a local bylaw. In the case of a city, an AgCom is formed through a recommendation from the city council and approval by the mayor. Members are then appointed by the Board of Selectmen or governing body of the municipality.

The purpose of an agricultural commission is to protect agricultural lands, preserve rural character, provide a voice for farmers, and encourage agriculture-based businesses.

For years New Hampshire farmers have served as stewards of land and water resources, and provided habitat for native plants and animals. As New Hampshire communities grow and change, citizens are looking for ways to support local farms, and foster new ones.

Agricultural commissions are a new idea for New Hampshire municipalities seeking to balance growth and quality of life issues, and preserve local character.

As prescribed by NH law, 674:44-e, an agricultural commission may be established in accordance with RSA 673 for the proper recognition, promotion, enhancement, encouragement, use, management, and protection of agriculture and agricultural resources, tangible or intangible, that are valued for their economic, aesthetic, cultural, historic, or community significance within their natural, built, or cultural contexts. The word "agriculture" shall include the entirety of RSA 21:34-a, which is the definition of "farm, agriculture, and farming."

Citizens can use an agricultural commission to help keep farming viable and vibrant in their community, whether rural, small town, suburban or urban. An agricultural commission gives farming a voice, but is not regulatory.

What does an AgCom do?

An agricultural commission focuses on agriculture. It will typically work cooperatively with other town or city governing and land use boards and commissions to make sure the concerns and interests of farmers are better understood and considered in their decision-making. An AgCom may:

- Conduct inventories of agricultural resources, historic farms and farm buildings
- Educate the public on matters relating to farming and agriculture
- Serve as a local voice advocating for farmers, farm businesses and farm interests
- Provide visibility for farming
- Give farmers a place to go to for help
- Help resolve farm-related problems or conflicts
- Help protect farmland and other natural resources
- Conduct activities to recognize, promote, enhance, and encourage agriculture, agricultural resources, and agricultural-based economic opportunities
- Assist the planning board, as requested, in the development and review of those sections of the master plan which address agricultural resources
- Advise, upon request, local agencies and other local boards in their review of requests on matters affecting or potentially affecting agricultural resources.



Who can start an AgCom?

A resident or group concerned about farming, farm businesses, growth, rural character, open space, etc. can start organizing support for an AgCom. The local legislative body establishes the agricultural commission.

Who can serve on an AgCom?

As specified in 673:4-b, the agricultural commission shall consist of not less than 3 members and no more than 7 members who shall be appointed in a manner as prescribed by the local legislative body.

Each agricultural commission member shall be a resident of the city or town which establishes the commission. One commission member may be a member of the local governing body. One commission member may be a member of the planning board. Not more than 5 alternate members may be appointed. When an alternate sits in absence or disqualification of a regular member, the alternate shall have full voting powers. In determining each member's qualifications, the appointing authority shall take into consideration the appointee's demonstrated interest and ability to understand, appreciate, and promote the purpose of the agricultural commission.

Members of an agricultural commission also may serve on other municipal boards and commissions, including but not limited to a conservation commission established under RSA 36-A, a historic district commission established under RSA 674:46, or a heritage commission established under RSA 674:44-a.

Does an AgCom cost the town money?

Since towns provide support for their commissions, each town should decide what is an appropriate budget for the AgCom. As specified by RSA 674:44-g, "A town or city, having established an agricultural commission, may appropriate money as deemed necessary to carry out its purposes. The whole or any part of money so appropriated in any year and any gifts of money received pursuant to RSA 674:44-f shall be placed in an agricultural fund and allowed to accumulate from year to year."

The town treasurer, pursuant to RSA 41:29, shall have custody of all moneys in the agricultural fund and shall pay out the same only upon order of the agricultural commission. The disbursement of agricultural funds shall be authorized by a majority of the agricultural commission. The use of such funds shall not be for the purchase of any interest in real property.

Are AgComs regulatory?

AgComs are created to represent farming interests in the town, but they do not have any legal regulatory mandate or enforcement authority.

Which New Hampshire municipalities have established AgComs?

As of October 2007, AgComs or committees are operational in the towns of Lee (the first), Brookfield, Tuftonboro, and Weare. Several other towns are considering agricultural commissions.

What resources are available to help start and AgCom and to support its work?

The organizational guide and a PowerPoint presentation "Creating an Agricultural Commission in Your Hometown" are available on the web at: <http://extension.unh.edu/Pubs/AgPubs/AgCom.m.pdf>. The guide provides information on how to establish an agricultural commission to promote, enhance and encourage the interests of farming, agricultural resources and rural aspects of community life where you live. The PowerPoint introduces New Hampshire citizens to this new resource. The guide is also available at the NH Division of Historical Resources site, *Tools for Preserving Barns and Farms*, a large and growing collection of other agriculturally-related resources, <http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/programs/barns.html>.

A wealth of information about and for Agricultural Commissions is found at the Massachusetts Agricultural Commission web site, <http://www.massagcom.org/>. And don't forget to visit the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food web site, at <http://extension.unh.edu/Pubs/AgPubs/AgComm.pdf>.

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