The AGvocate Program

began in 2009. Funded through Connecticut Department of Agriculture Farm Viability Grants, it provides a forum for municipal officials, agricultural producers, and other stakeholders to strengthen the farm-friendliness of eastern Connecticut towns. Funding for this brochure was made possible through a grant from The Last Green Valley, Inc. (www.tlgv.org). More information about the AGvocate Program is available at www.AgInfoTLGV.org/AGvocate, or by contacting Jennifer Kaufman at 860-450-6007, AGvocate@yahoo.com.

We live in a special part of the state – so special that Congress has designated our region a National Heritage Corridor that is popularly known as The Last Green Valley because it is the only remaining undeveloped region in the coastal sprawl between Boston and Washington DC. The Last Green Valley has a tradition of land-based economic activities: open pastures, beautiful barns, corn and hayland, locally grown food, and working forests. For generations, your farming neighbors have nurtured and cultivated their fields and helped to preserve this unique and beautiful New England Countryside we all cherish.

The Last Green Valley is a 1,086 square-mile region with 78% forest and farmlands, or 549,00 acres of working land.

For comprehensive resources about promoting local agriculture in Connecticut go to www.AgInfoTLGV.org.

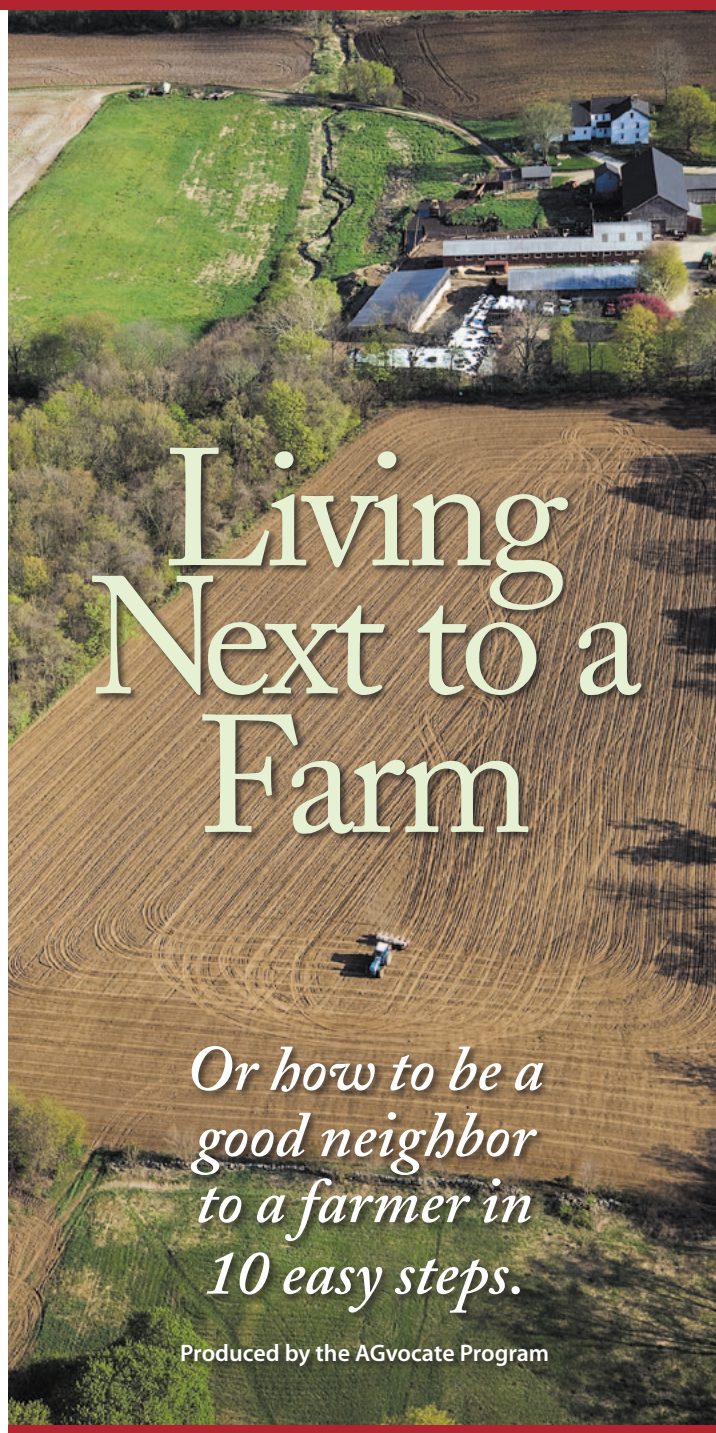
AGVOCATE
ADVOCACY FOR LOCAL AGRICULTURE

The Last Green Valley

Based on a brochure created by the Westport, MA Agriculture Commission

Aerial photos from www.glsweetnam.com

Spring 2011



Living Next to a Farm

Or how to be a good neighbor to a farmer in 10 easy steps.

Produced by the AGvocate Program

1. *Buy local.*

It's healthier for us, better for the environment, and we are lucky to have it. Buy local products at the grocery store—if you don't see it, ask for it. Stop at local roadside stands and farmers markets. When you buy local, you support farm families and preserve the character and the food supply of Connecticut's Last Green Valley. Remember we can't have farms without farmers. To find out more about where to buy local go to www.buyctgrown.com.

2. *Give a thumb's up for farm traffic.*

If you want to see tractors move fast, go to one or more of the many Connecticut Agricultural Fairs (find out more at www.ctfairs.org). If you get behind a tractor on the road, understand that they are not meant for speed or distance. Be patient. Wait for them to pull over or pass with extreme caution. They are part of a serious business that we need here in the Last Green Valley to maintain our culture. Give the farmer a thumb's up to show your support.

3. *Know that our responsible farmers use Best Practices.*

The State requires farmers to be trained, licensed and current in proper pesticide use and storage. Farmers are decreasing use of pesticides whenever possible because it's expensive, labor intensive to apply and overuse is not healthy for crops and their land. Acre for acre, the typical homeowner uses far more chemicals to keep his or her house clean and lawn green and free of weeds than the average farmer uses for cropland.

4. *Be neighborly.*

Farmers work seven days a week, dawn to dusk and sometimes later. If you're planning a backyard event in the middle of the growing season, talk with your farmer neighbor and negotiate a compromise. Most farmers have families too, and are very understanding and accommodating.

5. *Understand that farming is a business.*

While farmers are responsible for being good neighbors, they must also be farmers. Noise, dust, and smells are part of successful farm operations.

6. *Take a deep breath. Savor The Last Green Valley's fresh, clean air.*

You will sometimes smell manure, silage, and other odors—that's part of farming. Many of us around here have gotten used to it and even like it. Think of it as eau de farm. It was here before all of us.

7. *Communicate.*

Meet and talk with the farmer before and after you have a problem, remembering that it's in both your interests to be good neighbors. When you work out a solution, stay in touch with each other. If the conflict cannot be resolved, please contact the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (www.ct.gov/doag) or your town's Agriculture Commission.

8. *Learn more about farmland issues.*

Check out the American Farmland Trust Web site (www. farmland.org) for information about the future of farming. Speak up to your legislators and community and show your commitment to the preservation of our rural character. Farms provide a stable tax base at very low cost—study after study shows that for each dollar a farm is taxed, it requires a fraction of that in town services. Not only do farms preserve the visual character of our town, but they also keep our taxes down.

9. *Vote for farms.*

To keep our farms, we need votes and dollars. Local boards and commissions regularly debate issues that directly affect farming and farmland. Support initiatives to preserve working farmland such as establishing a municipal fund to purchase farmland and tax incentives to encourage farming.

10. *Volunteer.*

Volunteers with varied skills are always needed to support organizations in protecting our region's character. Find out if your Town has an Agriculture Commission. If not, Go to www.CTPlanningforAgriculture.com for information about how to start one. Connecticut Agriculture in the Classroom (www.agclassroom.org) is a great way to increase agricultural education in classrooms. Work with your Board of Education to plant a school garden. Find a local community garden and help out. Talk with your municipal leaders and let them know that your value the farmers in your town.