

• **VIEWPOINT** •

How best to save our farms

By **Stu Nunnery**

State business leaders point to our quality of life as a pillar of economic development. They understand that part of what will attract the high paying jobs they covet are those natural and historic assets that make us who we are.

Remember that.

The Rhode Island House Finance Committee is about to kill an important bond issue that would preserve funding for farmland and open space. The budget deficit will be blamed, but simply, some members of the assembly no longer believe that agriculture's contribution to the state is enough to merit the investment.

Not enough?

We can argue what are Rhode Island's best assets, but we cannot argue that foremost among them are farms and the open spaces they protect and preserve. Along with our beaches and nautical activities, people live and work here to

experience many of the things that our lands provide.

Rhode Island agricultural activity generates \$100 million annually. We rank second in the nation in per farm direct sales of fruits and vegetables while recognized as a leader in the region in turf grass and nursery stock production. Agriculture means local foods and greenery, farm stands and farmers markets, corn mazes and farm stays, and a unique diversity of landscapes and settings much of it protected by the conservation practices of farmers and landowners.

Not pulling their weight? Our farmers and/or their spouses, not only work the land, but may hold off-the-farm jobs as well that provide services to the rest of us. They are doctors and nurses, school bus drivers, builders and contractors, even state representatives and senators. Their passion for growing things, managing natural resources and trying to earn a living from them, does not come cheap and their contributions cannot be overestimated.

The timing could not be more out of synch with the significant investment being made here on several fronts. Rhode Island's farm viability initiative has spawned many of the projects that are growing agriculture's assets and profile. Municipalities recognize that working farms encourage tourism the states second-largest industry and serve to counter balance the ever-expanding infrastructure and service costs associated with residential development. Non-profits, foundations and others are assisting farmers to develop new business enterprises, explore energy efficiency technologies, promote agritourism, run farmers markets, and expand distribution to restaurants and schools.

Can we afford to waste all that investment? If not, why the resistance from the state assembly?

For one, agriculture is undervalued and measuring our commodity output like the big farm states do is deceptive. The majority of Rhode Island farmers engage in direct-to-consumer marketing and sell at retail rather than at wholesale

to distributors. We do not receive large crop subsidies, but leverage significantly less specialty crop money to ensure diversity in our agricultural practices.

Secondly, while RI's agriculture touches many other sectors, we do not assess what economic benefits accrue from these multiplier effects to capture the true value of it to our health, food, quality of life, as well as to the economy.

Third, preservation has become a dirty word, though preservation is what we do. Its what were good at. And many believe that our farms and open spaces have value to our communities commensurate with the mansions to Newport.

Finally, the perception of agriculture as a charity case is partly self-inflicted. Farmers and those of us who work with them have not resisted strongly enough the notion that Save the Farm is a cry for help, when farmers are not victims waiting to be saved and agriculture is not a disease waiting to be cured.

So how can we make good on our business credo while maximiz-

ing some of Rhode Island's best assets?

Make farmland and open space protection a permanent line item in the states budget. Establish a five-year plan for agricultural business development. Develop tax policies that encourage the farm generational continuity and town ordinances that encourage agricultural activity. In addition to preserving farmland, the philanthropic community can invest in those organizations that in turn assist farms and farmers.

One can imagine the scenario a few years hence if we dismantle the very assets upon which our quality of life rests: empty residential towers, abandoned industrial parks, and few new jobs to fuel the economy all because those who might have come here simply didn't want to live in a state that forgot who it was.

Editor's note: Stu Nunnery is the Director of the Rhode Island Center for Agriculture Promotion & Education (RICAPE) He can be reached at ricape@cox.net.

SERVICE DIRECTORY

SERVICES

HAVE TRUCK WILL HAUL

UNBEATABLE RATES

Junk • Brush • Leaves
Appliance Disposal • Construction Clean-Ups
Dumpster Trailers Available

(401) 294-4084 Local Cell: 497-1282

YOU NAME IT, I TAKE IT!

Hauling • Dump Runs • Demolition
Basement Cleanouts • Appliance Removal
Odd Jobs

Fast, Friendly, Cheap Service!

401-338-8950

Announcements:
news@JamestownPress.com

Ad Material:
production@JamestownPress.com

Classified Ads:
adunn@JamestownPress.com

www.JamestownPress.com

Need something printed?
Call 423-3200
The Jamestown Press

Place your ad here and
REACH MILLIONS ONLINE
All for one price!

Jamestown Press
423-3200

SOLAR

ISLAND SOLAR
WWW.ISLANDSOLAR.NET
HOT WATER - PHOTOVOLTAIC
(401) 423-3505

Please tell our Advertisers You saw their messages in the Press! They'll appreciate it and so will we!

TILE

TILE CONTRACTOR
Home Repair / Improvement
Interior / Exterior
Call Bill Caswell - 423-3158
FREE Estimates

Island Carpet
※ Tile & ※
Hardwoods

695 West Main Road
Middletown, RI
401-847-2095

Your Local Resource For All Types Of Flooring

TREE SERVICES

DAVE GLADDING & SONS
Tree Services

Climbing • Removal
Stump Grinding

Free Estimates • Insured
Arborist License #605

465-6401(cell)

Mann's Tree & Shrub Care
A Complete Tree Service
Fully Insured • Free Estimates
Lic.#144 • Lic. #2795
Top Quality at Affordable Prices
401.207.3231

WALLS

Wallcovering & Interior Painting

Fine Quality Work

Commercial & Residential

Any Type of Wallpaper

B: (508) 678 5016 C: (508) 415 6227

WATER

WELLS & PUMPS

Installations & Repairs | Filter Systems | New & Existing Water Systems

Service All Water Needs!

WellWorks 423-WATER (9283)
Lic. # WD/PI-57 • LLC

WATER

Agua SCIENCE

Servicing Jamestown since 1985

7 day a week
Emergency Pump Service

Pump Installation
Certified Water Testing
Water Filtrations
Well Drilling
(No Sub-contracting)
Licensed and Insured

Jamestown Resident's #1 Choice!!!

Best Brands
Best Service
Best Prices!

1-800-767-8731
WWW.WATERRI.COM

WATER

Serving Jamestown Since 1960

Water Well Systems Inc.

• Well Drilling
• Pump Systems
• Hydrofracking
• Filtration Systems

(401) 231 - 3402
www.waterwell.biz

Fully Licensed & Insured
(#WD/PI-52)

WINDOWS

A TOUCH OF GLASS
WINDOW CLEANING INC.

Fine Services for Fine Homes

Residential
Commercial
Power Washing
Awning Cleaning
& Resoration
Deck Sealing

401.490.0955 • 401.374.5179
Anthony M. DiTusa

Fully Insured

Ask about our State-of-the-Art Pure Water Technology

Simple Cleaning Partnership
Windows & Janitorial Service

David Lotero 401-996-1369 Kevin Caliste 401-714-5842

Commercial & Residential Insured & References
Serving Newport & Jamestown Since 1994

Advertise in the Jamestown Press and your display ad automatically appears online at **JamestownPress.com**

Include your Web site address in your ad and a link will be provided!