

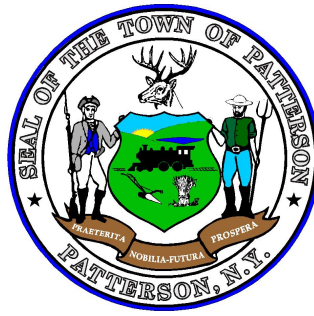
SUPERVISOR

Richard Williams Sr.
 Tel. (845) 878-6500
 Fax. (845) 878-6343
 supervisor@pattersonny.org

Susan Brown
Aide to the Town Board

TOWN COUNSEL

Hogan, Rossi & Liguori
 Tel. (845) 279-2986
 Fax (845) 278-6135

**TOWN OF PATTERSON**

1142 Route 311
 P.O. Box 470
 Patterson, New York 12563
 www.pattersonny.org

TOWN BOARD

Peter Muentener
 Shawn Rogan
 Mary E. Smith
 Joseph Esposito

TOWN CLERK

Donna Ramos
 Tel. (845) 878-6500
 Fax (845) 878-6343
 townclerk@pattersonny.org

March 31, 2025

FARMING IN PATTERSON

Does Patterson support farming in our community? The answer is yes. But much of the confusion, and the controversy comes from not only how farming is being defined, but how Putnam County's Agricultural District is being applied. Patterson follows the NYS Department of Ag's definition of farming; the raising of livestock, growing crops or boarding horses, whether done commercially or for personnel enjoyment. We recognize that farming within our community provides an important source of local food, while helping to maintain a rural character. But not all farm operations are equal, and there are limitations discussed below, needed to protect our residents.

Patterson's Zoning Code is fairly liberal when it comes to farming. The Code, however, is written to protect everyone's right to a reasonable use of their property. That is not to say that the Code is perfect, and it may need to be amended from time to time. What the Code does not support is individuals that would, under the guise of "farming", conduct practices that could potentially place our community, or the general public at risk.

We have seen one "farmer" bring thousands of yards of tree stumps onto their farm to be ground up with the claim that they are needed for a soil amendment. We have seen 10 acres of property cleared and regraded with no erosion control practices, claiming the work was in furtherance of creating a tree farm. When the work was done the "farmer" decided it was no longer feasible to develop the site as a tree farm. One would think that our County would have learned the lesson from Putnam Valley, where a farmer used his farm as a solid waste dump. It cost Putnam Valley thousands of dollars in legal fees to stop the dumping.

And this is our issue with Putnam County's Agricultural District. Some individuals want to be in the Ag District because those individuals believe that they will no longer be subject to the town's regulations and can do whatever they want, including activities that are not farm practices, and/or would adversely affect our community.

Residents should also understand that once a property is in the Ag District the neighboring properties don't have any say about the type of farming that occurs on the site. Residents who relied on the Zoning Code in purchasing are now without recourse. Today the farm could be boarding horses and tomorrow it could be raising pigs, and the neighbor would have no say in the change.

Since its inception the Putnam County Farm Protection Board has vilified Towns as being anti-farm, rather than work with the Towns. The Farm Protection Board has fostered the belief in the farming

community that farms in the Ag District do not have to work with the Towns. Rather than meeting with Towns and working to build an appropriate framework within our zoning laws for legitimate farms to thrive, the Farmland Protection Board has taken the stance that any protections to the community at large provided by zoning must be cast aside to make way for farms. Under NY law, the Town may still regulate health and safety but in practice, it is often difficult to enforce the regulations that protect everyone.

The Town gets little help from the State, whose liberal definition of farming would include a tall commercial building placed twenty feet from a neighboring home and surrounded in a six foot chain link fence topped with razor wire. With the signing of A1234/S1752 by the State, marijuana is now considered an agricultural crop and afforded all the protections of an agricultural district. Marijuana is not grown in an open field. It is grown inside a large climate controlled commercial building.

In other words, a property in an agricultural district can potentially grow *and sell* marijuana from their farm, even if it is in the middle of a residential district. How would you feel if a marijuana dispensary was placed next to your home, because this is now a very real possibility.

Patterson is now facing a new challenge; individuals that want to conduct commercial recreational activities, including inviting the public onto their property, under the guise of having these activities occur under a farm environment. Their livestock sales are not for a source of food or animal products. They are sold as pets. In fact, this is not farming. This is a commercial business in a residential neighborhood and, if it were to be permitted, a certain amount of oversight needs to be maintained to ensure the safety of the public. If the public is going to use the site, there needs to be assurances that they can do so safely; that there are adequate public restrooms, that multiple vehicles can safely access the site; that there is sufficient parking; that emergency services can safely access the site; and that the surrounding roads are adequate to handle the increase in traffic. But rather than have that discussion, the owners have shunned the Town and instead are fighting to be in Putnam County's Ag District with the expectation that they will be exempt from any oversight by the Town. NY law does not support this position. These are valid health and safety concerns that the Town will continue to regulate.

In addition, these activities fall outside of the guidance provided by the Department of Agriculture for what is considered a legitimate farm practice, and therefore are not protected by Putnam County's Ag District. A few of our County Legislators saw this and did not include their property in the Ag District last year.

The Town has offered to sit down and discuss the recreational activities being conducted on this property with the property owners to perhaps work to a compromise that protects both them and the surrounding residential properties. But all such offers have been rejected. And so the property owners continue to fight to be placed in the Ag District under the false belief that a property in the Ag District has an absolute right to do whatever they want, setting the stage for more lawsuits which only end up costing the taxpayers.

The path forward is for farmers and local municipalities to work together. For local municipalities to recognize that farms may have unique needs that should be addressed in their zoning codes, and for farms to accept that a certain amount of oversight by a local municipality is not overreaching, but to ensure that everyone's right to the peaceful enjoyment of their property is protected.

Patterson Town Board