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Sent: Monday, June 13, 2011 2:23 PM
To: crc@acton-ma.gov
Cc: info@actonaces.org
Subject: Acton Farmland, organic practices, and Conservation
restrictions

Hello to the hard-working volunteers of the Caouette-Simeone Conservation
Restriction Committee.

I've been getting some emails from the folks at Acton Citizens for Environmental
Safety (ACES) advocating for a future transition to organic farming at the
Caouette-Simeone farm. I wanted to let them and you know of my responses.

Short version:

1. A transition to organic farming would be a big win.
2. I don't think a CR is the place to put this policy. I believe it should be a
town-wide policy instead,
3. There's a role for the committee to play in making
this happen.

1. A transition to organic farming would be a big win.

I think the ACES memos articulate this better than I could. I would add two
additional points:

-Conventional farming relies heavily on fossil-fuel inputs. However, increasing our
chances of ending up with a somewhat-familiar climate depends on keeping these
fossil fuel resources deep underground where they are now, and successfully
removing more of the carbon out of the atmosphere and keeping it out.

-A focus of the purchase was dealing responsibly with the contaminated soil, and so
the town has agreed to pay considerable sums to remove it to a licensed storage
facility. Given the values implicit in that decision, it seems badly inconsistent
to continue to allow new poisoning of the soil with a variety of contaminants, even
at the lower and more focused doses used in the integrated pest management
(IPM) practices used at the farm now over conventional agriculture.

2. I don't think a CR is the place to put this policy. I believe it should be a
town-wide policy instead,

Conservation restrictions hand over the monitoring and enforcement of perpetually-
aimed choices to third parties, in our case to the Acton Conservation Trust and the
Sudbury Valley Trustees. A transition to organic practices does not belong in a CR
for these reasons:

-We humans are still learning how to make a transition to sustainable agriculture.
We don't know enough yet to specify now the sharp details of best practices,
especially given that a CR lasts in perpetuity. For example, what sorts of farming
best captures and stores carbon for the longest time? We may want to move towards
low-till or no-till practices, as these become better studied and understood.

-ACT and SVT are neither interested nor currently capable, of monitoring and
enforcing the details of agricultural practices. Land Trusts holding CRs are good
at other things: looing for encroachments, or illegal development, or big changes
in biological systems. It's not practical for them to look over treatment logs, or
test for contaminants.

-There are other lands under farming in Acton that would benefit from a clear
policy direction. The Wetherbee lands, for example, are owned by the town and

farmed by the state. Practices potentially way more toxic than IPM are used there: Round-up ready corn, and the widespread use of Roundup there, risk our healthy future in many ways. A vigorous town-wide discussion of farming policy for town-owned lands might help bend the next lease of that land in better directions. (The lease has expired, and needs renegotiating).

-The Morrison Farm and North Acton community gardens have a straightforward transitional policy that works well for those there, and might serve as a learning point for a wider policy ("Absolutely no herbicides may be used in garden plots. Only insecticides and fungicides approved by US EPA, and MA Pesticide Bureau may be used in plots. Care must be taken to keep sprays and dust from drifting out of plot.")

3. There's a role for the committee to play in making this happen.

I think the committee can play a useful role in this evolving policy discussion in two ways:

-Agree with town hall staff which department or person is responsible for farming policy on town lands, and tell the public who that is, so that we can continue this dialog with them.

-Please capture the feedback you get on this and other topics, even if you decide it does not belong in the CR, so that it can be passed on to the appropriate department or person. There's been a delightfully high level of interest in this topic, and I think it's important to allow the impact of that interest, all this good information and advocacy, to flow on unabated to the right people at town hall.

Thanks again for all you do.

-Jim

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