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Acton Conservation Commission
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

Dear Commissioners,

I was concerned to learn that a recent decision by the Conservation Commission may result in severely curtailing the use of Acton conservation land by horses from Hybrid Farm.

I realize that local policies often must address conflicting desirable goals. I have read the 1989 Hybrid Farm license agreement, and I hope that, while the Commission considers goals related to land conservation, the terms of the license may be revised, if necessary, to take into account the benefits that a horse farm of this type contributes to the community. Not only are horses ridden on public lands in many Massachusetts towns, but some conservation lands, even in Acton, have been preserved precisely *because* of their association with horses. Would Morrison Farm, for instance, have the open-space character it has today if it had not been a horse farm?

I understand that horse manure is a potential pollutant, but it also nourishes the soil. And although grazing may at times expose soils and eliminate certain plants, in recent years grazing animals have been welcomed on conservation lands in many Massachusetts communities as a means of maintaining the "open" aspect of open space.

I would be dismayed if Acton's conservation policy had the effect of barring horses from conservation land or of compromising the economic viability of any of our existing farms. Such a policy would present a serious impediment for potential grantors of conservation land or restrictions. Why would the owner of a horse farm, or even the owner of a wooded area used for horse trails, be likely to convey a permanent restriction if the terms of the restriction agreement might prevent use by horses in the future? Or if the constraints of an agreement with the Town might make it difficult for an agricultural enterprise to continue in operation?

Please note that in 2006 local participants in a study that was part of the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program specifically identified all of Acton's horse farms as important heritage landscapes worthy of preservation. The study resulted in the **Acton Reconnaissance Report** published that same year by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. I hope that the conclusions and recommendations of the report are regularly factored into the Commission's decision-making.

If Hybrid's present license agreement has been violated, I hope that the Commission can find a way to craft a new agreement that will make it possible for the farm to continue its valuable service to the Acton community.

Sincerely,

Anne Forbes