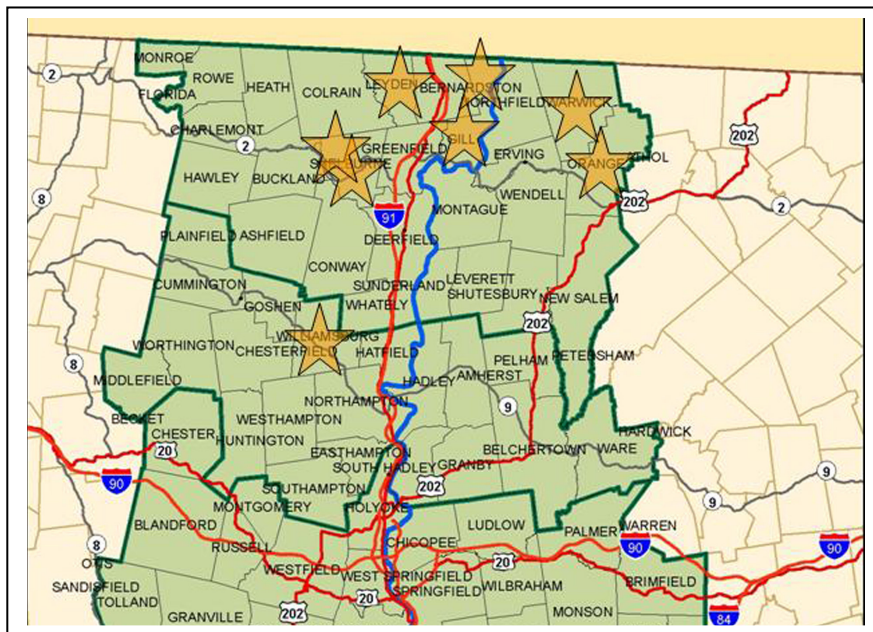


Our Family Farms Milk

In 1997, a group of small family dairy farmers in Western Massachusetts formed the Pioneer Valley Milk Marketing Cooperative and began marketing their milk under the “Our Family Farms” label. The farmers in the cooperative milk more than 320 cows on 1,620 acres of farmland and have combined farming experience adding up to more than 767 years¹. The farms are located primarily in Franklin and Hampshire Counties.



Farms in New England are an important part of preserving open space and wildlife habitats. Open space provides environmental and economic benefits to towns and the community. There is also large social value placed on the rural character that working farm landscapes bring to towns. Local farming also creates social and economic benefits by providing jobs to local workers and providing food security for the local economy.



The cooperative allows these small farmers to make the environmental and social decision to remain a small organization and allows the coop members to try different approaches to being successful, such as raising their herds without the use of rBST, and using low-input technologies like rotational grazing.²



Local Examples of Sustainability in the Pioneer Valley
Balancing economy, ecology & equity

Get involved and learn more at pvsustain.com

Our Family Farms Milk

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Our Family Farms is a good example of how the social and environmental benefits of local farming can be highlighted to make farming a more viable economic option for local farmers.

Statewide there has been a precipitous decline in dairy farming in the state of Massachusetts. Massachusetts has lost an average of 42 dairy farms per year from 1970 to 2004,³ which equates to a 5.3% decline each year. In Massachusetts the average age of the principal farm operator is 55. The combination of aging farmers, increased land value for development, and nationally controlled milk prices have made it difficult for dairy farmers to stay afloat.



Image © Adam Grandin 2007

Despite (or perhaps because of) the challenging economic prospects for farmers in New England, many farmers look at direct farm to consumer sales, cooperative marketing and/or value-added products. Massachusetts leads New England in direct sales to consumers and is number one in the nation for the average value of direct market sales per farm.⁴

CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) has also increased the viability of marketing local farm products with their highly-regarded “Local Hero” campaign to encourage buying local farm produce. In the Pioneer Valley, 78% of residents recognize the Local Hero logo and more than 65% of local consumers surveyed stated that “the Local Hero campaign influenced them to purchase locally grown products and to patronize local businesses⁵.” Cooperatives allow some types of business to stay or become more sustainable. This may not be true across all sectors but it is important to consider the audience and the product being marketed. Good environmental and social decisions can sometimes translate into good economic sense as well.

¹ Our Family Farms. www.ourfamilyfarms.com

² Simes, Debra. Strength in Numbers. *Conservation Matters*, 1999. <http://www.clf.org/general/index.asp?id=459>

³ University of Massachusetts Center For Agriculture. Number of Dairy Farms: a Historical Picture of Massachusetts and the U.S.

⁴ New England Agricultural Statistics 2004 and U.S. Census of Agriculture 2002

⁵ CISA, 2006 Buy Local Rate Card. <http://www.buylocalfood.com/2006PVadratecard.pdf>



Local Examples of Sustainability in the Pioneer Valley
Balancing economy, ecology & equity

Get involved and learn more at pvsustain.com