

Amherst Agricultural Commission
Background Information for
Town and School Purchasing Food from Local Farms
(Warrant Article 12)
October 21, 2010

In 2006, the Massachusetts General Court amended the state's law regarding institutional procurement policies to insert a preference for Massachusetts-grown or produced agricultural products. Under to M.G.L. c.30B, §4(d), a local governmental body may now make purchases of Massachusetts' agriculture products of less than \$25,000 using "generally accepted business practices." However, for such a preference to be extended to purchases greater than \$25,000 a majority vote of the town endorsing such a preference is required. The Town and School Purchasing Food from Local Farms Warrant addresses this requirement.

In spring, 2010, John Gerber, Professor in the Sustainable Food and Farming Program at UMass, Amherst, provided the Amherst Agricultural Commission with draft language and background information for the preferential purchasing warrant article. The warrant article language was based on two other Massachusetts communities which have allowed preferential purchasing of Massachusetts grown agricultural products: Cambridge and Hatfield.

Preferential purchasing of local agricultural products would have the most impact on the Amherst Public School system, which is the largest Town purchaser of foods. The schools' Director of Food Services, Rebecca Trietley, is not only supportive of this initiative, she has already been collaborating with an Amherst farm for the past year which now provides much of the autumn produce used by the schools' food services. Rob Detweiler, the Director of Finance and Operations for the Amherst schools, is also supportive. He commented in a recent email: "This Article does not pose a problem for the schools."

The warrant article has received the support of several other constituents, including: Larry Schaffer, former Town Manager; the Amherst Board of Health; Kelly Erwin, Managing Consultant of the Massachusetts Farm-to-School program; and the Amherst Agricultural Commission, which has reviewed, discussed and edited the warrant article.

By encouraging the purchase of locally grown agricultural products for the town and schools, this warrant article supports our local farms, the health of our citizens (particularly schoolchildren), and the environment. The Amherst Agricultural Commission is pleased to offer its unanimous support for the Town and School Purchasing Food from Local Farms Warrant Article for the fall 2010 Amherst Town Meeting.