

2024020 Chilmark ZBL and Farming

As a long time Planning Board member (35 years in West Tisbury) and as a part owner for almost 60 years of the land used by Mermaid Farm on Middle Road for traditional dairy and truck farming (continuing from several hundred years of similar activity as Brookside Farm) I hope that some comments on possible changes to the agricultural section of the Chilmark ZBL may help in your deliberations. In West Tisbury, and in close collaboration with town boards, owners and other farmers, with various conservation organizations and including individual farm leases from the Land bank, we have preserved in perpetuity well over 2500 acres, much of which is used for or available for agricultural as well as conservation purposes. This swathe extends from Seven Gates and Arrowhead Farms in the NW to the Frances Newhall Woods Sanctuary, to Priester's Pond, the Arboretum, Agricultural Society, Nat's Farm, Whiting's Parsonage Farm and to Sunny Side, and Flat Point Farm on the SE with small lots sprinkled around. I am incredibly proud of this locally crafted and funded (often on a shoestring and with considerable sacrifice) low-key group effort. I am also proud that the basic tenet of our ZBL has ALWAYS been that "the right to farm" allows and encourages small scale, low profile, traditional feet in the dirt, agricultural activities, in each of our zoning districts. This is firmly entrenched in our ZBL and it is a principle that guides all our actions. To lose, or even compromise it, would take the beating heart out of the community.

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We are all familiar and take great pleasure in travelling on the roads between our two towns with the sights of farms, and the access to farm activities and products. We are also familiar with and well served by the fishing boats of Menemsha, the shell fishing on Menemsha Pond and the Great Pond, and the fish markets. Let us work to keep them protected and small scale as befits the local community. I urge you to leave the ZBL as it is, and to resist amendment or changes which could allow activities that are essentially commercial and/or out of scale, far from the town's agrarian roots and ethos and potentially detrimental to the local community and the island as a whole.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment. I hope that keeping farming and fishing local, and community oriented (our closest Chilmark neighbors are farms!) will be an achievable mutual goal and look forward to our board working with yours to keep our efforts synchronized.

Ginny

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