

My testimony today is to encourage you to mandate our RPCs to issue Future Agricultural Land Use Maps in their current revision of their Regional Plans. We need these maps to be a part of the work of RPC's across the state, which requires a coherent approach that will shape the work of all of them, not just some.

The current work of RPC's will have lasting impacts on our landscape, and they will affect not just where we live and work, but also what we eat.

I'd like to offer two stories in support of this

I can remember the evening I first tasted asparagus. It was almost dusk outside of Chelsea, the kind of warm Vermont summer evening where no one really knows where all the kids are, but trusts they are all there together. The asparagus in question smelled amazing, and had been picked from the garden and immediately grilled. There was butter involved and though I had never even heard of asparagus, I was very, very interested.

This memory holds several threads - the best food comes from nearby, it is available from a place you know, and it has seasonality - threads that bind to the larger tapestry of my beliefs about what our food system can, and should be for everyone.

I'd like to contrast this scene with a more recent memory, when I attended my local Regional Planning Commission Meeting to learn about Future Land Use maps. It was dense and filled with maps and graphs, a detailed and tidy plan for how our towns can plan for expansion. But as someone with decades of experience working in our food system and someone who lives on a farm, I couldn't help but feel it was missing some big pieces.

This meeting made it clear that land for agriculture is always outside of town, and that it is away from municipal services and access to transportation and housing. Much of the meeting was spent explaining exemptions to allow for more housing development, while the discussion of land for ag use was only to tell us which color it was on the pixelated GIS maps.

Here is my point to all of you today - Future farmland protection and access needs to go hand in hand with our work to provide plans for how our communities will grow. Our NE Feeding NE plan has done the work to tell us not only how dire our regional food security is, but also how we might change that situation. But in order to make even modest improvements to our food security, we need to double our current land in ag production, and this will take time. FLU maps need to consider not just currently viable farmland and soil, but also how we will provide access to future land for farming. This also means we need a plan to deliberately protect the ag land across the state, particularly within town and "historic settlement patterns," as these spaces represent not just some of the best soil we have, but also easy access to housing, municipal services, and markets, all things that keep farmers on land, and attract new ones.

Everyone in this room understands the impact of RPC's across the state. Now is the time for us to un-silo housing and farming by making sure that FLU maps exist for

agriculture, not just development. We have to provide for a future where our neighbors and families can find food grown in their communities, not outside it.

Thank you for listening and hearing my thoughts.