AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY AREAS

Lewis County's economic history has been tied closely to the area's abundant supply of water, wood, and dairy production. A majority of the county's earlier growth occurred along the Black River Valley, with links to the Erie Canal in Rome, NY via the Black River Canal System. The Black River Valley provides a large alluvial plain with high quality soils and relatively flat topography — good for growing crops and providing grazing lands for cattle. The region's cool climate and well-distributed rainfall also contribute to making dairy the primary agricultural industry in Lewis County. Although the amount of land classified as farms is decreasing within the county, approximately 20 percent of current land area remains in agriculture (see Map 1 and Map 3).

In addition to the dairy corridor along the Black River Valley, the county's vast forested base contains the Tug Hill Plateau to the west and the Adirondack foothills to the east, with over 54 percent of the county's land area remains in agriculture. Agriculture has long been considered the largest industry in Lewis County, with the 2007 Census of Agriculture indicating total agricultural sales of approximately $121.6 million from farm producers. This differs from the USDA reported cash receipts for the same year of $103 million. The sale of animal products, such as milk and meat, accounts for the largest percent of sales, with the remaining revenue derived from commercial horticulture as well as the traditional sales of hay and other crops. From 1982 to 2007, the number of farms decreased 20 percent, while acres of land in farms decreased 18.8 percent (see Table 13). Market value for products in the aggregate within this same time period increased from approximately $59 million to approximately $112 million, although it results in a decrease of 11 percent when adjusted for inflation to 2007 dollars.

Dairy

According to Cornell Cooperative Extension, Lewis County ranked fifth in New York in 2006 milk production, generating 485 million pounds of milk from 28,700 cows on 273 dairy farms. In 2007 the number of dairy cows decreased slightly to 28,400, yet the average production per cow increased from 16,900 to 17,200 pounds of milk, with total Lewis County milk production increasing slightly to 488 million pounds. According to the NYS Agricultural Statistics Service, milk sales accounted for nearly 85 percent of the county's $76.7 million in agriculture product sales (dairy, crops and maple syrup) in 2006, an increase from $72 million in 2002.

The increased efficiency and production of dairy farms mirrors overall farm productivity trends found throughout the county. In contrast to total farm sales for the county, inflation-adjusted average sales per farm increased 137 percent from 1982 to 2007, equating to an increase of 10.6 percent when adjusted for inflation. This is due to the 20 percent decrease in farms and improved capabilities. When compared to 2002, 2007 per farm values increased 58 percent. These increases are a positive signal of the overall value of agricultural activity in Lewis County. It is likely that much of the increases are the result of improved efficiency and productivity from the farms over 1,000 acres. However, this dramatic increase of purchasing power has not lead to significant investments county-wide, as Lewis County's low- and moderate-income families continue to struggle.

The continued contraction of small family farms between 50 and 1000 acres aids in the out-migration of residents in search of work and income. Thus, some of the major pressures influencing agriculture and the economy in Lewis County are external and largely beyond the control of county residents or local leaders. While the continued loss of dairy and other farm acreage impacts the local agricultural economy, it also creates opportunities for alternative land use patterns within the county. However, the utilization of prime agricultural lands for uses other than agricultural activity should be done with deliberate consideration to the compounded impacts a loss of agricultural land may mean to the county and its economy.

Table 13: Lewis County Agricultural Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Farms</th>
<th>1982</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land in Farms (acres)</td>
<td>205,849</td>
<td>179,695</td>
<td>196,774</td>
<td>167,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Farm Size (acres)</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farms by Size:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 9 acres</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 49 acres</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 179 acres</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 to 499 acres</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 to 999 acres</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 or more acres</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvested Crop Land (acres)</td>
<td>91,237</td>
<td>82,748</td>
<td>97,402</td>
<td>82,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold ($1,000)</td>
<td>$55,337</td>
<td>$61,896</td>
<td>$72,178</td>
<td>$112,029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Value per Farm</td>
<td>$76,961</td>
<td>$59,015</td>
<td>$100,108</td>
<td>$122,839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census of Agriculture
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Reserve for Map 3.
The subdivision of large forest areas into smaller tracts, however, often provides sustainable forestry techniques at the parcel level due to the loss of economies of scale. As a result, some forest landholders are turning to conservation easements and special taxing programs to continue to make the growing of forests for timber affordable by reducing their tax burden and maintaining the ability to actively harvest limited amounts of timber. However, as stated previously, the county’s taxable revenue is approximately 75 percent of its assessed valuation. Further use of conservation easements be studied in the field of tax fixes associated with reductions in taxpaying property.

Primary Manufacturing

The conversion of trees or parts of trees into lumber, veneer, pulp or energy starts with the primary manufacturing sector. In Lewis County and throughout the state, the pulp and paper industry was once the primary end user of the wood harvested. However, the sawmill and wood energy industries increasingly are the major wood users within New York and Lewis County. The state has approximately 125 substantial sized sawmills and additional specialty wood products mills; Lewis County has a total of seven mills with an annualized output of 15 to 30 million board feet of timber in 2008. The products from these mills are sent to secondary processors to be included in products.

Secondary Manufacturing

Secondary manufacturing refers to the drying, canning, cutting, and assembly of lumber into parts or finished products. The diversity of tree species growing in Lewis County contributes to an established secondary forest products industry composed of over 30 companies that provide jobs and economic stability to the community. In Lewis County, secondary products include kitchen cabinets, furniture, countertops, custom millwork, molding, stakes, benches, swings, and the nation’s only location for the production of bowling pins. Many other products are manufactured from the varied hardwood and softwood tree species available.

The county’s abundant timber and natural resources have permitted annual growth to exceed annual timber removals, even though removals of growing stock outside of the Adirondack Park Preserve have increased by as much as 36% from 1993 to 2005.

Lands devoted to the forestry industry are owned and managed by logging firms, sawmills, paper mills, finished/secondary wood products processors, and the wood energy industry. The NYSDEC estimates that there are more than 122 logging operations that originate in Lewis County. In addition, at least 30 businesses within the county process raw materials such as chips and sawdust from sawmills and uses the material as fuel for the production of electricity via steam powered generators. In some instances, the steam is also used for manufacturing processes such as dry kilns, greenhouses or piped to other industrial users.

Forestry Areas (see Map 3)

Collecting sap in Croghan, circa 1974

Example of bundled slab wood

Collecting sap in Croghan, circa 1974

Example of bundled slab wood

According to the USDA Forest Service, Lewis County is the largest producer of maple syrup. In 2007, the 112 maple producers had approximately 171,643 taps that produce 28,786 gallons of syrup, accounting for approximately 13 percent of the state’s maple syrup production from 13 percent of its taps. The US Forest Service estimates there are approximately 289 million sugar and red maple taps available in New York State. Currently, it is estimated that state maple producers utilize only 0.5 percent of available taps. Lewis County, however, utilizes approximately two percent of available taps, which is higher than the state average. Even a small percentage increase in tap utilization within Lewis County may have a dramatic economic impact. Data from the June 2008 USDA Maple Report suggests that the approximate 2007 crop of maple syrup generated an estimated $964,000 in sales based on an average price of $33.50 per gallon.

In order to explore the economic potential of maple syrup, the county is currently partnering with Cornell Cooperative Extension to develop a feasibility study for locating a maple syrup bottling/processing plant in the county. In addition, at least 30 businesses within the county process raw materials such as chips and sawdust from sawmills and uses the material as fuel for the production of electricity via steam powered generators. In some instances, the steam is also used for manufacturing processes such as dry kilns, greenhouses or piped to other industrial users.

Lewis County’s forest-based manufacturing system consists of timber harvesting and associated trucking, primary manufacturing, and secondary manufacturing. Large and small operations in the timber harvesting sector cut the trees down and sell the logs and waste products to markets in Lewis County, New York State and throughout the region. After cutting, timber is rated by quality to determine the ultimate utilization of the wood, which is then trucked to mills throughout the region for processing. Sawlogs, the portions of harvested trees that are large enough to be sawed for lumber, are trucked to sawmills, with the highest value logs shipped to veneer mills that take thin layers from the log to produce products such as plywood. Low quality timber is predominantly refined by mills to create the pulp used in the manufacture of paper. In addition to pulpwood, low quality timber is also utilized by the wood energy industry, which takes whole trees or residues such as chips and sawdust from sawmills and uses the material as fuel for the production of electricity via steam powered generators. In some instances, the steam is also used for manufacturing processes such as dry kilns, greenhouses or piped to other industrial users.

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Reserve for Map 5.
As of 2005, it is estimated that private interests hold 75.6 percent or roughly 432,500 acres of the timberland in Lewis County, a decrease of 7.6 percent from 1993. The State of New York holds roughly 18.4 percent, or 105,000 acres, an increase of over 30 percent from 1993. As can be see in Table 14, the federal government also holds approximately four percent of the county’s timberland, a near four-fold increase from 1993. Local municipalities now hold the remaining two percent of timberlands, whereas in 1993 no timberland was reported under local ownership. It should also be noted that roughly 61,000 acres of NYS Forest Preserve lands in Lewis County are not included as timberland.

Agriculture Districts (see Map 4)

As defined by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets:

The purpose of agricultural districts are to encourage the continued use of farmland for agricultural production. The Agricultural Districts program is based on a combination of landowner incentives and protections, all of which are designed to forestall the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses.

Lewis County’s first Agricultural District was formed in 1975 and included portions of Lewis, West Turin, Leyden and Lyonsdale. Agricultural Districts 2, 3, and 4 were formed in 1976 and included portions of Lowville, Martinsburg, Harrisburg, Watson, West Turin, Lewis, Lyonsdale, Greig, Martinsburg, Leyden, and Turin. Agricultural District Number 5 was formed in 1978 and included portions of Denmark, Lowville, Montague, Harrisburg, and Pinckney. Agricultural Districts are required to be reviewed every eight years, and recertified by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets as viable Agricultural Districts.

The County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board recommended the five existing Agricultural Districts be consolidated as Agricultural District 6. Since the original five districts were contiguous with one another, the consolidation aids in the management and administration requirements as dictated by the Department of Ag & Markets Law 25-AA.

The process of consolidating these five Districts began in April of 2007 and the certification date of Ag District 6 is February 15, 2008. There are 246,141 total acres of land within the County Agricultural District, and the certification date of Ag District 6. Since the original five districts were contiguous with one another, the consolidation aids in the management and administration requirements as dictated by the Department of Ag & Markets Law 25-AA.

Table 15: Prime Farmland and Hydric Soils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil Classification</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Percent of Lewis County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Ag Soils</td>
<td>170.076</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Ag Soils, when drained</td>
<td>56.068</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydric Soils</td>
<td>26.259</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Natural Resources Conservation Service

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