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## Farm housing in short supply

*By Mariana Lamaison Sears, Correspondent*

HINESBURG — When Rachel Nevitt was a girl, she used to get a penny for each bug she caught in her mother's flower garden. She would pick them by hand and put them in a jar. Now an adult and an established farmer, Nevitt relies on other means to control pests but still employs manual techniques to grow and reap her fruit and vegetable garden.

"There are certain crops that need to be hand weeded or hoed in the row between the crops where the mechanical cultivation cannot get," said David Zuckerman, Nevitt's husband and co-owner of Full Moon Farm in Hinesburg. "That takes a lot of time."

At Full Moon, Nevitt and Zuckerman grow 20 acres of fruits and vegetables and raise about 1,000 broiler chickens for a direct consumer market. They serve 253 members through a community supported agriculture (CSA) model, and sell their produce every week during farming season at the Burlington Farmers Market.

Because diversified, big operations like Full Moon require a significant amount of dedicated, labor-intensive work, Zuckerman — along with a few other Hinesburg farmers — asked the town's planning commission to consider changes to the zoning bylaws that would facilitate the construction of farm-worker housing.

### **New trends in town**

At a recent Selectboard meeting, Alex Weinhagen, Hinesburg director of planning and zoning, explained that building on agriculture land requires a lengthy permitting process. Under the existing regulations, a farmer would need to undergo the same review process as a developer to build dormitories or to retrofit a barn to lodge seasonal workers, he said.

"We agree this is different and want to create an easier review process for them," he said.

Weinhagen said the proposal responds to the current trend in agriculture in Hinesburg, where there's one dairy farm left but many new, diversified operations. "Because the face of agriculture is changing, the way we deal with agriculture needs to change, too," he said. The new generation of local farmers is concentrating on "what can be produced for people's mouths. The same CSA model taking Vermont by storm is developing big in Hinesburg," he said.

There are four CSA farms in Hinesburg, Weinhagen said. One of them, the Trillium Hill Farm, is co-owned by James Donegan and Sara Armstrong Donegan. At Trillium Hill Farm, located in the heart of the town's historic village, the couple grow one acre of vegetable gardens and have a micro goat dairy. They've been farming for about four years on land that belongs to the family of James Donegan's mother, the Russells. They do not have employees now, but hope to expand their operation in the future. Coming from a family of farmers, James Donegan sees how agriculture activity is changing in town, he said. His grandfather had a dairy operation until the early 1980s.

## More labor

Zuckerman explained that, unlike dairy farms, where a couple of workers can manage the entire operation, relatively large, diversified and organic farms employ more people. Full Moon employs seven fulltime workers, many of them seasonally, and in the future, one or two more might be added as they intend to grow fruit trees and raise beef cattle, Zuckerman said. He would like to retrofit a barn to add dorms and a common kitchen. Offering housing along with the stipend would make the job more attractive to potential farm workers, he said.

Lindsay Harris, another Hinesburg farmer, said the farm worker housing proposal can be “a good, flexible option” and “an effective tool” to help small farms on a tight budget. She is also concerned about sprawl and conserving open spaces and agricultural land, she said.

Harris co-owns Family Farm Farmstand on Shelburne Falls Road with her partner **Evan Reiss**. The couple lease 30 acres of pastures where they raise dairy cattle and bottle and sell unpasteurized, raw milk to customers who subscribe monthly, Harris said. What is left is sold through a farmstand on the farm, along with other local products they promote. They’ve been operating since September and do not have employees. They might diversify in the future and raise pork, she said.

“In theory I think it’s a good idea, but I’d look at the way it’s written to make sure there aren’t loopholes so nobody takes advantage and promotes sprawl,” she said.

## Additional Facts

See the proposal

The Hinesburg Selectboard is revising the zoning proposal. No public hearing has been scheduled. To view the text of the proposal, see <http://hinesburg.org/regulations.html>.

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