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PRESS RELEASE

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RE: Planning Commission Welcomes Agripreneurs to Hinesburg

The Hinesburg Planning Commission (PC) has unveiled a proposal to allow a wide variety of on-farm and stand alone commercial uses in rural parts of Hinesburg. Thanks to rural and agricultural entrepreneurs, new and innovative ways to utilize land are emerging across Vermont. Examples from around the state include:

- On-farm restaurant at the Cloudland Farm in North Pomfret
- The cheese caves at the Cellars at Jasper Hill in Greensboro
- Burger nights and music at the Bread and Butter Farm in Shelburne
- "Nano-scale" slaughterhouse and butcher shop at Sugar Mountain Farm in West Topsham
- Agri-tourism and cheese making at Neighborly Farms of Vermont in Randolph Center
- Distilling new agricultural spirits at Caledonia Spirits & Winery in Hardwick

The Hinesburg PC feels it's time to expand the Town's zoning regulations to allow low-impact agribusiness to be part of Hinesburg's working rural landscape. Traditional zoning segregates uses – keeping commercial uses away from residential areas, and allowing residential uses to be the only alternative to farming and forestry in the rural countryside. Alex Weinhausen (Hinesburg's Director of Planning and Zoning) says, "We need to encourage innovation that helps retain the working farm and forest landscape. It's time to give rural lands and landowners other options beyond simply: farm until you drop, sell conservation easements, or subdivide to grow houses." To some degree, innovative rural land use is already knocking on Hinesburg's door. The Town has encouraged home occupations and cottage industries for decades, and currently has over 100 home-based businesses. Dairy farming in Hinesburg has largely been replaced by diversified farms (vegetables, berries, meat, etc.) and hay/forage farming. The localvore movement is still expanding with benefits accruing to both large scale commercial operations in Hinesburg's village area (e.g., Vermont Smoke and Cure, Green Mountain Organic Creamery) as well as potential small-scale agribusiness in the rural countryside.

Good site planning is essential to any development project. To ensure that rural area development is compatible with the surroundings, the PC proposal also includes refined development design standards for natural resource areas, rural road impacts, and other issues. Recognizing that rural residential development will continue to occur in and around working farms and forests, the PC proposal also specifies an objective formula for future housing density that factors in buildable and unbuildable areas as well as road capacity.

On September 12, the PC will hold a hearing to get public feedback on the proposal. The hearing will be at the Hinesburg Town Office at 7:30pm. The complete proposal is available on the Town website at <http://www.hinesburg.org/planning/raz>.