

***ANALYSIS & FINDINGS OWEGO NICHOLS AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT (#2) EIGHT YEAR REVIEW 2020***  
***Pursuant to NYS Agriculture & Markets Law - Article 25AA***

***Analysis per Section 303-a (2b):***

***(1) The nature and status of farming and farm resources within such district, including the total number of acres of land and the total number of acres of land in farm operations in the district.***

The proposed district will have parcels located throughout the Towns of Owego and Nichols. Land uses in this area are principally agricultural and residential. Small areas of commercial and industrial uses exist in the Villages of Owego and Nichols, as well as the hamlet of Apalachin. This area has evolved around agriculture, which has been the County's historic economic base. Protection of farmlands by agricultural districting has not negatively affected adjacent uses.

There is a wide range of soils and degrees of slope throughout Tioga County that vary in suitability for farming practices. Some of the largest farming enterprises in the Owego Nichols Agricultural District #2 are located in the terrace and floodplain areas of the Susquehanna River and Owego Creek. These deep, fertile, moderately well drained, fairly level alluvial and glacial-fluvial soils, without fragipans, have few limitations on crop varieties that can be grown. Supplemental irrigation using nearby water resources can substantially boost crop production. Howard-Chenango, Tioga Middlebury, Wayland and Chenango-Wayland soils predominate in these intensely farmed areas. The remaining land within the district is upland farming activities. These enterprises have shown stability even though upland farming activities can be limited, depending on slope, soil quality, erodibility, runoff and permeability, and soil depth to fragipan and bedrock. Slope ranges throughout the upland farming areas from rolling, 5% to 16%, to over 35% in extremely steep areas. With the advent of new conservation tillage technology, this becomes a less limiting factor. Volusia-Mardin soils developed by glacial till predominate. Upland farms are generally more suited to growing pasture crops, hay, and corn on a non-intensive basis since irrigation opportunities rarely exist.

The total number of acres of land in the Owego Nichols Agricultural District #2 has grown to 27,444, with 26,343 acres of land in farm operations, resulting in 96% of district acreage being actively farmed.

***(2) The extent to which the district has achieved its original objectives:***

The purpose of Agricultural District creation is the protection and preservation of viable farmlands. The previous Owego Nichols Agricultural District Review Modification of 2012 reported 25,405 acres in the District. The proposed 2020 district is 27,470. This is an 8% increase in the amount of acreage in the program.

Data collection during this eight-year review show that farmers own a total of 25,437 acres and rent a total of 903 acres of land to augment their agricultural operations. Additionally, this current review resulted in 5 more farms enrolled in this agricultural district, an increase from 126 to 134 over the eight-year period.

The Owego Nichols Agricultural District #2 is still achieving its original objectives, which is preserving farmland within the district.

Methodology for petitioner recruitment was intensive and included direct mailings, key farmer reviews, cross-referencing to previously reported agricultural lands, and follow-up telephone interviews for the purpose of accurate data collection and mapping.

**(3) The extent to which county and local comprehensive plans, policies and objectives are consistent with and support the district.**

Tioga County updated and adopted its Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan in 2015 and is working on implementing many of the recommended actions. Tioga County has created an Agriculture Development Specialist position in order to carry out the actions of the Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan. The Town of Nichols also adopted an Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan in 2012. Objectives of both plans present no conflicts between them and the Agricultural District. In general, the plans provide support in preserving and protecting farmland by identification of farmlands to be preserved, as well as consideration of agriculture in site plan and zoning proposals. Tioga County Planning and GIS have worked cooperatively to make this Owego Nichols Agricultural District eight-year a success in preserving and enhancing the district by a comprehensive scanning of the agricultural community resulting in increased farm enrollment.

**(4) The degree of coordination between local laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations that apply to farm operations in the district and their influence on farming:**

The Town of Nichols clearly demonstrates a desire for the protection and preservation of viable farmland by the adoption of its own Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan. Development of this plan took place under the supervision of New York State Agriculture & Markets and Tioga County Farmland Protection Board. These measure help eliminate conflict between local laws and the purpose of the Owego Nichols Agricultural District.

Although the Town of Owego has no written plans for farmland protection or right to farm statutes, the town planning department and municipal leaders adhere to Agricultural District Law in planning reviews and in developing town ordinances.

Both towns included in the district show evidence in their efforts to protect farmland and their agricultural economy.

**(5) Recommendations to continue, terminate or modify such district:**

Farmlands in the Owego Nichols Agricultural District #2 are composed of some of the highest classified soils mapped, particularly in the southern portion of the district along the Interstate 86 corridor. This natural resource is vital to Tioga County and requires the protection that an agricultural district provides.

Based on staff work and the findings in this report, the Tioga County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board recommended continuation with the stated modifications of the Owego Nichols Agricultural District #2 to the Tioga County Legislature.