

Town Meeting Farmland Preservation

(This activity is meant to be a culminating activity once students are oriented to the current issues in many of our communities of development and the struggle for farmland preservation.)

Maine Learning Results: ELA:A4, B4, E1, E2; Science:F2, F4, M4, M6; Social Studies:A1, A2, C2, D2

Purpose: to use existing knowledge of land history, development pressure, and the struggle of the farmer within the modern community to make decisions about farmland preservation in a mock town meeting.

Key Concepts:

- There are many points of view to take into account when making decisions as a town, but many of these different factions will have overlapping interests.
- Development pressure for economic reasons is very strong in our communities.
- Farms mean many different things in our communities, and there are many options for their futures in our towns.

Activity: (This activity is described here in the shortest possible time period. Each of the sections of the activity could be expanded and it could last for two hours or could be extended over a period of days.)

10 minutes: Describe to the class that we will be having a town meeting, and that they will be broken into small groups and will be pretending to be characters representing different factions of our town. We will eventually vote and make a decision on what to do with the old Longfellow Farm, a large historic farm in our community located close to the growing business district downtown, and next to the neighborhoods around our school. The family that has owned and operated this farm for many generations can no longer afford the taxes, and none of the children of the new generation want to go into farming, so they have offered the land up to the town. This meeting is a time when everyone presents ideas and plans for what to do with the farm, and then at the end we will all vote and make a decision. As they present plans and make their votes though, they will need to present from the point of view of their characters. The different factions include: the Longfellow Family, the Land Trust, the Read-Set-Develop Corporation, the Historical Society, the Town Business Association, and a group made up of themselves; the Middle Schoolers. Each group will receive an identity paper; a paragraph describing their point of view and main objectives (attached), and they will use these to formulate their plan. Each group will choose one person to be their public speaker, and remind them that their goal in making and presenting a plan is to convince the rest of the town, including all of the other factions, to vote with their plan.

20 minutes: divide groups by their factions, and give them their identity paper and scratch paper on which to record their plan. Each group should describe their plan in four sentences or less, and they need three main points as to why their plan is a good one. At the end of the 20 minutes they will present to the town.

20 minutes: groups take turns presenting their plans in two minutes or less.

10 minutes: groups have time to revise their plans and join with allies if they see other groups with similar objectives. They must be ready to present again in 1 minute or less explaining what has changed in their plan, what alliances have formed and go over their main points again.

Now is the time to VOTE. Students put their head down and closes their eyes. They show their vote by raising their hand for the plan they favor as it is called by the teacher. They vote twice; once as their character in the meeting, and once as themselves.

Debrief: Look at the results as a class. Is this what people expected? Are they surprised? Did this seem like a realistic activity to them? What about it do they think could happen in real life and what not? Why and why not?

Follow Up Activities: Students can research real life options for preserving farms in our state by looking on the internet for the Maine Farmland Trust, Farmlink (which is a project of MOFGA), and their local land trusts. They can also read newspaper articles about what happened to some real life farms by checking out Portland Press Herald Articles (available for \$1.00 through the Press Herald archives), about the Meserve Farm in Scarborough, the Tidewater Farm in Falmouth, and they can call the Morris Farm Trust in Wiscasset to find out what became of that old family farm. There are many options for farm preservation today, and knowing about them will put kids ahead of many adults in their communities, and help inform them for the future.

Materials:

- attached identity pages for each of the town meeting factions
[Attach:GorhamTownMeetingBlurbs.doc](#)
- a map or visual of the farmland in question
- a timer
- scratch paper and pencils