



May 9, 2022

Dear Members of the West Tisbury Conservation Commission,

I urge you to withdraw your opposition to holding the West Tisbury Farmer's Market (WTFM) at the Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society grounds on Panhandle Road. I write on behalf of Island Grown Initiative (IGI) and as a former MVAS Trustee and a current member.

Over the past 6 years, as Executive Director of IGI, I have worked closely with both the MVAS and WTFM to promote our agricultural, fishing and food communities. IGI secured a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) to help the WTFM with its legal incorporation, with marketing promotion and with resources to help ensure a safe market during COVID. We do so because the WTFM is so critical to our farmers, fishermen, and food purveyors. I have personally hosted the MDAR Commissioner on his visits to Martha's Vineyard and have shown him around the Fair, the WTFM, and many individual Farms. He and his team are impressed with the revival of the agricultural and food movement on the Island.

The Farmers Market originated with MVAS and is specifically included in the language of the Woods property restriction. This should be sufficient to continue the use of the grounds for this purpose if other local permitting is granted. The market may have grown since the signing of the restriction but so has the Island and the demand for local foods. Sales at the WTFM represent a significant source of revenue for our farmers and food producers. Your objection to non-agricultural vendors flies against standard operating procedures for Farmer's Market's around the country and the Commonwealth. Value added products have always been part of the market and continue to be important to bring in more customers and to help enterprising food and craft vendors.

I received the MDAR Commissioners newsletter last week which was promoting Farmer's Markets around the Commonwealth and included a list of Market's and the vendors they were seeking. That list included the following:

Pasta	Chocolate	Fibers
Pantry Products	Ice Cream	Condiments
Food Trucks	Crafts & Textiles	Soaps
Prepared Meals	Fish	Wine
Breads and baked goods	Soup	Value added products
Tea and coffee	Pizza	Beverages (other than coffee)

P.O Box 622, Vineyard Haven, MA 02568



Frankly, the WTFM is more restrictive than Farmer's markets elsewhere about vendor mix. From the beginning it has codified in their by-laws percentages that limit the non-agricultural product vendors. The WTFM managers today are preserving the ratios that were in place at the time that the restrictions for transferring the property to MVAS were made.

IGI has a track record of being strong advocates for conservation and protecting the lands and sea on which we all depend. We are leading the way on the Island regarding regenerative farming practices that will enrich our soils and help mitigate climate change. Noli Taylor our Senior Program Director is a founder of the Island Climate Action Network and is leading the charge on this week's Climate Summit. We want to partner with the West Tisbury Conservation Commission on all these initiatives and the many threats to the Island's survival. The WTFM is not a threat, but a vital opportunity to support our farmers, fisherman and food purveyors. The food renaissance is bringing more young people back to the Island. The WTFM is an essential marketplace for many of them; their own by-laws are sufficient to ensure a balance in the vendor mix.

I urge you to withdraw your objections and pave the way for the WTFM to open its season on the MVAS grounds.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Haag
Executive Director

Cc:

Lynne Whiting, Board Chair
Noli Taylor, Senior Program Director

Dear Brendon, Board Members and Friends,

I would like to offer my views on the use of the Fairgrounds for the West Tisbury Farmer's Market. Debbie and I started our farming career at the Farmer's Market in 1975 and learned a lot about farming and marketing from our fellow vendors. I have also been a Trustee of the Agricultural Society for about 40 years and recently retired to allow younger people a position. I realized in my work there that a large portion of our mission is to keep a strong presence of agriculture on Martha's Vineyard for the preservation of our character, culture, land protection and food security. Hopefully you also remember that I was a Board member of the VCS for several years and a strong supporter of your mission since the inception of the Society.

I believe that the expressed inclusion of Farmers Markets in the language of the Woods restriction is enough to justify the current use of the grounds at the Agricultural Hall now and in the future. If the Market today has grown to be larger than it was in 1975, it reflects the fact that we are providing products the Island people want and need, and less happily, it reflects the doubling of our population which has been allowed to crowd all our Island institutions. This makes the market all the more important to the missions of VCS and MVAS as it helps new islanders learn what we regard as important in life here. I would speculate that Bob and Jean Woods would support this as a strengthening of the relevance of MVAS for the Island's future.

Though I haven't read the specific legislation for Massachusetts Farmer's Markets, and the inclusion of value added and non-agricultural products for sale at Farmer's markets, I do know very well that the Commonwealth has acted powerfully to support agriculture in the state by permitting Farm Stands to include products that they did not grow in their stands. It has become obvious to me that this is what makes a "market". By providing a product such as New Jersey tomatoes in our stand in early July, when our local tomatoes are not ripe yet, we attract and hold customers who in August will be there in sufficient numbers that we can sell far more of our own tomatoes than we would if we had been turning customers away the rest of the year. We have visited farm markets all over the country and it is standard for them to also provide things like fudge, kettle corn, and cider doughnuts, all to attract a crowd to buy their own farm products when they are in season. This has helped many farms to stay in business which is good for the communities in which they are maintaining land for agriculture.

The By-laws of the Farmers market are much more strict than those of Massachusetts. From the start, we established that non-agricultural products, such as breads, pies and jams, could only constitute a small minority of the booths, with the strong majority being "farm", and also grown only on Martha's Vineyard. Non-farm products were being sold at the Farmer's market at the old Fairgrounds for about 20 years, before the new fairgrounds were established on the Woods' land. The current managers and Board of the market are maintaining the same ratio today to preserve an authentic farmer's market.

I would like the VCS Board to consider the Market as it is today and ask, "What's the harm?" I have told Brendan and others about my testing for compaction in the large field, which is used as a parking lot for thousands of cars for the Fair and other events, and as I pushed the probe into the soil, I was surprised to read that there was no compaction.

Visually, the market is a busy place. There are lots of cars and people. It makes a difference if it is a good thing, like supporting land use in agriculture on all of Martha's Vineyard, or something less noble, like a demolition derby. Some would consider a carnival to be obnoxious, but it is part of our Island culture and provides the attraction that allows MVAS to draw attention to our mission.

Bob and Jean Woods knew about these MVAS activities and, in the process of making the magnificent gift to the world by conserving their large land holding as a Nature Refuge, they also set aside these 20-some acres for the agricultural society to continue their service to the Island community. I don't think anyone expected this land would become a farm, even though the CR was labeled an APR. It was meant to be used as the fairgrounds in Town were used.

I hope you will decide to withdraw the reservations about the market that have been expressed recently and allow the use of the MVAS grounds for our well-disciplined Farmer's market.

Sincerely,

James A. Athearn

Conservation Commission

From: ss <andersenan@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2022 11:55 AM
To: concomm@westtisbury-ma.gov
Subject: Farmers Market

To Whom It May Concern:

I am so lucky to have been a member of this community for 35 years. A thousand and one reasons to call West Tisbury home. One of the delights: the farmer's market. I recently heard that there might be a chance to bring it back to the Grange Hall on Wednesdays?

I very much would be in favor of that. I support our farmers, go to all the farm stands and visit the farmer's market on Saturdays at the Ag Hall. But I have never liked it there. It is just too vast. Perfect during the Covid crisis, of course, but that place never had the charm of the market right in town. Where we always would meet neighbors to catch up with, laugh with, and put veggies and flowers into our baskets while chatting with the well-known vendors. That atmosphere is lost in the huge space the Ag Hall provides on its fields.

Whether it is a visit to our library, or to Alley's for a coffee on the porch, the church, the gallery, the gas station, or the town hall, all that makes our town unique. But it was the farmer's market that always was my favorite place. If there is a possibility to bring it back into our midst, I would be all for it.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Best regards,
Angela

Angela Andersen
115 Merry Farm Rd.
West Tisbury

100 Stoney Hill Rd.
PO Box 1185
West Tisbury, Ma 02575

May 10, 2022

To : West Tisbury Conservation Commission,
Vineyard Conservation Society,
West Tisbury Zoning Board of Appeals

Dear members:

We are writing to urge you to do whatever is necessary to approve the West Tisbury Farmers Market operating at the Agricultural Hall. The Farmers Market is a nearly 50-year-old icon of the town - indeed of the island. Unfortunately, it's prior location at the Grange is no longer sustainable. While we understand your concerns about local impact and we are not asking that they be ignored, please keep in mind the big picture.

Farmers markets are found all over the United States, certainly across rural America but in many urban and suburban neighborhoods as well. It is a significant cultural addition to our island as well as an economic engine for farmers and others – the mix of products beyond pure agricultural is an asset, not a detriment. The market not only serves as a mechanism for farmers' sales but introduces our burgeoning tourist population to members of the community they might not otherwise encounter.

Additionally let's not overlook the years of complaints about the traffic impact to town center where backups have been reported for miles. The Ag Hall has multiple entrances that can (and have been) used to significantly mitigate traffic impacts.

We recognize the real responsibility of properly enforcing an APR. Though we admit no intimate knowledge of the details here, we would argue that "Unacceptable disturbances" and "unsightliness" are very much in the eye (and ear) of the beholder. Many would consider a quiet Farmer's Market held for a few hours to be far more appealing than the 4-day, 12-hour extravaganza of light and noise from the Ag Fair.

Finally, please don't ignore the clear sentiment heard from the community in the comments to yesterday's MV Times article. Most are well-considered, thoughtful responses, including from neighbors to the property. Please clearly recognize the spirit of the law as you consider the letter of the law and approve this.

Sincerely,
Doug Ruskin
Ginger Norton

Cc: MV Agricultural Society

Conservation Commission

From: Contact form at West Tisbury, MA <cmsmailer@civicplus.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2022 10:19 AM
To: mmcfarland
Subject: [West Tisbury, MA] WT Farmer's Market (Sent by Lynne Whiting, lynne.whiting@gmail.com)

Hello mmcfarland,

Lynne Whiting (lynne.whiting@gmail.com) has sent you a message via your contact form (<https://www.westtisbury-ma.gov/user/30/contact>) at West Tisbury, MA.

If you don't want to receive such e-mails, you can change your settings at <https://www.westtisbury-ma.gov/user/30/edit>.

Message:

To the West Tisbury Conservation Commission,

The West Tisbury Farmer's Market began on the Agricultural Society Grounds. It has been an important part of our rural community for decades and a part of my life since the 1970s. When I joined my future sister-in-law, Prudy Whiting, as a vendor selling flowers and herbs from my garden, we had no idea it would grow into what it is today. Not only does it provide the opportunity to procure locally grown produce, locally harvested fish and Island made products, it has become a popular meeting place for Islanders and visitors alike, not to mention a source of income for the growers and sellers. One farmer reported that a season at WTFM represents about 40% of their annual income.

Since joining the Island Grown Initiative (IGI) Board in 2015, I have learned a great deal about the importance of collaboration and cooperation among Island non-profits. I have watched the responsiveness of these groups to the needs of our neighbors. When the Pandemic began in 2020 and the WTFM moved to the Agricultural Grounds, we all wondered how it was going to work. Surprisingly, it only got better. The traffic congestion in the center of Town was relieved and the new space provided a safe arena for folks to buy, sell and/or simply see other humans in the out of doors. It's been a win-win for everyone. I am optimistic that those in opposition to giving WTFM a permanent home on the MVAS grounds will see the importance of making this work.

As a lifetime member of the MVAS, I see the WTFM directly linked to the Society's mission of supporting farmers. As the President of the Island Grown Initiative Board (IGI), I know that my responsibility is to further our mission: "To build a regenerative and equitable food system on Martha's Vineyard that engages, informs and integrates the community." As an aging West Tisbury resident, I hope that the WTFM will be granted a permanent home to engage and nourish my grandchildren and generations to come.

Please work to keep the Farmer's Market alive and well on the Agricultural Grounds in West Tisbury where it belongs.

Respectfully,
Lynne E. Whiting
985 State Road
West Tisbury, Mass.