

ENVIRONMENTALISTS SEEK TO DISTINGUISH FARMERS FROM DEVELOPERS Charge Farm Bureau Undercuts Farming While Promoting Over-Development

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The Long Island Pine Barrens Society has kicked off a new public education campaign to preserve open space and farmland on the North Fork. Designed to help distinguish real farmers from developers and real estate speculators, the campaign consists of print and radio ads, articles, presentations to community groups and direct mail.

In ads and a column in North Fork newspapers this week, the Society points out that 70 percent of agricultural land is owned by developers and not real farmers. It argues that the Town Board of Riverhead and Southold must use zoning and planning to preserve some 30,000 acres of land before final build-out in 2010. The Society warns that a population and taxes could double in Riverhead or triple in Southold, add more than 100,000 new automobile trips daily and result in the destruction of the North Fork's tourism based economy, property values and overall quality-of-life.

PBS Executive Director Richard Amper spoke bluntly, "Riverhead and Southold must protect the equity in their land so that they can get loans needed to continue farming, but we have no obligation to make land speculators rich at our expense when they densely develop the North Fork, sending taxes for schools and other new government services through the ceiling, undercutting our tourism economy and reducing our property values."

A main target for the campaign is the Long Island Farm Bureau. The Society charges that the Farm Bureau represents developers and real estate speculators who greatly outnumber the North Fork's real farmers and criticizes the group for supporting development on farmland and opposing upzoning and building moratoriums which can preserve open space and control taxes. "We have no problem with farmers," Amper explained, "We have major problems with the Long Island Farm Bureau which is advancing the developer's agenda, undercutting farming and merely masquerading as farmers." He said the Farm Bureau is indistinguishable from the Long Island Builders Institute.

Print and radio ads beginning June 27 say, "Old MacDonald had a farm ...and on his farm he had some condos..." The ads go on to point out that land owners committed to farming are being used by developers to influence Town Board decisions that favor over-development at the expense of "farms, farmers and farming."

The latest in the Pine Barrens Society's "Enough is Enough!" campaign against over-development, the effort is entitled "North Fork's Moment of Truth." The goal is to persuade local residents and town officials to adopt zoning and land use plans that "protect the public interest as well as that of real farmers but which do not advance the interests of developers at everyone else's expense," Amper said.

"The North Fork is certain to go the way of the west if action is not taken immediately," Amper concluded. "We must distinguish between real farmers and real estate speculators or we won't be able to help the farmers while preventing over-development."