

To: Cape Elizabeth Town Council
From: William H Jordan Farm

Date: May 3, 2021

Re: Agricultural Buildings – High Tunnels**/Greenhouse

EXISTING SITUATION

Chapter 19 of Cape Elizabeth’s Zoning Ordinances - SEC. 19-9-2 APPLICABILITY under ***Activities Not Requiring Site Plan Review*** identifies:

Agricultural buildings: Any barn, greenhouse, or storage shed with a building footprint that does not exceed 2,000 sq. ft. in size.

THE CHALLENGE

The “not to exceed” 2,000 sq. ft. presents an issue for farms wishing to participate in the High Tunnel program funded by the USDA’s NRCS EQUIP program. Under the USDA requirements a high tunnel must cover greater than 2,100 sq ft. Therefore, any high tunnel a farm wishes to erect that meets the reimbursement requirements from the USDA will trigger site plan review.

Many of the farms in Cape Elizabeth desire to take advantage of the USDA’s High Tunnel program and as a result I am requesting that the Town Council recommend a review for a potential change.

DESIRED OUTCOME

The desired outcome would be an increase in the “not to exceed” square footage for high tunnels to 3,000. This will allow for more than enough growing space for farms that want to extend their season or do year round production. This will result in more fresh food available to our community and more resilient farm businesses.

As you know the Comprehensive Plan recommends supporting agricultural activities in our community.

52. Continue the farm-friendly regulatory structure, including but not limited to allowing agriculture related uses, the TDR agricultural bonus and agricultural land preservation as part of open space zoning developments.

**** Definition – HIGH TUNNEL**

High Tunnels, sometimes called hoop houses, are steel-framed, polyethylene-covered structures that extend the growing season. High tunnel benefits include better plant and soil quality, fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment, and better air quality because the crops are usually sold locally, decreasing fuel use for transportation. High tunnels protect plants from severe weather and allow

farmers to extend their growing seasons – growing earlier into the spring, later into the fall, and sometimes, year-round.

And because high tunnels prevent direct rainfall from reaching plants, farmers can use precise tools like drip irrigation to efficiently deliver water and nutrients to plants. High tunnels also offer farmers a greater ability to control pests and can even protect plants from pollen and pesticide drift. Perhaps the best thing about high tunnels is that they help farmers provide their communities with healthy local food for much of the year – food that requires less energy and transportation inputs.