

CHAPTER 3

AGRICULTURAL & FOREST RESOURCES

This chapter of the Casco Comprehensive Plan is a portion of the Inventory and Analysis section of the plan. The purpose of this section is to provide a current status of the agricultural and forestry capacity within Casco and the surrounding region. This Chapter is organized into four sections:

1. Agricultural Resources
2. Local Agricultural Protection
3. Forestry Resources
4. Implications

Agricultural Resources

[STATE REQUIREMENT: “How important is agriculture and/or forestry and are these activities growing, stable, or declining?”]

Agriculture is not a major part of the economy of Casco. According to the American Community Survey 5-year estimates, only 14 residents over the age of 16 were employed in farming, fishing, and forestry in Casco. Since 2010, there have been less than 30 people working in farming, fishing, and forestry in Casco. Previously, agriculture was a large part of the town’s economy and community. Community members have expressed interest in reinvesting in local agriculture.

Forestry is a significant part of Casco’s economy. Hancock Lumber Company has been in business since 1848 and still has a lumber mill, retail store, and its administrative offices in Casco. It has been prominent in Casco since its founding. The town was initially formed around mills, many of which have become today’s villages. Forestry has been a constant in Casco and has been relatively stable throughout town history.

[STATE REQUIREMENT: “A description of any community farming and forestry activities (e.g. community garden, farmer’s market, or community forest) and a brief description of any that are under threat. Does the community support community forestry or agriculture (i.e. small woodlots, community forests, tree farms, community gardens, farmers’ markets, or community-supported agriculture)? If so, how?”]

Agriculture is not a significant aspect of Casco’s economy; there are not many opportunities for the town to support community agriculture. Casco previously hosted a farmers’ market at the Village Green, however due to low participation and the onset of COVID-19, the market has not been held

in recent years. The biggest community farming operation in Casco is Hancock Family Farm which runs a very popular CSA and farm stand. The farm also runs a hands-on farmer training program to help new farmers learn all aspects of the farming business.

Known farming facilities in Casco include:

- Hancock Family Farm, 36 Quaker Ridge Rd.: Organic Farm with a CSA, Farmstand, and pick-your-own Flowers.
- Sweet William’s Maple Syrup, 66 Spiller Rd.: Maple products.
- Rooted Earth Farm, 28 Webbs Mills Rd.: Small, 5 acres, three person operation. The farm has a focus on sustainable farming and herbs.
- Mid Ridge Farm, 343 Mayberry Hill Rd.: Organically produced urban farm and farmers market.
- Thicket Hill Farm: Family-owned pig farm.
- Momentum community garden, 1059 Meadow Rd.
- E’s Beez: honey producer.

Additionally, the Casco (Wade) State Fish Hatchery is located at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife just North of the Village off of Route 121 and is supplied water by Pleasant Lake. Fish species raised at the Hatchery include brown trout, rainbow trout, landlocked salmon, and brook trout seasonally. Annually, the facility produces 85,000 catchable fish, more than 45,000lbs.



[STATE REQUIREMENT: “Information on the number of parcels and acres of farmland, tree growth, and open space enrolled in the state’s farm, tree growth, and open space law taxation programs, including changes in enrollment over the past 10 years. Are farm and forest land owners taking advantage of the state’s current use tax laws?”]

Farms, open space, and tree growth in Casco:

- 330.7 Acres, 7 parcels farm
- 64.5 Acres, 3 parcels open space
- 6,559.3 Acres, 68 parcels tree growth

In the 2021 Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary, Casco’s Cumberland County Assessor reported that there were 69 tree growth parcels, seven farmland parcels and three open space parcels, or a total of 79 parcels in current use programs. Of the 3389 land parcels in Casco, 2.33% are enrolled in current use programs as of March 1, 2021. Although land has continued to be enrolled in these programs over the past 10 years, some parcels of land have been withdrawn from these programs as well.

Local Agricultural Protection

[STATE REQUIREMENT: “Is the community currently taking regulatory and/or non-regulatory steps to protect productive farming and forestry lands? Are there local or regional land trusts actively working to protect farms or forest lands in the community? Are there policies to safeguard lands identified as prime farmland or capable of supporting commercial forestry. To support farming and forestry and encourage their economic viability?”]

The Casco Open Space Commission’s mission includes protecting working agricultural land and forests. Through community engagement, the Commission has guided landowners toward strategies to protect the space such as through Farm land tax laws to reduce the landowner’s tax liability and using conservation easements. Beyond the Open Space Commission, the Town Code touches on farming mostly in the context of water protection policies, although the Planning Board is currently working on an alternative energy ordinance to help contain solar farm operations in balance with maintaining open space.

The Loon Echo Land Trust reported easements on a few sites that were historically agricultural lands, such as Helen Allen Farm; however, LET does not currently have any working farms under protection. The organization has expressed interest in doing work to acquire/conservate farms in Casco given the opportunity.

[STATE REQUIREMENT: “Are there large tracts of agricultural or industrial forest land that have been or may be sold for development in the foreseeable future? If so, what impact would this have on the community?”]

Until very recently, Hancock Land (Lumber) Company owned a significant portion of forested and open land in Casco. The company has a history of making their private land open to public access for recreation, including Jugtown Forest, a large conservation easement held by the State, a portion of which is in Casco. While Hancock and others’ lands have been a major resource for Casco residents, residents have expressed concern over the potentially unclear future of Hancock Land Company’s former land, as 90% of it has now transferred ownership to a private individual. Given the amount of land in large ownerships, changing ownerships, particularly if fragmented or for development, could be problematic for the forests, open space and outdoor recreational opportunities in Casco.

[STATE REQUIREMENT: “Does the community have town or public woodlands under management, or that would benefit from forest management?”]

Casco has public woodlands although community members have observed that they have been managed poorly. Sebago Lake State Park is located in the Towns of Casco and Naples. The park, including its woodlands, is operated by the Maine Department of Conservation. Other publicly accessible lands are privately owned.

Forestry Resources

Hancock Lumber Company operates sawmills, lumberyards, and component manufacturing. The company was founded in 1848 and today is the largest producer of Eastern Pine in North America. In addition to the location in Casco, Hancock operates two other sawmills in Maine and one in New Hampshire. They also operate related retail businesses which supply contractors and homeowners with lumber and building materials. Facilities in Casco include the Ryefield Sawmill, on Route 11, which produced over 17 million board feet of Eastern White Pine in 2001. There is also one retail outlet in Casco, and the corporate offices are on Route 11, across from the Ryefield Mill, Hancock Land Company owns and manages timberland.

Also in the lumber industry, The Red Mill Lumber is a sawmill that specializes in hardwood and hemlock timber mats, supplying the lake region with building materials since 1979.

The annual timber harvest for Casco has fluctuated in the last 30 years from under 200 to over 1000 acres harvested total; the average total harvest from 1991 to 2018 is 622 acres. Harvest is most often done through selection harvest and shelterwood harvests.

[STATE REQUIREMENT: “Does the community have a street tree program?”]

Casco does not have a street tree program.

