

Plymouth Farm & Livestock Compact

February 20, 2025 (v1.4)

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The Plymouth Farm & Livestock Compact is a voluntary agreement to manage family and small commercial farms using Standard Farming Practices.

This process is about keeping livestock on suburban and semi-rural properties for personal use or small-scale commercial operations. It calls for signing and following of a voluntary agreement, in the form of a Farm & Livestock Compact agreement (Compact), between the Town of Plymouth and individual farmers and cooperatives to commit to using state of the art good farming practices and operating their farms in an ethical, humane, and nurturing manner that will ensure a resilient and sustainable agricultural economy in Plymouth and our surrounding communities into the future.

Under this process, there are no specific regulations regarding the keeping of livestock. Once a Farm & Livestock Compact has been agreed to and signed by the farmer and the Town, as long as the farmer is conducting their operation according to the Compact, there will be limits to nuisance complaints filed by neighbors related to the farming operation.

Any farmer who chooses not to participate (e.g., not prepare and sign a Compact), is of course free to do so. However, by not having a signed Compact, the farmer is open to nuisance complaints and consequences related to their farming operation.

Under this voluntary process, the farmer will agree to prepare, sign and farm in accordance with the Compact. (The Compact may be prepared with the assistance of the Agricultural Commission.)

1. Overview

The Plymouth Farm & Livestock Compact provides a comprehensive framework for the healthy and safe operation of a small-scale commercial livestock farm. The farmer is to adapt and adopt the sections of the plan based on the specific needs and conditions of their farm, and seek guidance from agricultural experts, the Plymouth Agricultural Commission, and veterinarians for personalized advice. Regular review of and update to the Compact is required to incorporate improvements and to address changes in the farm's operation.

1.1 Right to Farm

Right-to-Farm laws began in the 1970's as a response to the rapid development that is and has been increasingly encroaching into America's farmlands. As urbanization swelled, and suburban developments converted once picturesque rolling hills into homogenized cul-de-sacs, many family farms paid the price. New residents who were unfamiliar with lifestyles in once rural areas would soon bring noise, dust, odor, and other nuisance complaints against farmers who pre-dated the newly developed neighborhoods.

Many family farms were unable to compete monetarily against the lawsuits and litigation they faced for their normal farming practices. In addition to driving out existing farms, anti-farm legislation and restrictions also prevented younger and newer farmers from entering the agrarian industry or continuing a family tradition. Once vibrant and active farmlands

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would slowly become vacant and overgrown, until ultimately becoming sub-divided and paved.

By 2015, all 50 states in the United States have passed some variant of Right-to-Farm legislation. Plymouth adopted its Right to Farm Bylaw (Chapter 63) on October 26, 2009, through the Annual Town Meeting, Articles 22 & 23, and amended on April 2, 2022, Article 14 – Annual Town Meeting.

1.2 Plymouth Agricultural Commission (“AgCom”)

The Plymouth Agricultural Commission’s Mission is to “enhance local understanding of the right to farm, encourage agriculture careers, promote agriculturally based economic opportunities and protect farming in the Town of Plymouth by allowing agricultural activities to be undertaken with minimal conflict with abutters and town agencies for agricultural operations and activities that are conducted following good agricultural practices, in compliance with state, local health, conservation, planning and zoning by-laws/regulations or votes of Town Meeting.”

While Plymouth’s Right-to-Farm bylaws focus on commercial farming, the Plymouth Agricultural Commission seeks to promote and protect agriculture on any scale, regardless of commerce. Although Plymouth has a rich rural history and contains some vast open space, the Town is also home to many dense neighborhoods. Plymouth currently has no restrictions on general farming practices, including lot size. Therefore, in an effort to allow all residents to participate freely in the joys of agriculture, it is incumbent upon all who engage in this lifestyle to exhibit mindful and considerate standard farming practices proactively and continuously. Residents keeping farm animals (livestock) on smaller lot sizes are encouraged to pay extra attention to these matters.

1.3 Standard Farming Practices

Standard Farming Practices are a series of principles, official norms and technical recommendations on the processes of planting, harvesting and transportation of food products, that aim towards human health and protection of the environment while improving the lives of farmers, homesteaders, their families, as well as providing a healthy and safe environment for livestock.

1.4 Ethical Care

Although there is no checklist for how to treat animals with basic needs for healthy living, the Compact requires healthy and safe living conditions which are clean, disease free, and safe from humans and predators. Conditions which minimize stress on the animals, both on the farm and when being transported.

Ethical farms prioritize animal welfare. Livestock is raised with adequate living spaces. Living conditions are clean with fresh air and sunlight. Animals are fed healthy, nutritious food and provided with fresh, clean water on a scheduled basis.

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1.5 Legal Obligations

Farmers should be aware of, and comply with, all legal obligations relevant to livestock production, e.g., disease reporting, record keeping, animal identification, transporting, and end-of-life considerations, such as carcass disposal.

1.6 Nuisance Complaints

While the Farm & Livestock Compact seeks to mitigate nuisance complaints, complaints may still occur.

If there is a complaint filed with the Town regarding a farming operation the complaint will be forwarded to the AgCom for possible resolution. The Civic Agriculture Office (CAO) in coordination with the AgCom Town Agent will conduct an inspection of the operation with the farmer. The inspection will be based on the Compact to which both parties have agreed. If it's found that the farmer is operating according to the Compact, then the finding will be that the farmer is operating under Chapter 63 – Plymouth Right to Farm By-law. Specifically, *"The benefits and protections of this Bylaw are intended to apply exclusively to those agricultural operations and activities conducted in accordance with generally accepted agricultural practices."* In adopting this process, the interpretation of "generally accepted agricultural practices" will be the contents of the Farm & Livestock Compact as it applies to personal or small-scale livestock operations. Therefore, it is not subject to a nuisance complaint under Chapter 63. Other statutes, bylaws or regulations may be applicable.

Under the dispute resolution process the CAO and AgCom Town Agent will work towards obtaining a satisfactory resolution of the dispute between the complainant and the farmer. If an agreement cannot be reached, the case will be referred to the AgCom for a decision as to whether to take no action, find in favor of the farmer or find in favor of the complainant. If either party is unwilling to accept the decision of the AgCom they shall have the right to appeal. Once a Compact has been prepared, agreed, and signed by the farmer and the Town, as long as the farmer is conducting their operation according to the Compact, therefore limiting nuisance complaints filed by neighbors. If on the other hand, a farmer who chooses not to participate, the farmer is open to nuisance complaints and any consequences.

1.7 Financial Considerations

In this document, we have intentionally omitted financial considerations for family and small commercial farms. Each farmer should understand the financial obligations and responsibilities to care for livestock.

1.8 Exemption from the Compact: Horses

Plymouth Farm & Livestock Compact encourages the following Standard Management Practices for all livestock. An exception to the Compact is made for horses. The care and management of horses is addressed separately from this Compact, as it falls under

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Plymouth Board of Health Rules and Regulations – “Rules and Regulations Governing Horses and Stables”.

1.9 Compact: Initial Signing & Renewal

The Plymouth Farm & Livestock Compact is an agreement between the farmer and the Town of Plymouth. There is to be an initial signing of the Compact by which the farmer agrees to comply with the Compact Requirements (Section 2) and to follow the best practices outlined in this document. Renewal is to be done every three (3) years when the farmer and the Town reaffirm their agreement to abide by the terms of the Compact.

2. Compact Requirements

By signing the Compact, the farmer agrees to comply with the following Compact Requirements. Adherence to each Requirement is to be achieved and maintained such that a farm inspection would confirm that all Requirements have been met in intent and practice.

1. Farm contacts and emergency numbers on hand.
(See: [Emergency Plans & Contacts](#))
2. Sufficient housing and yard space for each animal.
(See: [Infrastructure](#) & See: individual livestock modules)
3. Clean housing and yard conditions.
(See: [Waste Management](#))
4. Proper livestock containment.
(See: [Containment: Fencing and Predator Protection](#))
5. Predator and rodent deterrence.
(See: [Containment: Fencing and Predator Protection](#) & [Manure Collection and Storage](#))
6. Daily food and freshwater scheduling and supply.
(See: [Food & Water](#))
7. Proper food storage.
(See: [Feeding Systems](#))
8. Proper waste handling and disposal.
(See: [Manure Collection and Storage](#))
9. Noise mitigation effort.
(See individual livestock modules)
10. Proper health management:
 - a. Regular health checks. (See: [Health Management](#))
 - b. Vaccination schedule and administration. (See: [Vaccinations](#))
 - c. Appropriate biosecurity. (See: [Disease Prevention](#))
 - d. Isolation and quarantine procedures. (See: [Health Management](#))
11. Safe and healthy livestock transportation. (See: [Transportation](#))

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12. End of life considerations. (See: [End of Life](#))
13. Record keeping. (See: [Record Keeping](#))
14. Community involvement: neighborhood and community outreach.
(See: [Neighborhood & Community Relations](#))
15. Compact: initial signing and renewal.
(See: [Compact: Initial Signing & Renewal](#))

3. Infrastructure Recommendations

Infrastructure details farm and livestock structures including:

- Housing structures, stalls, pens, and coops;
- Yard spaces, pastures, corrals, or runs, and
- Fencing used to secure yard spaces or livestock boundaries.

3.1 Site Selection and Preparation

- Choose a location with good drainage, accessibility, and proximity to necessary resources. The location should be close to electricity, water, material storage, and waste processing.
- Determine the proper spacing of structures to allow for free movement and exercise of the livestock. Avoid overcrowding to prevent stress and territorial behavior.

3.2 Housing Structures: Stalls, Pens, and Coops

- Provide well-ventilated and well-insulated stalls, pens, or coops.
- Ensure adequate space for each animal or bird.
- Choose materials that are weather-resistant, easy to clean, and provide longevity for the infrastructure.

3.3 Yard Spaces: Pastures, Corrals, and Runs

- Design secure and predator-resistant yard space around housing structures. Determine if the yards will be permanent or mobile.
- Incorporate cover structures or shaded areas within the yard space to protect livestock from extreme weather conditions.
- Maintain windbreaks to shield animals from harsh winds; install or locate near the housing or yard. Consider natural elements, such as trees, for additional shade.
- If possible, rotate range areas often or ensure good quality forage and cover areas for animals in outside yards to prevent large dirt and mud areas from forming from overgrazing.

3.4 Containment: Fencing and Predator Protection

- Secure Fencing:
 - Consider fencing materials that will protect the animals from predators.
 - Install a secure perimeter fence around the entire livestock's housing and/or yard.

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- Ensure that fencing extends both above and below ground to deter climbers and diggers.
- Motion-Activated Lights or Alarms:
 - Install motion-activated lights and/or alarms around the housing structures and yard spaces to deter nocturnal predators.
 - Consider the use of dogs, geese, or other living alarm methods.
- Regular Monitoring:
 - Establish a routine for regularly inspecting the fencing and infrastructure for any signs of wear, damage, or potential entry points for predators.
 - Consider the use of motion-activated cameras to aid in monitoring for intruders.

3.5 Continuous Improvement: Feedback and Adjustment

- Collect feedback from observing the livestock's behavior and adjust the infrastructure as needed.

4. Livestock Management

4.1 Breed Selection Recommendations

The following breed selection considerations are offered. By evaluating these considerations, you will be well-positioned to raise livestock that are well-suited for the region's climate, regulations, and your specific goals.

- Research and Information Gathering:
 - Local Availability: Identify local breeders, or agricultural supply stores in your area. Gather information on the availability and success of breeds in the area.
 - Local Veterinarians: Gather recommendations on breeds that thrive in the local climate and are well-suited for suburban living.
 - Extension Services: Inquire about any specific challenges or advantages associated with certain breeds in the area.
 - Community Engagement: Consider joining local farming communities to seek advice and experiences from residents in your area. Consider attending local livestock shows or events to observe breeds and gather insights.
- Local Climate Considerations:
 - Temperature and Weather: Given the climate of Plymouth, prioritize breeds that can handle both cold winters and warm summers.
 - Disease Resistance: Research breeds that exhibit resistance to common livestock diseases prevalent in the region. Consult local veterinarians or livestock experts for advice on disease-resistant breeds.
- Breed Selection Considerations:

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- Breeds suitable for small-scale and backyard farming.
- Prioritize breeds with calm and friendly temperaments suitable for backyard environments.
- Consider breeds that are well-behaved and less prone to excessive noise.
- If keeping multiple breeds, consider a mix to enhance visual appeal and diversity within your livestock, while ensuring interbreeding compatibility. (Tip: This may help limit in-fighting and bullying.)

BEST PRACTICE: Consider breed temperament and hardiness, as well as the climate, local conditions, and your specific goals when selecting the breeds for your farm.

- Record Keeping: Breed Log

- Consider maintaining a log or spreadsheet to record information about each selected breed. Include details such as temperament, production, and any specific care considerations relevant to the local climate.

Tip: Be prepared to adjust operational practices based on the evolving needs of your livestock.

4.2 Animal Identification

Animal identification and the ability to trace animals have become important tools to ensure food safety and improve livestock management.

Identification of animals may be on an individual, group or herd basis, and connections between properties as a result of animal movements should be able to be deduced from good record keeping and animal identification. Where a food safety incident occurs, it should be possible to determine the source of the problem and to take appropriate action.

BEST PRACTICE: The ability to trace animals at least one step forward and one step back from the current holding is recommended.

4.3 Controlled Breeding

Implement a controlled breeding program to ensure genetic diversity and the production of healthy offspring. Select breeding pairs with desirable traits to enhance the overall quality of the herd or flock.

- Comfortable Breeding Environment:
 - Design and maintain clean and comfortable breeding areas within the appropriate housing spaces.
 - Control environmental factors such as temperature and lighting to support successful breeding.
- Monitoring Breeding Stock Health:

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- Regularly monitor the health of breeding stock, conducting health checks and vaccinations as needed.
- Implement biosecurity measures to prevent disease transmission within the breeding stock.

4.4 Training and Handling

- Train your animals to be comfortable with human interaction from a young age to facilitate easier handling, build trust, and reduce stress. Socialize baby animals by gentle handling to promote friendly and docile behavior.

Tip: Be sure to wash / sanitize your hands after touching or handling any livestock to reduce the spread of diseases.

BEST PRACTICE: Continued handling / intervention with your animals will make them accustomed to humans, and they will be easier to manage as adults.

4.5 End of Life

- Ensure proper disposal of diseased and dead animals. Anticipate the logistics requirements for disposal of large individual animals and/or large numbers of animals.
- Follow local and state requirements for the reporting of diseased or dead livestock and wild animals. Note: Plymouth Solid Waste permits the disposal of small, individual animals via the Pay-Per-Throw process. Contracted disposal services may also accept small, individual animals.
- Options for Disposal may include any of the following:
 - Burying: Locate away from buried utilities, livestock housing and/or yard.
 - Burning: Acceptable, but the smell may be unpleasant.
 - Composting: Acceptable for animals which die of natural causes. Use composter designed to manage odor and destroy pathogens.
 - Cremating: Some veterinary offices offer cremation for a fee.
 - Incinerating: At a vet diagnostic lab is preferred when disease is suspected.
 - Landfill: Plymouth Solid Waste accepts small livestock in small quantities (one or two animals) in “pay per throw” (orange) bags.

5. Food & Water

5.1 Feeding Implementation Plan

By implementing a feeding plan, you will ensure that your livestock receive a balanced and nutritious diet tailored to their specific needs, promoting overall health and productivity.

5.2 Research and Information Gathering

- Nutritional Requirements:

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- Research the specific nutritional needs of the selected livestock breeds, considering factors such as age, purpose, and health status.
- Consult nutrition guides, veterinary recommendations, and reputable online sources.
- Local Feed Suppliers:
 - Identify local feed suppliers or agricultural supply stores that offer sustainable, high-quality feeds suitable for the identified nutritional requirements.
 - Explore sustainable practices, such as growing feed stock on your farm, using locally grown feed stocks, or exploring organic feed options.
- Supplemental Additives:
 - Consider incorporating supplemental additives for your livestock.
 - Consult with a nutritionist or veterinarian for guidance on appropriate supplements.

***BEST PRACTICE:** Ask a local farmer (or two) for their best practice recommendations based on the type / breed of your livestock.*

5.3 Nutritious Diet

- Offer a balanced and nutritious diet suitable for your types of livestock, ensuring they receive the necessary nutrients for optimal health and production. Remember: different diets may be appropriate for various livestock groups.
- Consider consulting with a nutritionist for specific dietary recommendations and/or customizing feed formulations.
- Provide a well-balanced and nutritionally rich diet for breeding stock to ensure healthy offspring.

5.4 Feeding Schedule and Quantity

- Age-Appropriate Feeding:
 - Develop a feeding schedule that considers the age and life stage of the animals.
 - Adjust feeding quantities based on growth stages, production cycles, and seasonal variations.
- Monitoring Body Condition:
 - Regularly monitor the body condition of the animals to assess the effectiveness of the feeding regimen.

5.5 Feeding Systems

- Identify the type of feeding systems which will be used to ensure all animals have access to a balanced diet and to minimize wastage and contamination.
- Consider how and where will the food be stored.

***BEST PRACTICE:** Utilize predator / rodent-proof containers for food storage. Such as galvanized metal cans with tight fitting lids.*

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5.6 Water Supply

- Establish a reliable and clean water supply system.
- Consider the style of waterers to be used to ensure a constant source of clean water through the seasons and weather extremes (ex.: heater water base).
- Regularly clean and sanitize water containers to prevent contamination.

Tip: Consider rainwater harvesting for non-drinking water needs.

5.7 Sustainability Practices

- Consider implementing practices, such as using sustainable packaging, integrating renewable energy, energy-efficiency, and water conservation.
- Consider sourcing feed locally, supporting sustainability and reducing environmental impact.
- Explore sustainable practices, such as growing on your farm, using locally grown grains, or exploring organic feed options.

6. Waste Management Plan

Implementation of effective waste management practices are essential, including regular cleaning of bedding and yards, and proper disposal of manure.

A comprehensive manure and waste management plan can contribute to sustainable agricultural practices, nutrient recycling, and community engagement. The integration of composting and nutrient recovery not only minimizes environmental impact but also enhances the fertility and health of the local soil ecosystem.

There are various ways to manage manure:

- Develop a waste management system for manure and other by-products.
- Manage manure to create nutrient-rich fertilizer for use on fields or gardens.

BEST PRACTICE: Offer mature compost material to your neighbors so they may enjoy nutrient rich soil while helping to reduce your compost pile.

For more information on composting refer to the Department of Environmental Protection's website (See: [Resources & References](#).)

6.1 Initial Assessment

- Site Evaluation:
 - Conduct a site evaluation to determine the available space and environmental conditions required for waste management facilities.
 - Identify potential areas for composting, storage, and recycling.

6.2 Manure Collection and Storage

- Waste Streams:

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- Optional: Implement a system for segregating different waste streams, including manure, bedding, and other organic waste.
- Waste Storage:
 - Provide storage facilities for manure which prevents runoff and minimizes odor and reduces accessibility to rodents and other animals.
 - Ensure that storage structures are well-ventilated to control moisture and enhance composting.
- Regular Collection and Disposal Schedule:
 - Establish a regular schedule for manure collection and disposal to prevent accumulation and maintain a clean environment.
 - Consider daily or weekly collection and disposal based on the size of the farm. Larger quantities may require hiring a removal service.

6.3 Composting System

- Designate a specific area for composting that allows for proper aeration, drainage, and turning of the compost pile. Consider using compost bins or a designated composting facility.

6.4 Vermicomposting (Optional)

- Integrate vermicomposting for further breakdown of organic waste by earthworms. This may be an additional revenue source when offered to the public.

BEST PRACTICE: Use redworms (e.g., Eisenia fetida) to accelerate decomposition.

6.5 Nutrient Recovery and Application

- Apply compost/manure to agricultural fields, garden beds, or urban green spaces (in urban green spaces with appropriate permission).

6.6 Collaboration and Outreach

- Consider educating the local community about the benefits of responsible compost and manure management.

6.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

- Regular Inspections:
 - Conduct regular inspections of waste management facilities to ensure proper functioning.
 - Address any issues promptly, such as odor concerns or inefficient composting.
- Record Keeping:
 - Maintain records of waste collection, composting activities, and nutrient application.
 - Use records for Compact reporting and continuous improvement.

7. Health Management

BEST PRACTICE: Visit the MDAR and Plymouth's Agriculture Commission websites regularly for latest alerts and notifications regarding diseases (e.g., avian flu) and other epidemic / pandemic situations. See: [Resources & References](#).

7.1 Health Management

- Implement biosecurity measures which prevents the introduction and spread of diseases and harmful organisms.
 - Example: including foot baths and restricted access to the farm.
- Regular Health Checks: Establish a routine for regular health checks, including monitoring for signs of illness or injury.
- Schedule regular health checks by a veterinarian.
- Quarantine new individuals before introducing them to the existing population to prevent disease transmission.
- Isolate and treat sick animals promptly to prevent the spread of diseases.

7.2 Cleanliness and Sanitation

- Maintain a strict cleaning schedule for housing, yards, and common areas.
- Regularly disinfect surfaces, waterers, and feeders to minimize disease transmission. Be sure that disinfectants are safe for use with livestock.

7.3 Biosecure Feed Storage

- Store feed in secure and vermin-proof containers.
- Ensure that feed storage areas are clean and protected from environmental contaminants.

7.4 Parasite and Pest Control

- Establish a regular deworming schedule.
- Monitor for external parasites (lice, mites) and create a treatment plan.
- Use of preventive measures such as insecticides and rodent control. Use of Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs) is strongly discouraged.

7.5 Vaccinations

- Consult with breed-specialist veterinarians to establish vaccination schedules.
- Develop and document your vaccination program as part of your Farm Compact based on local disease prevalence and veterinary recommendations.
- Vaccinate stock as per recommended schedules to ensure immunity and prevent disease outbreaks.

For more information and specifics see Appendix: Biosecurity and Health Management.

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8. Transportation

The farmer is responsible for the well-being of livestock during loading, unloading, and while in-transit, complying with all government regulations, and maintaining a systematic approach to the logistics of transporting animals. For specific best practices, please refer to the individual livestock modules.

- Compliance with Regulations
 - Ensure compliance with both local, state, and federal transportation laws and regulations.
 - Adhere to regulations related to vehicle specifications, driver qualifications, and animal welfare during transportation.
- Vehicle Preparation & Animal Travel Spaces
 - Regularly clean and sanitize transportation vehicles to ensure biosecurity.
 - Equip vehicles with proper ventilation and climate control systems.
 - Ensure that travel spaces are secure and are appropriately sized to prevent overcrowding and allow for comfortable movement.
- Pre-Transport Health Checks
 - Implement pre-transport health checks.
 - Quarantine any animals showing signs of illness before transport.
- Loading and Unloading Protocols
 - Implement gentle handling practices to avoid injuries or stress-related issues.
 - Use appropriate equipment and techniques to ensure the well-being of the livestock during loading and unloading.
- Route Planning
 - Plan routes that minimize travel time and exposure to environmental stressors.
- Emergency Preparedness
 - Ensure that personnel are trained to respond appropriately to emergencies.
 - Equip vehicles with emergency kits containing first aid supplies, tools, and contact information.
- Record Keeping
 - Keep an inventory of individual animals being transported, including name / ID, breed, age, and any specific characteristics.

9. Emergency Information & Contacts

It is your responsibility to maintain up to date emergency contact information. This contact information is to be kept with your Record Keeping system, but also posted so it may be easily located and referenced in case of emergency.

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9.1 Farm and Livestock Information

- Name and location of the farm.
- Types and numbers of each kind of animal or bird (by species)
 - Notes to address special housing or biosecurity measures in place.
- Location of the Record Keeping System.

9.2 Emergency Contacts

- Veterinarian: for each kind of animal or bird (by species)
 - Contact information and emergency availability.
- Farmer Friends & Family (Next of kin)
- Livestock care service (if contracted while the farm staff is away)
- Emergency Transportation type of animal / type of service.
 - Contact information, services provided, and emergency availability.

9.3 Veterinary Emergency Kit

- Location of Emergency Kit which contains essential veterinary supplies (antibiotics, vaccines, first aid materials).
 - Make sure that the Emergency Kit can be easily and quickly accessible. Determine the best storage location; consider if temperature control is needed.
 - Instructions as to where to find supplies if stored elsewhere.

9.4 Waste Removal

- Contact information, services provided, and emergency availability.

9.5 Emergency Response Plan (Optional)

The objective of an emergency response plan is to ensure the safety and well-being of the livestock, farm personnel, and the surrounding community during natural disasters, disease outbreaks, or unforeseen events.

The plan covers various emergency scenarios, including but not limited to hurricanes, floods, fires, disease outbreaks, and power outages.

By implementing a comprehensive emergency response plan, the small-scale farm aims to minimize risks, safeguard the well-being of personnel and livestock, and contribute to community resilience during unforeseen events. Regular training, collaboration with local authorities, and continuous improvement efforts are integral components of this plan.

10. Record Keeping

Record keeping is critical to implementation and demonstration of on-going compliance with your Plymouth Farm & Livestock Compact.

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10.1 Record Keeping Implementation Plan

By implementing a record-keeping plan, you establish a structured and efficient system for managing crucial aspects of your farm and livestock operations. This plan will aid in day-to-day decision-making and serves as a valuable tool for continuous improvement.

When a problem arises in an enterprise, be it a disease, a chemical hazard issue or a physical safety matter, record keeping is central to any effort to trace the source of the problem and eliminate it.

As far as is practicable, farmers should keep records of:

- All animal populations on the farm (herds, groups, or individuals as relevant).
- All animal arrivals, including their identification markings or devices, origin, and date of arrival, to ensure that movements of incoming animals are traceable to their source.
- Any changes to feeding or health protocols, and any other management changes that may occur.
- Origin and use of all feeds, drugs, disinfectants, herbicides, and other consumable items used on the farm.
- Document known diseases/infections, diseased/infected animals, and mortalities, to the extent possible giving details such as dates, diagnoses (where known), animals affected, treatments and results.

10.2 Accurate Records of Vaccinations, Health Checks, and Production

- Record-Keeping System:
 - Establish a comprehensive record-keeping system that includes categories for type and quantity of commercial feed, vaccinations, health checks, and livestock production.
- Individual Animal Identification:
 - Consider assigning unique identifiers (name and description, ID, leg band, image or tag) to each animal for easy tracking in records.
 - Record identification details, including breed, age, and any specific characteristics or markings (enter as notes).
- Breeding
 - Keep track of breeding pairs and birth rates.
- Vaccination Records:
 - Create a vaccination schedule based on recommended protocols for the specific region and breeds.
 - Log each vaccination event, noting the type of vaccine, dosage, and any observed reactions.
- Health Checks and Observations:
 - Record results of regular health checks, noting observations such as weight, condition, and overall behavior.
 - Record any signs of illness, injuries, or unusual behaviors.

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- Record Retention:
 - Determine a record retention policy, specifying how long records should be kept for reference and compliance purposes.
 - Ensure secure storage, whether digital or physical, to prevent data loss.

10.3 Utilize Technology for Efficiency

- Explore digital tools and software designed for farm management and record keeping.
- Consider using spreadsheets (such as the Farm and Livestock Log), farm management apps, or specialized software to streamline data entry and analysis.

10.4 Compliance

- Stay informed about local, regional, and national regulations related to animal keeping and farm production.
- Ensure that your record-keeping practices align with compliance requirements.
- Regularly update record-keeping practices to remain in compliance with any changes in regulations.

BEST PRACTICE: Periodically check industry sources, agencies, and service centers for helpful updates. See: [Resources & References](#)

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11. Regular Self-Audits and Assessments

To ensure the ongoing success, efficiency, and compliance of farm operations, regular self-audits and assessments will need to be conducted. These evaluations will focus on current best farming practices, biosecurity, health management, and overall operational efficiency.

Audit findings and resolution of any issues are to be documented in the Record Keeping method to demonstrate compliance with the Compact.

Regular self-audits of farm operations are to be conducted to ensure compliance with best practices, including but not limited to:

- Records for new animals to be introduced into the herd.
- Appropriate space allocations and structure sizes for each type of animal
- Proper ventilation, heating, and sanitation in housing structures.
- Cleanliness and sanitation practices.
- Implementation of routine health checks and diagnostic testing.
- Vaccination records and adherence to recommended schedules.
- Quarantine procedures for new and sick animals.

Further your farm documentation by including training which has been conducted, community outreach and communications efforts, ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the farm's record-keeping, and, when appropriate, documenting corrective actions taken, particularly those actions taken as a result of audit findings.

BEST PRACTICE: Conduct and document a "self-audit" of farm and livestock operations at least once a year to assess the accuracy and effectiveness of operations and to ensure that corrective actions have been made as identified in previous audits.

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12. Education & Training

While you may be an experienced farmer, there is always more to learn and new best practices to consider. Stay informed about the latest trends in animal production, processing, and marketing through workshops, online resources, and agricultural extension services. Educating and training your farm team will help ensure the success of your farm and demonstrate your commitment to your Compact.

Add any educational and/or training accomplishments to your record keeping, by documenting:

- Classes taken by you and your farm team (e.g., NRCS training), including proper livestock handling, biosecurity measures, and emergency procedures.
- Independent study completed (books read, watching YouTube videos, reading journals and industry magazines).
- Farms visits and discussions with other farmers regarding best practices.
- Participation in farming and livestock related organizations.

Conduct regular refresher courses to keep you, the farmer, your family, and employees informed about best practices.

BEST PRACTICE: Be part of the public process, help encourage local agriculture, and work to strengthen support for Plymouth's Right to Farm by-law.

For more information and specifics on creating a custom plan, see the Appendix: [Continuous Learning Plan](#).

13. Neighborhood & Community Relations

It is essential to the success of your Compact that you engage your neighbors and customers, so they better understand your farm goals and operations. Consider participating in local community events, farmers' markets, or educational programs to engage with the community and showcase responsible farming and livestock keeping.

BEST PRACTICE: Maintain open communications with neighboring residents, address any concerns promptly, and share information about your animals and farming practices.

Consider engaging in some or all of the following activities:

- Community Engagement:
 - Establish a strong online and offline presence through social media, websites, and local community events.
 - Engage with the local community through outreach events, workshops, and educational programs.
 - Foster a positive relationship with customers, answering queries and addressing concerns.
 - Engage with the community to build relationships and promote the sales of your farm products.
- Educate Customers:
 - Provide educational resources on caring for baby animals, including feeding and housing. Remind parents that cute babies quickly grow into teenagers.
 - Educate customers about the benefits of locally produced farm products, including freshness, quality, and supporting local agriculture.
 - Provide information on product storage and cooking tips.
- Farmers' Markets and Local Outlets:
 - Participate in farmers' markets and collaborate with local stores or restaurants to expand your market reach.
 - Offer promotions or partnerships to attract customers.
- Transparent Marketing:
 - Clearly communicate your farming practices, emphasizing factors such as free-range, organic, or sustainable methods.
 - Clearly communicate breeding practices, including health management, vaccination protocols, and breeding stock quality.
 - Build trust with customers by being transparent about the origin and care of the animals.
- Customer Feedback System:
 - Establish a feedback system to gather insights from customers.
 - Use feedback to make improvements and meet customer preferences.

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For more information and specifics on creating a custom plan, see: Appendix: Community Engagement Implementation Plan.

14. Resources & References

14.1 Footnotes: Links and Websites

- Right-to-Farm Bylaw: Plymouth's Town-General-Bylaws: Chapter 63. [04-22-Certification-Chapter-63---Right-to-Farm-Bylaw-PDF](#)
- Plymouth's Agriculture Commission website: <https://www.plymouth-ma.gov/581/Agricultural-Commission>.
- UMass Extension Crops, Dairy, Livestock, Equine: [Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at UMass Amherst](#)
- Ethical Animal Farming: www.ethicalfarmingfund.org/ethical-farming.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome 2009: *Guide to Good Farming Practices*
- Department of Environmental Protection, Composting: <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/compos01.htm>.
- Chickens, Vol. 14, No. 6, November/December 2023, Coleman, Sarah E., p.72.
- Chickens, Vol. 14, No. 6, November/December 2023, Baxter, Mikayla, PHD, Purdue Animal Nutrition, p.6.

14.2 Livestock Veterinarian

- To be completed.

14.3 Livestock Care Providers

- To be completed.

14.4 Waste Recovery Services

- To be completed.

14.5 Agriculture Supply Stores

- To be completed.