



Agricultural & Farmland Protection Plan

December 2014



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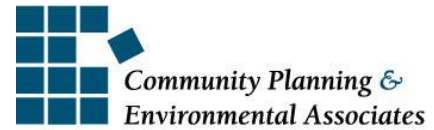
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Executive Summary

Agriculture is one of the pillars of the Sullivan County economy and quality of life. County farms provide access to fresh, healthy foods; they contribute significantly to the local economy and support many businesses in many other economic sectors; contribute to the County’s visual landscape and rural character, and provide open spaces and wildlife habitats – all of which are highly valued by both residents and visitors. This plan builds on an impressive array of recent agricultural and economic development initiatives in Sullivan County that have taken place since the first agriculture and farmland protection plan was adopted in 1999. This plan outlines the current state of agriculture in the County and recommends a series of actions that, when implemented, will help the County and its farmers take full advantage of the many farm and ag-business opportunities that exist.

Despite an ongoing decline in the number of farms – especially dairy farms – over the last several decades, there has been a renewed focus on agriculture in Sullivan County and many efforts are taking place. This is due in part, to local and national trends that emphasize locally- and organically-grown food products, a desire among travelers to “experience” agriculture through agri-tourism, and new markets

for value-added and specialty products such as artisanal cheeses, grass-fed meats, and craft brews.

Agriculture is increasingly being recognized as an economic section having solid prospects for sustainable growth and profit. The importance of this trend is significant: a public survey in Sullivan County showed that the vast majority of participants valued freshness and being locally grown as the two most important criteria used when decided on food purchases.

This updated Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, funded by a planning grant from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and Sullivan County, is designed to evaluate the current status of agriculture in Sullivan County, and outline initiatives to further promote and enhance it, with an emphasis on agricultural economic development.

Current Agricultural Initiatives in Sullivan County include:

- Completion of a **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan**, which identifies agriculture as one of the primary drivers of the local economy;
- An **Agricultural Summit**, which brought together farmers, agribusiness leaders, and agency and organization representatives to discuss challenges facing agriculture and brainstorm potential solutions;
- The development of a **commercial kitchen** at Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Liberty campus to support small-scale food production;
- The **promotion of agritourism opportunities** and the development of the *Fresh from the Farm* agricultural trail;
- Coordination of **farmers’ markets** in multiple locations;
- The production of events including **Farmstock** and **Down on the Farm Day** to raise public awareness of agriculture;
- The development and construction of a **red meat processing facility** to serve livestock producers, scheduled to begin operating in 2015;
- The creation of a **food distribution hub** project, providing farmers with improved access to New York City markets; and
- **Ongoing programs** administered by various agencies and organizations to support farms, protect farmland, market local agricultural products, and strengthen the viability of the agricultural sector (see Chapter 3 and Appendix A).

It incorporates input received from farmers, agricultural groups and organizations, economic development officials, community leaders, and the general public, and gives the County:

- a long-term vision and direction to guide the development of policies and programs;
- strategies to maintain agriculture as a critical land use and economic driver;
- a framework for organization and collaboration to promote existing and new farm operations;
- an analysis of current conditions, issues, and trends in agriculture, including the impact of property taxes on Sullivan County farms;
- an evaluation of local land use laws and policies to determine their “farm-friendliness”;
- the development of priority farmland criteria for use in farmland protection initiatives;
- the identification of marketing opportunities, potential project partners, and sources of funding;
- data, maps, and other information that can be used to support marketing, grant writing, and other programs related to agriculture; and
- resources on agriculture to be used by county staff, elected officials, and farmers.

Agriculture in Sullivan County

Sullivan County has a long history of farming. Beginning in the late 1800s, farms in the County benefited from proximity to New York City, producing milk, eggs, and other agricultural commodities for the growing metropolis. Nearly half of Sullivan County’s land area was in agricultural use in 1925; today, that proportion is less than 10%.

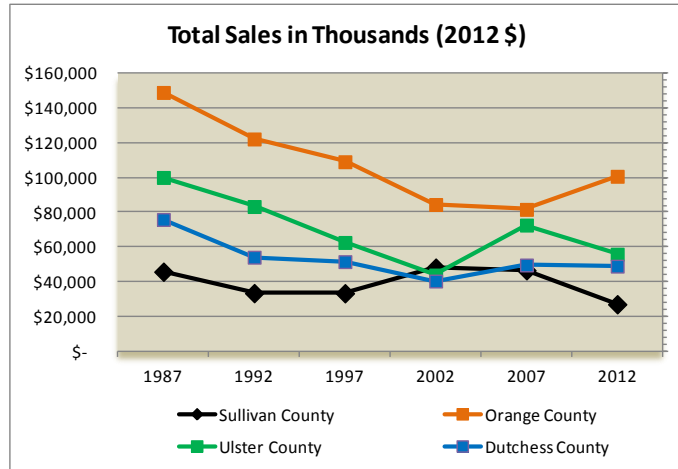
Nevertheless, there are bright spots in Sullivan County’s agricultural sector: the overall number of farms is stable, farmed acreage has increased slightly, and there is a growing number of vegetable farms, horse farms, and various livestock farms. More farms are getting involved in agritourism activities, and a resurgence of small farms has stimulated an increase in the sales of agricultural products directly to consumers at such venues as farmers’ markets.

The economic value of the agricultural industry in the County is impressive. In 2012, according to the most recent US Census of Agriculture, Sullivan County’s 321 farms generated \$27.1 million in sales. Most of the sales were generated by the livestock sector, which includes poultry and egg producers and dairy farms.



While there have been many positive efforts and gains in agriculture, issues and challenges remain. Dairy farms continue to struggle in both Sullivan County and the region. In 2012, 24 farms reported dairy as their principal commodity in 2012. While still a significant proportion of farm activities in the County, there are fewer farms raising beef cattle or poultry for meat or egg production now than in the past.

Many farms in Sullivan County are small and many are not yet making significant profits: 56% have annual sales of less than \$10,000. The operators of these farms often depend on off-farm employment and other sources of income. According to the US Census of Agriculture in 2012, approximately one-third of Sullivan’s farms made a profit (compared to 42% in the counties of Delaware and Orange). At the same time, 9 farms (3% of farms in the County) had \$500,000 or more in sales yet produced 63% of the County’s agricultural output.



Direct-to-consumer sales of farm products in Sullivan County reached \$649,000 in 2012. Although farmers’ markets have provided outlets for local farmers to sell produce and meats, Sullivan County has a lower level of direct-to-consumer sales compared to other counties in the Mid-Hudson region, where direct sales are measured in the *millions*, not thousands, of dollars. Sullivan County farms do not seem to be fully taking advantage yet of more direct sale opportunities that exist in the region.

Issues and Opportunities

This Plan identifies a variety of issues and challenges that negatively impact farming in Sullivan County. The issues are often complex and interwoven. Some of the threats to agriculture extend well beyond county boundaries, and some require action to be taken at the state or national level.

Important issues include the following (see **Appendix G** for a complete list):

- Farmers are unaware of support mechanisms and programs
- There is often a lack of communication and coordination among agencies and organizations involved in agriculture and helping farmers
- Some farmers who sell directly to individuals lack marketing expertise
- Lack of new and “next generation” farmers makes the future less certain
- There is a continued loss of dairy farms
- Farming has high production expenses with low profitability
- Farmers often have difficulty finding qualified labor
- Vegetable and crop production and sales does not reach its potential

This Plan evaluates those weaknesses to identify new opportunities for expanded agriculture. It establishes a positive outlook and direction for agriculture and emphasizes the many opportunities that the County and the farm community can take advantage of. These opportunities include:

- Agritourism
- Value-added and niche markets exist and can be taken advantage of
- Land and resources that would be attractive to new farmers
- Financial and technical assistance to farmers is available
- Direct marketing locally and in urban areas has growth opportunities
- Existing regional brands exist that farmers can take advantage of
- Initiatives are underway that can be enhanced such as the food hub and red meat processing
- Farmland protection programs can be initiated
- More public education and marketing could benefit agriculture

Vision and Goals

Based on input from the AFPB, farmers, the public, agriculture-related agencies and organizations, and the public, this Plan establishes a positive vision for the future of agriculture in Sullivan County. This vision includes:

- Farms that are financially successful;
- Agriculture will be a top economic driver for the County;
- The public is educated about the role and importance of agriculture;
- Promotion and enhancement of agriculture is an economic priority in the County;
- Supportive County programs and policies;
- Available and accessible farmland; and
- Sullivan County is a location for and farming offers a stable and viable career opportunity for the next generation.

The plan presents five goals to support this vision:

1. Maintain the County's valuable farmland in active agricultural use.
2. Increase the financial success and stability of farm operations.
3. Integrate agricultural economic development into County economic strategies.
4. Increase public recognition of the value of agriculture and farmland, and develop a better understanding of farm issues by non-farmers.
5. Attract new entrepreneurs and younger households to farming ventures and assist this next generation of farmers.

Priority Initiatives

The plan recommends programs and projects that can be implemented to address critical issues and capitalize on agricultural opportunities in Sullivan County. Six initiatives have been identified as priorities, as they serve as the foundation for other successful outcomes.

These priority initiatives build on the many existing efforts in the County and address critical issues and opportunities. Each is summarized below; *see Chapter 6 of the Plan for full details.*



Priority Initiative 1: Building Capacity, Organization, and Collaboration

Many of the problems, or lack of solutions to known problems in the County, stem from not having the capacity, communication, and collaboration in place to support implementation. Agencies and organizations involved with agriculture, both within the County and the broader region, need to work together, efficiently use the talents of staff and volunteers, find ways to eliminate duplication and fill gaps in programs, and build relationships. This initiative is a foundation for success in implementation – as important as adequate funding support.

Summary of recommended strategies under this initiative include:

- Setting up effective **communication systems** to share information among agencies and organizations that support agriculture and help farmers;
- **Evaluating existing programs** to reduce duplication of effort and address gaps in services;
- Continuing to **fund** Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), Soil and Water Conservation, and the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation (HVADC) as they serve critical functions;
- Scheduling **regular multi-county meetings** of Planning staff, HVADC, CCE, and others to improve coordination between the counties in the region on agricultural issues; and
- Establishing a **committee to provide leadership**, assistance, coordination, and support to implement the priority projects identified in this plan. This committee should consist of representatives from organizations that support agriculture and agribusinesses along with plan implementation partners. It should meet on a regular basis to discuss the status of agricultural projects, share information, and assist in implementation of the projects outlined in this Plan.

Priority Initiative 2: Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program

Modeled after Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) programs used in non-farm economic development, and similar to existing CCE farm management programs, this initiative will provide a

framework for communicating directly with farmers to increase their awareness of available resources, improve their profitability, and solve problems. Central to this effort will be the creation of an Agricultural BR&E Program Coordinator position.

He or she will visit farms on a regular basis and will be responsible for working directly with farmers to provide general assistance, referring them to service providers in such areas as business planning, marketing, value-added processing, and diversification as appropriate. He or she will also play a role in the other priority initiatives and serve as a spokesperson for agriculture in Sullivan County.

Summary of action steps under this initiative include:

- **Structuring** the Agricultural BR&E Program and outlining its **objectives**;
- Determining **how** the program will be **administered**;
- **Evaluating options** for the new position, and recruiting and hiring staff;
- Developing a **database** of farms;
- Developing and implementing a proactive **business visitation** program;
- **Providing assistance** with respect to business planning, farm management, succession planning, obtaining financing, securing and training workers, reducing production costs, etc.;
- **Collaborating** regularly with agency partners to provide referrals and follow-up, and
- Establishing a **website** and using other **marketing tools** to assist farmers.
- Continue to develop and expand funding mechanisms for farm infrastructure and equipment.

Priority Initiative 3: Agritourism Enhancement

Agritourism has been identified as a strong niche by the Sullivan County Visitors Association. The agency already features local farms, farmers' markets, breweries, distilleries, and farm-to-table restaurants in print materials, on its website, and in social media. These and other efforts to develop and promote farm-based tourism have been beneficial, but have not yet reached their full potential.



There is a need to develop new agritourism products, experiences, and events; leverage the resources of and coordinate with existing organizations involved in agriculture and tourism; and make the County more "tourism-friendly." This would provide additional opportunities for both new farmers and existing farmers to diversify and increase their incomes, while bringing valuable external dollars into the County.

Summary of recommendations for enhancing agritourism include:

- Working with interested farmers to **increase agritourism** activities (e.g., farm markets, tours and demonstrations, corn mazes) and **create farm stays**;

- Increasing the **online presence** of farms;
- Developing **additional special events** or festivals focused on agriculture;
- Improving the existing **agricultural trail map** by making it available online and allowing users to view the location of nearby lodging, restaurants, and other amenities;
- Develop marketing brochures to promote different farm sectors;
- Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County and SCVA to develop rack cards or brochures for specific sectors of agriculture; ie maple producers, Christmas tree farms, farmers' market and CSA's.
- Developing a **coordinated wayfinding signage** program with a mobile phone app; and
- Increasing **collaboration** among farmers' markets, agritourism providers, and agencies and organizations involved in promoting agritourism.

Priority Initiative 4: New/Young Farmer Program

This program represents a concerted effort to “sell” Sullivan County as a good place to farm, targeted to young farmers and the next generation of farmers. It includes initiatives such as a farmer/farmland match program, along with mentoring, agricultural business incubation, training, coordination with organizations such as the Glynwood Center, apprenticeships, and educational efforts via schools, Sullivan County BOCES, 4-H, and SUNY Sullivan.

Summary of action steps under this program include:

- Creating **fact sheets** on market opportunities that may be viable for new farmers;
- Providing **training and support** for new farmers;
- Adapting the Orange County **New Farmer Manual** for use in Sullivan County;
- Providing incentives and advertising **existing funding opportunities** for farm start-up operations;
- Promoting Sullivan County **agribusiness loan programs**;
- Tapping into and promoting **veterans in farming** programs;
- Working with local realtors to **inventory available agricultural property** that would appeal to new and existing farmers;
- Encouraging Farm Credit or local banks to **create a set-aside** to provide capital or loan guarantees to qualified new and beginning farmers to purchase land;
- Getting local **schools involved** in agriculture; and
- Helping Sullivan County BOCES agriculture students' **transition to agricultural employment and farming**.

Priority Initiative 5: Value-Added and Diversification

This program has two parts. The first part will take agricultural initiatives already underway,



including the Liberty Red Meat Processing Facility and CCE’s community kitchen (the EaT Kitchen) and help make them more successful. It will involve good organization, planning, coordination with farmers, getting the right operators, and marketing. The second part is oriented to offering training and assistance to farmers in understanding market opportunities, and helping them take advantage of funding that can be used for value-added processing, diversification and expansion.

Summary of action steps under this initiative include:

- Educating farmers on **diversifying** their farms for financial stability;
- Facilitating the development of **specialty farm operations** and products;
- Providing **training or technical assistance** to farmers in business planning and value-added processing;
- Developing a catalog of **potential niche/specialty crops** that can be grown in Sullivan County;
- Continuing CCE’s **high tunnel program**, developing a funding mechanism for farmers to **purchase high tunnels** after completing training, and possibly adding **cheese-making** programs at the EaT Kitchen;
- Tapping into the **expertise available** at Cornell University, SUNY Sullivan, and other regional colleges and universities to help farmers diversify their operations;
- Determining the potential **demand for other facilities** or services to piggy-back on the red meat processing facility; and
- **Working with livestock producers** and cooperatives, both within and outside Sullivan County, to market and sell meat from the processing facility, and work with Cornell Cooperative Extension to develop educational programming and technical assistance related to livestock processing and profitability.

Priority Initiative 6: Buy Local

This initiative is aimed at improving the local sales of and demand for fresh, local foods. Project components include farm-to-table, farm-to-institution, and farm-to-business programs, as well as local marketing/public relations and a Pride of Sullivan or Sullivan Fresh initiative to highlight businesses that use or sell local produce and products.

Summary of recommended strategies under this initiative include:

- Expanding **farmer participation** in the Pride of New York and Pure Catskills branding campaigns;
- Continuing existing **consumer education** efforts and **farmers’ markets** to help the public understand the importance of agriculture;
- Developing a **local food procurement** policy for County agencies and institutions; and
- Develop a “Sullivan Fresh” initiative; and
- Continuing efforts to create a **Farm-to-School Program**.

The initiative also calls for creating a marketing campaign to advertise local farms and educate residents about the benefits of buying locally-grown and raised farm products.

Farmland Preservation

In addition to the six priorities, this Plan recommends that efforts continue to be made towards farmland preservation in Sullivan County. While the County is not currently under intense development pressure, loss of farmland still occurs due to both conversion to non-farm uses as well as abandonment of farmland.

The best way to preserve farmland is to have economically successful farmers. However, the complexity of issues facing farmers today makes it imperative that farmland remain

available and affordable, especially for the new and young farmers targeted for recruitment.



The Plan update recommends that the County work to establish a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program to permanently preserve critical farmlands. Along with this, a Lease of Development Rights (LDR) program patterned after the State program would provide affordable land opportunities to encourage new farmers in the County. Both these programs will require establishment of participation criteria and funding.

The County can also play a critical role in training local officials and encouraging use of farm-friendly local land use regulations and adoption of right-to-farm laws. Farmland preservation programs should include succession planning for farmers to ensure farm operations can continue into the next generation, and a farmland/farmer match initiative. The County could explore the possibility of arranging for placement of conservation easements on foreclosed lands that are suitable for farming so that land could be rented or sold at affordable rates to farmers.

Marketing Opportunities

A significant effort is made in this Plan to identify marketing opportunities. There are a variety of audiences and messages that must be conveyed for success: the general public, farmers, local businesses, agr-businesses, and organizations to name a few. This Plan update offers specific marketing recommendations needed to implement each of the six priority initiatives. These range from helping farmers tap into the New York City metro and other urban markets, to leveraging existing marketing and branding programs such as Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley Bounty and helping promote buy-local programs within Sullivan County. As an aid to this, Appendix A and K offer a compendium of resources that can help.

Implementation

Implementation will require leadership, collaboration and communication between many people and agencies, from county departments and committees to organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension (see list in the text box, below). Some projects may be more effective for *regional* implementation, working closely with adjacent counties and regional or even state agencies. All of these entities – and of course, the farm community – have important roles to play in implementing these initiatives. For each recommendation, the Plan lists potential partners that can work with Sullivan County to implement the project. It also outlines a critical organizational framework to get the job done that includes formation of an advisory task force and creation of an agricultural business retention and expansion coordinator to help the County and farmers navigate to success.

Potential Implementation Partners

- Catskill Mountainkeeper
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County
- County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency
- Delaware Highlands Conservancy
- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- Local school district food service directors
- Soil & Water Conservation District
- SUNY Sullivan
- Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development
- Sullivan County Agricultural Advisory Board
- Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- Sullivan County BOCES
- Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce
- Sullivan County Department of Planning & Environmental Management
- Sullivan County Department of Public Health
- Sullivan County Farm Bureau
- Sullivan County Farm Network
- Sullivan County Farmers' Market Association / other farmers' markets in the County
- Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development
- Sullivan County Visitors Association
- Sullivan Renaissance
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- Watershed Agricultural Council/Pure Catskills



Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 2012, Sullivan County was awarded a planning grant from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to update the County’s original 1999 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. The plan update evaluates the current status of agriculture in Sullivan County, and identifies actions for the County and others to act upon to promote and enhance agriculture, with an emphasis on agricultural economic development.

This Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan will give the County:

- a long-term vision and direction to guide policies and programs that enhance agriculture;
- strategies to maintain agriculture as a critical land use and economic driver;
- a framework for organization and collaboration to promote existing and new farm operations;
- identification of potential project partners and sources of funding;
- data, maps, and other information that can be used to support public relations, marketing, grant writing, and other programs related to agriculture; and
- resources about agriculture to be used by county staff, elected officials, and farmers.

The Planning and Approval Process

The planning process in Sullivan County was initiated in May 2013 with the release of a Request for Qualifications seeking a consultant to assist the Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management in updating the County’s 1999 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. With input from the County’s Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB), a consultant team was selected and work on the plan began in October 2013.

Working with County Planning staff, the AFBP facilitated the planning process, meeting monthly with the consultants to discuss various issues, coordinate opportunities for public input, and review materials. Some of these meetings were held with the Sullivan County Agricultural Advisory Board and other County officials as well.

Agricultural Planning in New York

The development of county farmland protection plans is authorized by Article 25-AA of New York State’s Agriculture and Markets Law, which recognizes agricultural lands as “irreplaceable state assets.” Specifically, Article 25-AA supports local initiatives to protect agriculture and farmland and ensure the continued economic viability of farms in New York State. It also acknowledges the “crucial role that local government plays” in addressing threats to farming and developing strategies for the protection of agricultural lands.

Consequently, county agricultural and farmland protection boards may develop plans that include information on lands or areas proposed to be protected, and a description of the programs and strategies to be used to protect priority farmlands and sustain the agricultural economy.

Planning activities consisted of the following:

1. A review of county and regional plans and studies related to agriculture and agricultural economic development;
2. Surveys of the farming community, municipal officials, and the public;
3. Approximately 25 interviews and 3 focus group meetings with farmers, agricultural groups and organizations, economic development officials, and other stakeholders;
4. Analysis of current conditions, issues, and trends in agriculture;
5. Creation of GIS maps showing agricultural lands and other features;
6. Evaluation of local land use laws and policies to determine their “farm-friendliness”;
7. Analysis of tax impacts on agriculture and the economic role and importance of agriculture to the County:
8. Inventory and analysis of existing marketing opportunities;
9. Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to agriculture in Sullivan County;
10. Development of an agricultural vision, goals, and strategies to enhance agricultural activities, agricultural economic development, and farmland protection; and
11. Development of the full plan document.

As required by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, the AFPB must conduct at least one public hearing for public input regarding the proposed Agricultural and Farmland Protection plan before submitting the plan to the County Legislature for its approval. The County will then submit the plan to the NYS Commissioner of Agriculture for final approval.

Existing Plans and Initiatives

Planning for agriculture and farmland protection is not new to Sullivan County, the Catskills, or the Mid-Hudson region. Over the last twenty years, several plans and studies that directly or indirectly address agriculture have been developed. In addition, many agencies and organizations, including but not limited to the Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management, Cornell Cooperative Extension, County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency, and Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board are engaged in activities that support farming (see **Appendix A** for more information). This plan is intended to update, integrate, and capitalize on these efforts. Below is a brief description of county-level plans and initiatives that address agriculture in Sullivan County.



County-Level Plans

Sullivan County’s first Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan was adopted by Resolution 297-99 of the County Legislature in 1999. The plan explained why farming is important, provided an overview of Sullivan County agriculture with an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, and established goals and objectives for an agriculture and farmland protection program. Recommendations addressed such issues as right-to-farm laws, farmland preservation, land use planning, education and public relations, taxation, economic development, and business, estate, and farm planning. Since the 1999 plan was completed, many priority initiatives have been met and additional areas of focus have emerged.



Sullivan County’s Open Space Plan (2008) and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan (2014) both recognize the importance of agriculture to the County, albeit from different perspectives. The Economic Development Plan identifies agriculture as one of the primary drivers of the Sullivan County economy, defining agriculture broadly to encompass “the production of farm food products and product processing through manufacturing.” Both plans, however, emphasize the need for agricultural economic development to protect and maintain existing farms, promote local agricultural products, and improve farm profitability.

County-level plans and studies reviewed for this plan update included:

- 1999 Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan
- 2006 Sullivan 2020: Defining an Image and Managing Change - A Cost of Community Services Study for Sullivan County
- 2007 Liberty Red Meat Facility: Expanded Analysis (Skoda Enterprise Inc.)
- 2008 Sullivan County Open Space Plan (Conserving Open Space and Managing Growth)
- 2010 Sullivan County Community Health Assessment 2010-2013
- 2010 Sullivan County Creamery Market and Financial Feasibility Analysis (Baez Associates / Shepstone Management)
- 2011 Results of the Sullivan County Agricultural Summit
- 2014 Sullivan County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan

Agricultural Initiatives in Sullivan County

This plan builds on several recent agricultural initiatives in Sullivan County, including:

- The November 2011 **Agricultural Summit**, a collaborative effort which brought together 200 farmers, agri-business leaders, and agency and organization representatives to discuss challenges facing agriculture and brainstorm solutions to address them;
- The creation of agribusiness **revolving loan funds**;
- The development of a **commercial kitchen facility** (EaT Kitchen) at the Cornell Cooperative Extension's Skoda Educational Center to support small-scale food production;
- The **promotion of agritourism opportunities** and the development of the *Fresh from the Farm* agricultural trail;
- **Coordination of farmers' markets** in six communities;
- The production of numerous events and activities, including **Farmstock**, **Down on the Farm Day**, **Ag-Stravaganza** and the **Little World's Fair**, to raise public awareness of agriculture and strengthen communications between residents and farmers in the County;
- The development and construction of a **red meat processing facility** in the Village of Liberty to serve livestock producers, expected to begin operation in 2015;
- The creation of a **food distribution hub** project, to meet the need for less-than-trailer-load freight service and provide farmers with access to the local and regional markets;
- A **second food hub** project proposed for the western end of Sullivan County;
- A **dairy processing initiative** aimed at encouraging farmers to begin value-added dairy processing operations and pursue higher-value markets;
- SUNY Sullivan's proposed **Healthy World Studies and Tech Transfer Institute**, which will create a new Nourishment Arts program and facilitate the development of a food and beverage industry in the County; and
- **Ongoing programs**, administered by local, state, federal, and private agencies, to support farms, protect farmland, market agricultural products, and strengthen the agricultural sector.

Chapter 2 – Agricultural Resources

Definitions

Agriculture refers broadly to any land use activity that produces or supports food, crops, fiber, greenhouse products, animal husbandry and products, timber, and other goods and products from the land as a commercial enterprise. An agricultural operation could be large or small in either acreage or sales but includes the land and on-farm buildings, equipment, manure processing and animal handling facilities, and practices which contribute to the production, preparation, processing, and marketing of food, crops, livestock and livestock products, timber operations, commercial horse boarding and equine operations, composting, and biomass crops. The land on which an agricultural operation takes place is considered a farm. **Agribusiness** is considered to be a farm related business that supports farms such as equipment and supplies, but also includes those that are engaged in the processing, storage, and distribution of farm commodities. **Farmland** is land used primarily for bona fide agricultural production, for commercial purposes, of all those items and products.

History and Role of Agriculture in Sullivan County

Sullivan County has a long history of farming dating back to the eighteenth century. The earliest farms met the subsistence needs of individual families. By the late 1800s, however, local farms had expanded to serve New York City’s growing population. Agricultural products were distributed within the region, north to Albany, and south to New York City by rail. After the First World War, farms grew larger and began to specialize as dairy or egg farms. In fact, Sullivan County was once one of the largest producers of eggs in the state (“The Egg Basket of New York State”) and nation.



At a Jewish poultry cooperative in Liberty, 1936.
(Source: Library of Congress)

In 1925, nearly 47% of the land in Sullivan County was being farmed. Since that time, however, there has been a steady decline in the amount of land in farms in the County. From 1950 to the mid-1970s, there was a swift decline in agriculture and the number of farms in Sullivan County dropped from approximately 2,000 to 400, with farm acreage from about 192,000 to 66,000.

Since the 1970s, the rate of decline in farmland in Sullivan County has slowed but has not ceased. By 2012, according to Agricultural Census, there were 321 farms working 53,859 acres of land – 8.9% of the

County's total land area. Meanwhile, changes in the dairy industry have resulted in a sharp reduction in the number of dairy farms over the last 60 years, from 631 in 1950 to just 32 in 2012.

There are some positives to report, however. The amount of land being farmed in Sullivan County increased slightly between 2007 and 2012. The County is seeing growth in the number of vegetable farms, horse farms, and various livestock farms, with rising sales of vegetables and other crops, horses, and beef cattle. There are also more farms involved in agritourism activities, linking agriculture with another one of Sullivan County's major economic drivers, tourism.

More recently, there has been a renewed focus on agriculture in Sullivan County due to local and national trends including interest in locally- and organically-grown food products, growing "buy local" and farm-to-table movements, rising demand for Kosher foods, a desire among some travelers to "experience" agriculture through agritourism, and new markets for value-added and niche products such as artisanal cheeses, grass-fed beef, and craft brews. Agriculture has also been in the spotlight due to several state-level initiatives. For example, the Cuomo Administration has made it easier for farmers to launch wineries, distilleries, and breweries, stimulating the growth of thousands of farm-based manufacturers using ingredients grown in New York.

Agriculture is an important industry and land use in Sullivan County because it:

- ✓ Contributes to jobs and income, and supports economic activity in other sectors;
- ✓ Contributes to the County's visual landscape and rural character;
- ✓ Provides access to fresh, healthy, local food products including eggs, meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables;
- ✓ Preserves the open space and helps to maintain the quality of life that residents value;
- ✓ Serves as the basis for many tourism activities;
- ✓ Keeps property taxes down because agricultural land uses require less in services than they generate in revenues;
- ✓ Supports a variety of wildlife; and
- ✓ Preserves and enhances the quality of the environment through soil conservation, carbon sequestration, and conservation of biodiversity.



Snapshot of Farms, Farmland and the Agricultural Economy

A detailed analysis and profile of Sullivan County farms, farmland and agricultural economic characteristics is provided in **Appendix C**. This information reflects data from the US Census of Agriculture from 2010 and prior years. The following highlights current conditions and trends.

Farms

- The 2012 Census of Agriculture reported 321 farms in Sullivan County, a minimal decline from 323 farms in 2007.
- The amount of land being farmed has increased since 2007, to 53,859 acres. Approximately 9% of the total land area in Sullivan County is in farming.
- In 2012, the largest share of farms in Sullivan County (30%) was in the 10- to 49-acre range, followed by those with 180 to 499 acres (22%).

...we are seeing more small farms emerging in the region, often as new ventures dedicated to making locally grown food available to consumers. And they have increasing opportunities to do so, through direct sales and specialized regional distribution channels.

- Glynwood Center,
The State of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley

Farm Products

- Half of all Sullivan County farms in 2012 reported their principal product as either mixed crops and hay (27%) or mixed livestock (23%). Approximately 13% of farms raised beef cattle.
- Dairy was the principal commodity for just 24 farms (7.5% of the total), down from 46 in 2002.¹ The total number of dairy cows has decreased, corresponding with a decrease in the market value of milk sold.
- Fewer farms in the County are raising beef cattle, producing milk, or breeding, hatching, and raising poultry for meat or egg production. There are *more* farms growing vegetables, however.
- The most common crop in the County is forage, which is grown on 146 farms covering 17,773 acres. This is significantly lower than what existed in 2002.
- More farms had horses and ponies than any other livestock (106 farms with 1,249 animals). The number of farms with dairy cattle fell 40%, while those with sheep and lambs declined 23% between 2002 and 2012.

Farm Operators

- The average age of a principal farm operator in Sullivan County was 59.7 years. This compares to 57.1 years statewide.
- There were only 6 principal farm operators in Sullivan County under the age of 35 in 2012, a decline from 12 in 2007 and 17 in 2002.

¹ The “principal commodity” refers to the crop or animal accounting for at least 50% of the farm’s production. Although 32 farms in the County had dairy cows in 2012, only 24 of them were classified as dairy farms according to this definition. See additional details in **Appendix C**.

Farm Sales

- Sullivan County farms generated \$27.1 million in cash receipts in 2012, with livestock and poultry accounting for \$23.0 million (85%) and crops for \$4.1 million.
- Four commodity groups made up 91% of Sullivan County's agricultural output: poultry and eggs, dairy products, cattle and calves, and horses and ponies.
- Between 2007 and 2012, sales of agricultural products declined nearly 36%. Although virtually all of the crop commodities experienced increased sales, as did horses, beef cattle, and sheep and goats, these increases were not enough to offset significant reductions in the sales of dairy products and poultry and eggs.
- In constant 2012 dollars (i.e., in values adjusted to account for inflation), total farm sales declined about 41% between 1987 and 2012. Most of the decline took place from 2007 to 2012.
- Direct-to-consumer sales of farm products in Sullivan County increased 4% from \$624,000 in 2007 to \$649,000 in 2012.
- On average, Sullivan County farms had \$84,424 in annual sales. However, farms with livestock sales generated significantly higher average sales (\$131,686) than those selling crops (\$23,576).
- Nine farms had sales of \$500,000 or more, accounting for 63% of the County's agricultural output.
- The majority of farms in the County do not generate significant income from the sale of agricultural products. Farms with sales of less than \$10,000 represented 55 -60% of all farms in the County between 1997 and 2012.
- Fifteen farms in Sullivan County had farm-related income from agritourism and recreational services in 2012, totaling \$300,000. This is an increase from 9 farms and \$170,000 in 2007.

In 2007, Sullivan County accounted for more than 22% of New York State's poultry and egg production, with \$27.7 million in sales. Onondaga County was ranked a distant second, with an 8% market share.

Five years later, poultry and egg production in Sullivan County generated \$12.3 million in sales. The County's market share was down to 8.5%, surpassed by Suffolk County with 17% and Onondaga County with 9.5% of poultry and egg sales in the state.

Other Farm Characteristics

- Sullivan County farms incurred more than \$27.2 million in production expenses in 2012 with feed for animals being the largest expense (\$9.3 million). Other significant expenses were for hired labor (\$3.1 million) and the purchase of livestock and poultry (\$2.5 million).
- Approximately one-third of the farms in the County made a profit in 2012, an increase from 28% in 2007.
- Sullivan County farms owned more than \$198 million worth of land and buildings and an additional \$23.9 million in machinery and equipment.
- A total of 94 farms had hired labor in addition to their principal operators in 2012, accounting for 377 employees with \$3.1 million in annual payroll. Six farms reported having 10 or more workers, but they accounted for 36% of the County's total farm employment.

Agriculture-Related Industry

- There are many businesses and industries in Sullivan County that are dependent upon or linked to agriculture. These include agricultural production support services, food and beverage manufacturing, selected wholesale and retail trades, real estate, and so on.
- Agricultural production, support services, and manufacturing activity contributed an estimated \$714 million in output, 1,458 jobs, and \$63.4 million in labor income to the Sullivan County economy in 2012. The figures reflect only the *direct* contributions made by agriculture and do not take into account the fact that these contributions generate *additional* employment, sales, and labor income as each dollar is subsequently re-circulated throughout the local economy. This is what is referred to as the multiplier effect.

As an industry, agriculture has a relatively high economic impact because farmers purchase supplies and services from many other businesses. They also tend to “spend locally as much as possible so the impact of their spending in their local community is often much higher than that of other industries” (Glynwood Center, *The State of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley*). Dairy farmers, for example, may generate income and employment for milk haulers, animal feed stores, fuel suppliers, farm equipment dealerships, and large-animal veterinarians, among others.

Farmers’ Markets

Until recently, the Sullivan County Farmers’ Market Association operated four seasonal farmers’ markets, in Jeffersonville, Liberty, Callicoon, and Kauneonga Lake. In 2014, the markets were held only in Liberty (which has had a farmers’ market since 1996) and Callicoon. The Farmers’ Market Association also coordinates an indoor farmers’ market in Callicoon from November through April.

Other seasonal farmers’ markets in the County - in Roscoe, Rock Hill, Barryville, and Monticello - are operated independently. Bethel Woods Performing Arts Center also has a farmers’ market in the fall called the Harvest Festival.

Agriculture and Property Taxes

A separate analysis of the impact of property taxes on agriculture in Sullivan County was conducted as part of the development of this plan (see **Appendix E**). The analysis found considerable variation in combined property tax rates within the County, with the highest overall tax rates in the central portion of the County in Liberty, extending into northeast Bethel, southeast Rockland, and covering most of Fallsburg. The majority of the farm parcels in this higher-tax area, however, are enrolled in the Agricultural Assessment Program, and are taxed based on their estimated value for agricultural use rather than at market value.

The analysis also examined data from the Census of Agriculture to determine whether farmers in Sullivan County pay disproportionately more in property taxes than farmers in neighboring counties. It

was concluded that property taxes on both a per-acre and per-\$1,000 basis are lower in Sullivan County than in most adjacent counties. Moreover, property taxes have remained a relatively stable proportion of farm production expenses in Sullivan County relative to other farm costs over the last 25 years.

Consistent with similar studies conducted elsewhere, the analysis concluded that while property taxes are an issue for some farms in the County, they do not appear to be a major overall threat to farm viability. However, smaller-sized farms, as well as farms earning less income from agriculture, are more likely to pay disproportionately more in property taxes than larger farms and those with greater farm income.

Agriculture and Local Plans and Regulations

The foundation for local land use regulation is the comprehensive plan. That document establishes the policies, vision, and strategies desired by the community. Land use regulations including zoning flow from the plan to meet those community objectives. Both can affect agriculture in many ways. These audits can help gauge the level of support given to agriculture, and to identify areas where these could be strengthened to promote farming.



A review of local comprehensive plans and zoning laws was completed for the Towns of Cocheton, Fallsburg, Rockland, and Mamakating. Previously, a similar audit was done for the Towns of Liberty, Bethel, Delaware, and Callicoon as part of their municipal agricultural and farmland protection plans. Of the four audits included in this plan, Cocheton has the most active agriculture. However, Mamakating, Fallsburg and Rockland all have some agriculture, and have the potential for other agricultural activities to develop to provide for the denser populations in those towns.

At the most basic level, zoning can specify where and what types of farms can operate and at what intensity farmland could be developed for other uses. Some zoning laws go beyond this to regulate setbacks, height, and size of farm buildings. Others establish minimum acres required in order to be considered a farm, while still others regulate the number of animals a farmer could have. Zoning laws thus can promote or deter farming operations.

Choices made by local communities in their zoning can drive up land values, make farm expansion or start-ups difficult, cause fragmentation of viable farmland, and hasten conversion to other uses. When local laws restrict agriculture, a sense of impermanence for farming can develop which in turn, can foster disinvestment in farm operations, and ultimately lead to sale of the land for development. Zoning regulations coupled with the many other issues facing farmers can make selling the land for development irresistible.

Appendix H details the results of the audit done for the Towns of Cocheton, Fallsburg, Rockland, and Mamakating. The results are summarized below to give an overall picture of “farm-friendliness” of municipalities in the county. Appendix H also includes the specific criteria used in this evaluation.



“Farm-Friendliness” of Comprehensive Plans

All four of the towns included in this audit show positive efforts by including agriculture in their planning: all four plans address agriculture in some way in their comprehensive plans. All the plans consider agriculture as having an important role in the community and three towns had at least one goal that included promotion or maintenance of agriculture. Three of the four

also established at least general policies to promote agriculture.

Some aspects of the plans were not very farm-friendly, however. Mamakating and Cocheton did not translate their general discussion into specific actions or strategies that could be implemented to improve farming land uses. Only two of the plans include data, maps and specific information in their resource sections showing the current state of agriculture.

Overall, while agriculture is a recognized land use having an important role in these communities, the plans included in this audit were not particularly strong about making recommendations for planning methods that actually can be implemented to elevate the role and presence of agriculture.

Comprehensive plans can be strengthened by further analyzing issues facing farms and farmland, more clearly articulating the benefits provided by farms, and identification of specific strategies that support and allow for farms. As the pressure to convert farmland to non-farm uses increases, these tools and plans become even more important.

“Farm-Friendliness” of Zoning Laws

An important conclusion of this part of the audit is that the four towns reviewed have zoning laws that do not address agriculture in a way that matches established goals in their plans. In other words, the plans are more supportive of agriculture in philosophy but less supportive in how zoning requirements have been implemented as law. Some of the zoning requirements are very restrictive and could significantly affect the ability to farm in some locations. In most respects, the zoning laws reviewed do not reflect each community’s stated role of agriculture from their comprehensive plans.

Overall, some aspects of the zoning laws reviewed placed “farm-unfriendly” barriers to farming activities. Even in towns where agriculture had a strong component in the plan (such as Fallsburg), the

zoning did not reflect those same values. Zoning in all four towns does place barriers or poses challenges for farming. According to the farm-friendly criteria reviewed in this audit, the zoning laws in Cohecton and Rockland were more farm-friendly than those in Fallsburg and Mamakating. It may be very difficult for new farms to start or for existing farms to expand, diversify, or add value-added products or direct sales in Fallsburg and Mamakating. Some of the zoning practices commonly in use in these communities that are not considered to be farm-friendly include:

- Requiring special use permits for farm uses.
- Limiting the ability of a farm to have a farm-related businesses on the farm.
- Lacking use of buffer areas between farmland and new residential uses.
- Prohibiting processing facilities either on-farm or at a commercial location.
- Limiting farm stands to sale of produce raised only on that one farm.
- Lacking a process to ensure that the Planning Board evaluates impacts of a proposed project on surrounding farms.
- Lacking application submission requirements that ask for maps or other information that can be used to assess impact of a project on adjacent farm operations.
- Limited or inflexible definitions of agriculture, farms, etc.
- Lacking use of an Agricultural Data Statement as per AML 25-AA.
- Placing barriers to providing for farm worker housing.
- Not fully exempting farm structures from height requirements.
- Establishing setbacks that force farm structures to be located in specific areas on a parcel.
- Prohibiting certain kinds of farm animals.
- Limiting the number of farm animals allowed per farm or per acre.
- Establishing a certain minimum acreage that farms need to have.

Right to Farm Laws in Sullivan County

Of the 15 towns in Sullivan County, 11 have adopted right to farm laws. These laws are adopted pursuant to Article 25-AA of New York’s Agriculture and Markets Law (AML 25-AA) and provide protection against nuisance claims. Farmers within a New York State Agricultural District are also protected from nuisance claims through the State Right to Farm law. Communities having a local right to farm law not only extends that protection, but makes an important statement showing support for farmers in their municipality.

Right to Farm Laws by Town		
Town	Has RTF Law	Name
Bethel	Yes	Chapter 160: Farming
Callicoon	Yes	Chapter 100: Farming
Cochecton	Yes	Chapter 180: Right to Farm
Delaware	Yes	Local Law #2
Fallsburg	No	
Forestburgh	Yes	Chapter 89: Farming
Fremont	Yes	
Highland	No	
Liberty	Yes	Chapter 76: Farming
Lumberland	Yes	
Mamakating	Yes	Chapter 100: Farming
Neversink	Yes	Chapter 35: Right to Farm
Rockland	Yes	Local Law #2: Right to Farm
Thompson	No	
Tusten	No	

Soils

County soils as a whole have been classified by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service according to their capabilities for agricultural use and the 1989 Soil Survey of Sullivan County. New York indicates some 39,000 acres or 6.2% of the County can be considered "prime farmland." This highest classification is limited to soils that produce the highest yields, require minimal amounts of energy and economic resources and result in the least damage to the environment. It is predominately limited to the river valleys and hilltop areas with less than 8% slope.

Slope is, indeed, the primary limitation with respect to most soils within the County and many of them are actually quite usable for farming where pockets of relatively level land exist or the crops require less cultivation. The majority of the forage crops in the County, in fact, are grown on soils which fall into less than prime but still good classes. Prime farmland soils and soils of statewide significance are shown on **Map 4**. In general, the loams are the best soils for farming in the County. The best soil group includes the Valois-Chenango-Riverhead soils and can be found in about 4% of lands within the County, although other soil groups have additional locations where prime farmland soils are found. These soils are found in the upland areas of the County and are more level, very to moderately deep, and moderately well-drained.

State PDR programs place a high level of importance on the amount of prime farmland soil present. However, poorer soil conditions can be overcome with soil amendments and proper management and lack of prime farmland soil does not mean that successful farming cannot take place. Rather, farming on poorer soils means that there are likely higher costs or lower production rates in those areas.

Topography and soils have resulted in farms being scattered about the County rather than concentrated. Farms are often separated by larger wooded parcels and forestry is an important corollary and compatible use for many farms.

Agricultural Districts

The New York State Agricultural District Program exists to protect current and future farmland from nonagricultural development which would result in competition for limited land resources, and also to prevent ordinances which would inhibit farming and raise farm taxes. The first Sullivan County Agricultural District was formed in 1973.

There are currently two active Agricultural Districts in the County: Agricultural District #1 encompasses lands in the western part of the County, west of I-86/Route 17, with all or portions of the Towns of Bethel, Callicoon, Cocheton, Delaware, Fremont, Liberty, Thompson and Tusten (see **Map 2**). This district includes large, contiguous areas of land and is the least fragmented. Agricultural District #4 covers widespread areas of lands along and east of I-86/Route 17, and includes portions of the Towns of Bethel, Fallsburg, Liberty, Mamakating, Neversink, Rockland, Thompson and the Villages of Bloomingburg and Wurtsboro. The portions of the district in Fallsburg, Mamakating, Neversink, and Rockland consist of scattered individual parcels of land.



Both districts are required to be reviewed every eight years. Updates are made to the district boundaries after a review and public input process. The eight-year review of Agricultural District #1 took place in 2013. The review of Agricultural District #4 will be in 2015.

The table below provides information about these districts.

Characteristics of Sullivan County Agricultural Districts		
	Agricultural District #1	Agricultural District #4
Total Acres	114,951.23	46,747
Acres in Farms	74,247	27,680

Parcels Receiving Agricultural Assessments

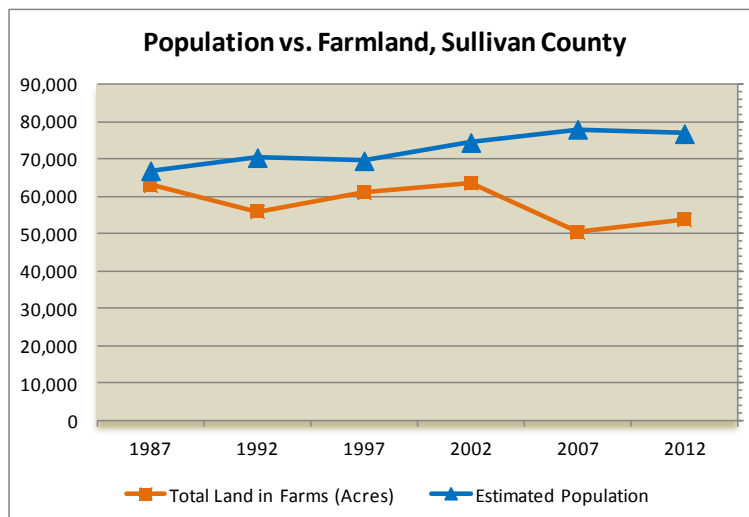
Some of the best farmland in the County is found along the Delaware River in the Cocheton area and along the Shawangunk Kill near Bloomingburg. Agricultural land is widely dispersed throughout the County but concentrated in the western portion of the County. In Sullivan County, there is a very close correlation between farms that are active and those that also receive agricultural assessments through

the New York program. Thus, use of the map showing agricultural assessments also approximates where the active farmland is in the County (**Map 3**). Not all farms are eligible for or take advantage of the agricultural assessment.

Farmers and farmland owners benefit from reduced tax assessments through the New York Agricultural Assessment Program. Generally, farmland that receives a reduced assessment is in active agriculture and shows commitment on the part of the farmer and/or landowner to continue farming. Map 3 shows parcels of land that are included in the agricultural assessment program. It illustrates the most active concentrations of farms in the County. There are 1,057 parcels and approximately 34,677 acres of land in Sullivan County that receive agricultural assessments. Generally, farmland that receives that assessment is in active agriculture and shows commitment on the part of the farmer and/or landowner to continue farming.

Farmland Conversion Pressure

An increasing population growth rate has a direct impact on the County's land use patterns and significantly impacts agriculture. Increasing numbers of single family homes and commercial developments outside urban areas results in the conversion of farmland and open space into other uses. Historically, the highest conversion rates were seen in the 1970s to 1980s, when there was a 24% increase in population. Coupled with a 16% increase the previous decade, much of the farmland loss was during that time frame. The total population of Sullivan County in 2010, according to the Census, was 77,547. This reflected an increase of approximately 3,600 people, or 4.8%, from a decade earlier. The growth pressure has slowed considerably, but has not ceased.



Sullivan County's population is concentrated in its eastern half. The Towns of Fallsburg, Mamakating, and Thompson account for approximately 51% of the County's full-time residents. These towns are also the most densely populated. Between 2000 and 2010, Fallsburg, Mamakating, and Thompson along with Liberty accounted for 89% of the population growth in Sullivan County. Lumberland, along the Pennsylvania border, also experienced a significant population increase, adding 511 residents (26.1%).

Only a handful of towns lost population: Bethel, Delaware, Forestburgh, Fremont, and Rockland. Some towns with more significant areas of farming saw changes: Cochection grew 3.3% (44 people), Fallsburg grew 5.2% (636 people) and Tusten grew 7.1% (100 people).

Population and Housing Trends by Town, Sullivan County							
	Population			Population Density	Housing Units		
	2000 Census	2010 Census	% Change		2000 Census	2010 Census	% Change
Bethel	4,298	4,255	-1.0%	45.50	3,641	3,954	8.6%
Callicoon	3,039	3,057	0.6%	61.58	1,797	2,003	11.5%
Cochection	1,334	1,372	2.8%	36.05	955	1,114	16.6%
Delaware	2,718	2,670	-1.8%	76.13	1,337	1,535	14.8%
Fallsburg	12,195	12,870	5.5%	162.42	6,661	8,497	27.6%
Forestburgh	843	819	-2.8%	14.45	500	550	10.0%
Fremont	1,386	1,381	-0.4%	26.88	1,182	1,323	11.9%
Highland	2,387	2,530	6.0%	49.99	1,558	1,766	13.4%
Liberty	9,635	9,885	2.6%	120.73	5,350	5,495	2.7%
Lumberland	1,957	2,468	26.1%	48.83	1,419	1,630	14.9%
Mamakating	10,971	12,083	10.1%	120.79	5,629	6,251	11.0%
Neversink	3,557	3,557	0.0%	40.96	1,960	2,045	4.3%
Rockland	4,008	3,775	-5.8%	38.81	2,475	2,755	11.3%
Thompson	14,158	15,308	8.1%	163.70	9,258	9,130	-1.4%
Tusten	1,399	1,515	8.3%	30.19	1,008	1,138	12.9%
Sullivan County	73,966	77,547	4.8%	76.68	44,730	49,186	10.0%

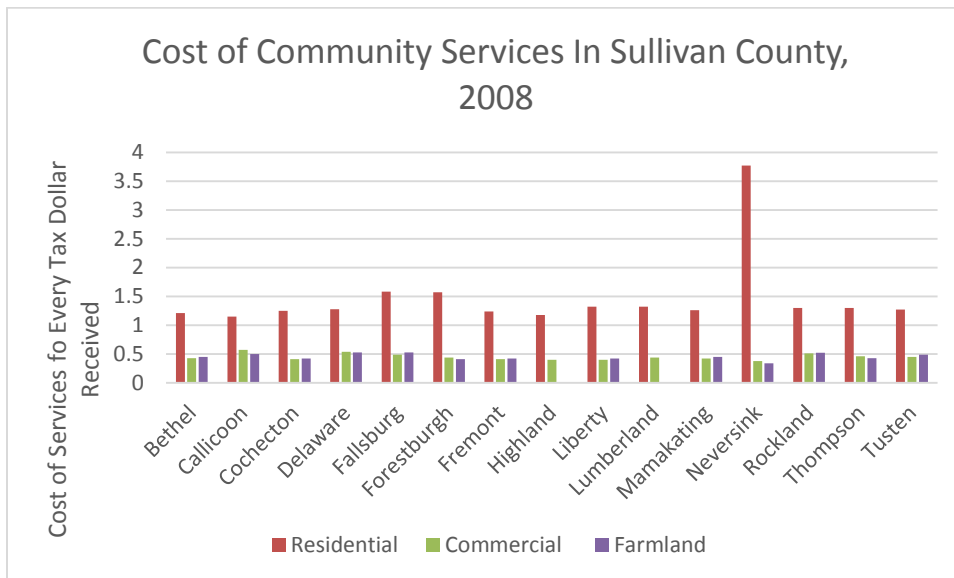
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

At the same time, with the exception of Thompson, all but one town in Sullivan County gained additional housing units between 2000 and 2010. While a few towns had moderate gains ranging from three to ten percent, many others had higher rates of growth. Fallsburg, for example, added more than 1,800 units, an increase of 27.6%. Even the rural towns that declined in population, such as Rockland and Bethel, added more housing units.

This discrepancy between population growth and housing growth is a common trend seen in rural areas in upstate New York, and suggests that some degree of rural sprawl is occurring. Ultimately, this may impact the availability and cost of farmland more than population growth, as well as the potential for farm/nonfarm conflicts in Sullivan County.

Some of these patterns are heavily influenced by the second homeowner population in Sullivan County. Municipalities with the highest percentages of second home owners – Bethel, Rockland, Thompson, and Fallsburg – are those easily accessed by the future I-86 (Route 17); by State Route 17B, a major east-west collector from I-86; or, in the case of Fallsburg, State Routes 42 and 52. Between 2001 and 2007, the County experienced a 65% increase in second home ownership. The Sullivan County Division of Planning, using tax roll data from the Sullivan County Office of Real Property, established that there were 6,089 second homeowners in 2001. In 2007, the Division, again using tax roll data, revealed that

10,085 persons owned a second home in Sullivan County, and an additional 6,196 people owned vacant land in the County while maintaining a full-time residence outside of Sullivan County. Sullivan County's growth has been driven partly by this "urban conversion expansion."



These numbers mean that for every \$1 collected in taxes by a municipality, it costs that amount to provide public services for a land use. For example, in Bethel, for every \$1 collected in taxes it costs the Town \$1.21 to provide municipal services to residential uses, but only 45 cents for farmland.

The consequences of conversion of farmland mean not only a loss of production, open space, and loss of jobs, it also negatively affects County and Town fiscal conditions. In general, most residential housing does not generate as much net revenue for a jurisdiction as it costs more to provide public services to it. Commercial development and farmland usually subsidize residential development to varying degrees. This makes farmland, even with a preferential tax assessment, a net fiscal positive and in many cases a preferred land use. Cost of community services studies commissioned by the American Farmland Trust, Sullivan County, and others from within the Hudson Valley have found this to be the case.

Protected Lands

There are 943 parcels of land that are currently protected in some way in Sullivan County (see **Map 6 - Protected Open Space**). Thirty of these parcels have conservation easements on them, held by the Delaware Highlands Conservancy. These parcels cover 72,687 acres, or 11.4% of the County's total land area.

Farms protected by these conservation easements include:

- Birch Ridge - 23 acres in the Town of Delaware;

- Lemons Brook Farm - 159 acres in the Town of Bethel; and
- Sulphur Springs Farm - 158 acres in the Town of Liberty.

In addition, the Watershed Agricultural Council holds easements on 21 parcels encompassing 1,478 acres in the Town of Neversink. The Open Space Institute owns 29 parcels totaling 762 acres in Sullivan County.

The other publicly held open spaces serve many purposes such as:

- Community services, including cultural and recreational facilities;
- Public service, such as public water supply source and protection;
- Public parks, picnic grounds, and playgrounds; and
- Publicly owned and accessible forest lands, owned primarily by the State of New York.

Priority Farmlands

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) is asking that county and municipal agricultural and farmland protection plans place more emphasis on economic development than they have in the past. This is a shift in focus from the land preservation aspect of past plans, placing more emphasis on the business aspects of agricultural operations. This does not, however, mean that the condition of the land is not important. Location is always high on the list of things to consider when starting a new business, expanding, or moving an existing business. This is doubly true for agricultural businesses, as farms are inextricably linked to the condition of the land. When a county or municipal agricultural and farmland protection plan is sent to NYSDAM for its review, one of the elements the agency looks for is an evaluation of the lands proposed to be protected.

New York State Priority Farmland Criteria

New York State requires county farmland protection plans to identify any land or areas that are to be protected.² A landowner who wishes to sell their development rights through the state's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program must show that the proposed land is in an area identified by the County as important farmland.

The State PDR program is designed to:

- preserve "viable agricultural land" as defined in §301 of the NYS Agriculture and Markets Law;
- protect farmland in areas facing significant development pressure; and

² The state has elevated the importance of county-level priority farmland identification because NYSDAM provides funding to farmland protection projects that are consistent with local agricultural and farmland protection plans.

- protect lands that serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics.

The specific state-level criteria for farmland preservation revolve around how well the proposed project:

- will preserve “viable agricultural land”;
- is located in areas facing significant development pressure;
- serve as a buffer for a significant natural public resource containing important ecosystem or habitat characteristics;
- protect prime farmland soils;
- protect farmland of statewide importance soils; and
- protect land used in agricultural production.

Sullivan County Important Farmland Criteria

Farms cannot be successful without land resources. This Plan recognizes that having financially successful and sustainable farms is the best way to preserve farmland. However, Sullivan County communities will change and grow over time, and farmland will remain at risk for development or even abandonment. Therefore, identification of important farmlands is a crucial part of the Plan so that programs can be targeted to those critical areas. Additionally, the State’s Circular 1500, that establishes components to be discussed within a County-level agricultural and farmland protection plan requires identification of important farmlands.

This section outlines the steps taken by the County to identify those farmlands. The Steering Committee worked to identify parcels already being farmed as well as other characteristics that define ‘important farmland.’ The committee discussed features that affect the value, condition, and usefulness of a piece of farmland in Sullivan County. The committee discussed items that affect its value, productivity, viability, and how it is affected. It then identified a list of criteria to use that fit into the broad topics previously identified.

The criteria used to define important farmlands were

- All parcels of land currently identified by town assessors as being used for agriculture (100 and 241 classified parcels).
- Parcels that are in an agricultural district, but are not classified as agriculture;
- Parcels that receive an agricultural assessment, but are not classified as agriculture; and
- Other vacant and large residential parcels that appear to be used for agriculture (identified by using aerial photos). These parcels include, but are not limited to, those with property class codes of 240 (rural residential with acreage), 321 (abandoned agricultural land), and 322 (vacant residential land over 10 acres).
- Parcels that meet the definition of agriculture that as used in this plan.

As a result of the original 1999 Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, Sullivan County developed criteria to help identify important farmlands for use in a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program. The PDR program was not funded, but the criteria have been maintained as ones that can be used to define priority farmland. The towns of Bethel, Liberty, Callicoon, and Delaware subsequently incorporated those County criteria into their local town-level analysis of important farmlands. That list of criteria for use in a PDR program is summarized and listed below by topic:

Value to the agricultural economy

- Land has high percentage of farm in prime soils or soils of statewide importance
- Land has above average crop yields

Conversion pressure

- Soils are highly suitable for development
- Property has a lot of State, County or Town road frontage
- It is close to a hamlet or village
- Property has water and sewer on site or close by

Consequences of conversion

- Farm is near other viable agricultural lands and farms (more = higher priority)

Open space value

- Land has significant natural resources on it (in a major watershed, in or bordering public land such as the Catskill Park, Delaware River, Neversink River or Bashakill Wildlife Management Area, historically significant)

Long term viability and level of commitment

- Farm has a whole farm plan or conservation plan in place
- Landowner has formal estate or business plan
- Land is in an Agricultural District

Cost effectiveness (effort worthiness)

- The acreage proposed to be protected is large (larger size = higher priority)
- Landowner applies to protect more than 75% of farm property
- An application for protection includes neighboring farms as well

As part of this planning update, the AFPB discussed the relative importance of these criteria, along with other possibilities. The results are listed in the table below, in the order of their relative importance. This table represents the original County criteria plus several others that were deemed important by the AFPB. Some of these criteria have data and are mappable, while other are not. To further the understanding of where the critical mass of farmland in Sullivan County is a map has been created showing farmlands that score higher using mappable criteria.

Using a geographic information system, each parcel identified as a farmed parcel was evaluated and ranked by identifying those mappable criteria found on or near it, applying a score for each criteria, and

adding them up to produce a total score for each parcel (using the table that follows). **Map 7** shows those farmed parcels and their relative scores. Parcels with the highest scores as shown on this map, represents the core priority farmlands in Sullivan County.

The Priority Farmland Map should not be interpreted to mean other areas not included do not have viable farmland. Due to the dynamic nature of some of the data used to produce this map, it will change over time. There are also some criteria used that are important, but cannot be mapped using existing data. This map should be updated as new information becomes available.

Ranking of Farmland Criteria³	
	Score Applied to Each Parcel
Proximity to other farms	17
Farms that are in an Agricultural District	16
Proximity to currently vacant land that could be brought into production	15
Has been locally identified at the Town level as important farmland to protect	15
Farm has a business plan in place	15
The farm is able to change with the times, changing crops over time	14
Farms that receive an agricultural value assessment	13
Farm operations with a whole farm plan, or conservation plan in place	13
Farm has an estate plan in place	12
Proximity to recently abandoned farm operation with existing infrastructure	12
The farm has been in operation for many years	11
The land has been farmed for many years	11
Town has a Right to Farm Law	10
Large parcels of land	10
Land with high percentage of high quality soils (Prime or State Important)	10
Land with high percentage of soils highly suitable for development	10
The farm is historically significant in some way	9
The percentage of the land being actively farmed.	9
Land with above average crop yields	9
Proximity to water or wellhead protection areas	8
In an area identified as having high scenic value	7
The farm has multiple agricultural enterprises	7
Has been locally identified as important non-farmland to protect	7
Properties with large amounts of local road frontage	7
Properties with large amounts of county road frontage	6
Properties with large amounts of state road frontage	5
Proximity to major attractions, such as a casino	4
Proximity to a farmers' market	3
Properties close to a hamlet or village	3
Proximity to other non-farm tourist attractions	2
Proximity to municipal water	2
Proximity to municipal sewer	2

³ Criteria that are highlighted represent those that are not currently mappable. If a County-wide PDR program were to be developed, this information would be collected on a parcel by parcel basis during the application process.

Ranking of Farmland Criteria³

	Score Applied to Each Parcel
Proximity to the Catskill Park, the Delaware River, or the Neversink River	1
Proximity to the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area, or any other federal, state, or county preserved open space or parkland	1

Chapter 3 – Recent Agricultural Initiatives in Sullivan

There are several exciting initiatives that have already been started in Sullivan County over the past few years that will support agriculture in many ways. These projects complement the range of ongoing programs offered by public agencies and private organizations to support agriculture. **Appendix A outlines all the projects and support programs**, and several are briefly highlighted below. Continuation, expansion, and marketing of these existing programs in an effective way is a centerpiece of this Plan and building on these efforts is a critical action Sullivan County should work on.

Agricultural Summit

In November 2011, a Sullivan County Agricultural Summit brought together about 200 farmers, agribusiness leaders, and agency and organization representatives at the Villa Rome Resort and Conference Center in Callicoon. The Agricultural Summit was a collaborative effort between Sullivan County, Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County, Pure Catskills, the Sullivan County Farm Network, Catskill Mountainkeeper, and other organizations, as well as several farms and businesses.

The primary objectives of the Agricultural Summit were to discuss the biggest challenges facing Sullivan County agriculture and brainstorm solutions for overcoming those challenges. Priority solutions included creating a “one-stop shop” for assistance with business planning, funding and financing, and other available resources; fostering collaboration among farmers to prioritize initiatives and leverage political and economic power; focusing on sustainable energy practices; and advocating for agriculture within the political system.



Liberty Red Meat Processing Facility

The County started looking into the creation of a red meat processing facility about ten years ago, but the initiative did not begin to gain traction until a feasibility study was completed with funding from the Sullivan County IDA in 2007.

In 2008, the Sullivan County IDA agreed to take charge of the project and provide the leadership necessary to bring the project to fruition. The IDA was able to secure funding from federal, state and local sources to support the \$1.6 million cost of designing and constructing the meat processing facility. It also purchased a site for the facility in the Village of Liberty.

The Western Catskill region [comprised of Delaware, Sullivan, and Ulster Counties] has a weak agriculture infrastructure, similar to other mostly small farm regions that are losing farms and farmland. The region has fewer equipment dealers and wholesalers, and not enough slaughterhouses and food processing services.

*- Catskill Mountainkeeper,
Western Catskill Region Foodshed
Research & Analysis*

The need for the red meat processing facility was identified as early as 2002 and confirmed by the feasibility study. Although the main focus of the project will be to serve Sullivan County livestock producers, it is expected to serve farms within a 50- to 100-mile radius due to its location and the lack of slaughter facilities in neighboring counties.

Excavation and infrastructure work on the site has been completed. The Sullivan County IDA has awarded a bid for building construction and has scheduled additional bid openings for equipment and coolers and for the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing portions of the project. The IDA anticipates that all of this work will be completed in 2015.

A Request for Proposal for the facility operator is expected to be approved for posting in the near future, with an operator to be selected early in 2015. The bidders will be required to provide a business plan. During the development of this plan update, some local farmers expressed interest in having a smokehouse or a packaging operation as part of the red meat processing facility. The specific nature of processing and packaging activities will be determined by the operator, and is unknown at the time of this writing.

Livestock Processing and Profitability Project

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County's Closing the Gap: Livestock Processing and Profitability program will improve the economic viability of at least 60 Sullivan County and regional livestock farmers. Supported by Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County, this will aid livestock producers in the region by providing a series of workshops, technical assistance, and farmer resource development activities, a directory of resources and programs for farmers (A Livestock Manual), county-wide on-site farm outreach and technical assistance visits, and an analysis of the economic impacts of different processing opportunities for individual farms. Farmers can take advantage of forums, outreach and

networking events that can help them create valuable connections, support and information to enhance their daily livestock practices.

Participation in the program will increase livestock farmers' readiness for the County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency's Red Meat Processing Facility, and will increase producers' annual sales through expanded capacity to produce, manage, process, and market livestock products. The program is designed to take advantage of market demand and increased efficiency and it will help farmers engage with processing facilities and the larger consumer marketplace.

This program is also designed to increase consumer awareness and education on local agribusiness and good livestock management practices. Workshops and activities are research driven and developed in consultation with Cornell University. In addition, Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County will collaborate with area farmers, Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management, Sullivan County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency, Pure Catskills and others.

Food Hubs

A major factor that prevents Sullivan County farmers from taking advantage of the opportunity to sell local products to downstate consumers is a lack of an effective distribution system that can efficiently move smaller volume shipments to market. Given the small nature of many farms in the County and region, such a distribution system accommodating farms throughout the area and into Pennsylvania would be very beneficial.

In 2013, the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation (HVADC) in partnership with the County of Sullivan IDA and Ginsberg's Foods applied for state funding to develop a network of "hyper local distribution nodes" – or food hubs – that would supplement existing regional food transportation and distribution infrastructure. This network is expected to meet the need for less-than-trailer-load freight service and facilitate transactions between farmers and wholesalers locally while also giving farmers access to the larger New York City market. One of the designated distribution hubs will be in Sullivan County.

What Is a Food Hub?

According to the USDA, a food hub is "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products." Their target markets are typically institutions, grocery stores, and restaurants that tend to have difficulty purchasing local products in the necessary volumes.

This food hub project will leverage significant commitments that have already been secured from agencies like the USDA. The County of Sullivan IDA has also committed matching funds. Implementation was delayed, as the state awarded only partial funding towards the project. However, in October 2014 the IDA and Ginsberg's Foods announced plans to lease a 13,500-square foot

warehouse at the Bridgeville Office Centre, located just east of Monticello. Leasing rather than purchasing property will reduce the cost of the food hub project. Once the paperwork is completed, the project should be able to proceed as planned.

Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS), an initiative of American Farmland Trust, will be working with the IDA and its partners on the food hub project to identify and address farmer training needs. Launched in 2013, FINYS is a statewide partnership of agricultural leaders, public health officials, and economic development practitioners working together to strengthen New York’s farm and food economy. FINYS activities include the development and delivery of a program that will train farmers to scale up food production with a focus on food safety, packaging and requirements of institutional food service.

A second food hub project has been proposed for the western end of Sullivan County. Led by The Solution Project, this project is centered on the former Narrowsburg School and is a project in the early stages of planning.

The Lucky Dog Local Food Hub is a grassroots effort to fill the farm’s weekly truck t NYC Greenmarkets by transporting neighboring farmers’ products to buyers seeking high-quality, source-identified farm products. Lucky Dog Organic Farm is working to match local produce with known buyers. Regional small farms then establish relationships directly and use the Lucky Dog Food Hub for transportation or delivery.

Commercial Kitchen (EaT Kitchen)

Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County recently developed a commercial kitchen facility at its Gerald J. Skoda Educational Center to support small-scale food production in Sullivan County. The Entrepreneurial & Teaching (EaT) Kitchen is a training ground for food entrepreneurs, a learning center for cooks, a demonstration site for chefs, and the starting point for healthy eating. In partnership with the Liberty Community Development Corporation and Sullivan Renaissance, the Extension held a hands-on workshop series entitled “Recipes for Success” in spring 2014. Aimed at aspiring food entrepreneurs, the series focused on the business planning process, helping participants convert their ideas into viable business opportunities.



Dairy Processing Initiative

In 2010, the County of Sullivan IDA commissioned a study examining the potential for local dairy processing in Sullivan County. Although the study concluded that a conventional fluid milk processing facility was not financially feasible, it determined that the market for small, niche dairy producers is strong, as is demand among farmers to create and market their own products. In fact, a number of individual dairy farms are already pursuing these higher-value markets (e.g., Bethel Creamery, which makes organic, kosher dairy products).

Sullivan County subsequently applied for and received a \$186,500 Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) from the USDA in 2011 to assist dairy farmers with the purchase of equipment for on-farm processing. The objectives of the initiative are to:

- enable one or more local businesses to begin or expand value-added dairy processing operations;
- enable local farmers to sell their milk locally and capture a higher return than they currently get from selling to large cooperatives; and
- make funding available for other local dairies grow and diversify their operations, by channeling equipment lease payments into a low-interest revolving loan fund.

The County is currently in the process of awarding the money and working with a local business to develop a farmstead yogurt product.

SUNY Sullivan Healthy World Institute

In November 2013, the SUNY Sullivan Board of Trustees approved the concept for the proposed Healthy World Studies and Tech Transfer Institute. The Healthy World Institute will be dedicated to applied learning, food and beverage technology transfer, entrepreneurship, green technology and food shed management, and software application development. It will provide programming related to Nourishment Arts, a new program that examines the food shed, healthy agriculture practice, nutrition science, and culinary arts training that caters to resorts, health care organizations, and schools.

A primary goal is to facilitate the commercialization of products invented and brought to market by START-UP NY eligible businesses. These businesses can then transition to an 18-acre SUNY Sullivan Commerce Park. Space will be provided for food and beverage manufacturers to pilot products and to develop new technologies that build capacity, knowledge sharing and innovation. Technology transfer will provide a focus on how to bring new products to NYC, the region, and the world marketplace. New programs and expansions of existing SUNY Sullivan programs will prepare students to participate skillfully and add value to the work of developing an economic cluster around food, beverage, green tech, and data aggregation and sharing.

The Nourishment Arts and Science AOS is a two-year program designed to provide students with broad-based training in a pioneering field of study. This innovative program includes three primary elements

and an optional pathway designed to grow food and beverage entrepreneurs. The three elements include a practical knowledge of healthy agricultural food production, nutrition science, and basic culinary competencies. In addition to a solid foundation related to sustainable agriculture and nutrition science, students will gain hands-on skills and practices related to food technologies and healthy meal preparation designed for institutional settings. Moreover, students will have the option to layer a series of courses and internships emphasizing food and beverage entrepreneurial studies that include business practices, frozen meal manufacturing processes, aquaponic, hydroponic, and organic field farming practices, and the production of distilled beverages.

Partnership with the food and beverage manufacturing industry, with Cornell Cooperative Extension, and with SUNY technical colleges will enhance the HWI and NAS program and bring a level of aspirational excellence to the educational and entrepreneurial outcomes. .

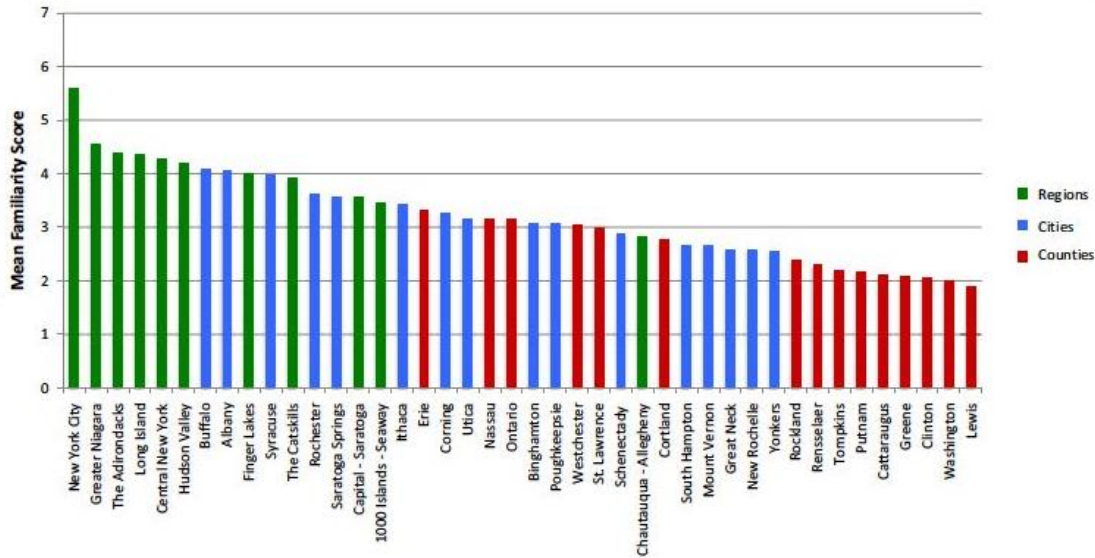
Marketing Opportunities

An inventory of marketing opportunities available to Sullivan County farmers was done along with a review of Sullivan County Visitor’s Association work related to agriculture and that of other tourism agencies, economic development agencies, and the Pure Catskills program. **Appendix K** provides an inventory of existing marketing opportunities.

Evaluation of a Sullivan County Brand

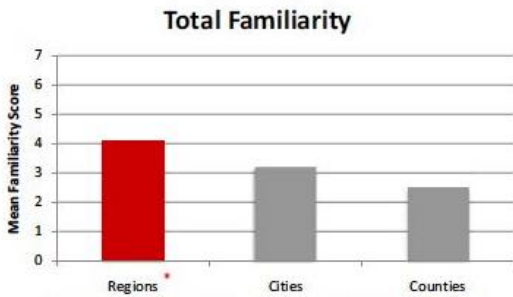
Past planning efforts have recommended marketing local agricultural products through a Sullivan County brand. During this planning process, an effort was made to evaluate existing marketing opportunities compared to development of a Sullivan County brand to determine what direction would be most useful and beneficial. Several studies done by Cornell University have evaluated just this question and have concluded that regional branding is better. The Cornell study concludes that regions, and not individual counties, are what people are most familiar with (see charts below).

Regions make up the top 6 most familiar geographic designations, while counties make up the bottom 9, reinforcing that visitors are most familiar with regions.

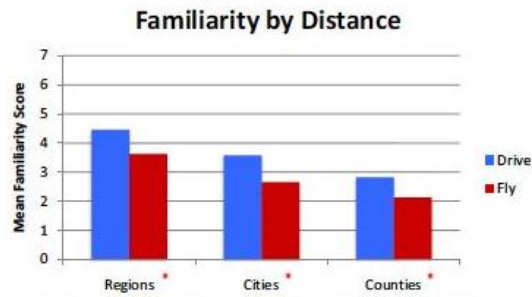


Source: Cornell Survey
 Question: How familiar are you with the following locations in the State of New York? Rating on a 7 point scale (1=not familiar; 4=neutral; 7= very familiar). 25

Although overall familiarity levels are low (4 or less), respondents are more familiar with the tourism regions than with cities and counties.



* Familiarity with regions is significantly higher than both cities and counties at the 95% confidence level.



* Differences between segments is significant at the 95% confidence level.

↑
 Respondents living further away (the fly market) are less familiar with New York State than those who live within a driving distance.



Source: Cornell Survey
 Question: How familiar are you with the following locations in the State of New York? Rating on a 7 point scale (1=not familiar; 4=neutral; 7= very familiar). 24

Because of the large opportunity for Sullivan County farmers to benefit from direct sale and agri-tourism opportunities directed at New York City and other urban markets, the AFPB concluded it would be far more advantageous for farmers to leverage existing regional branding efforts, such as Hudson Valley Bounty and Pure Catskills for obtaining greater reach. The regional names of “Hudson Valley” and “Catskills” are recognizable far outside of the local market, reaching into the NY-metro area and beyond in many cases.

These regional programs, along with some national marketing programs (outlined in **Appendix K**) offer many benefits to participating farms and food-related businesses now – they have fully developed, well-funded, recognizable, established and successful marketing programs already designed to specifically promote their members and associated organizations. These regional programs are already in place and available for Sullivan County farmers. Thus a Sullivan County brand to be marketed out of county is not recommended.

However, a local initiative targeted within Sullivan County could be beneficial. A specific Sullivan tag line or logo, such as “Sullivan Fresh” or “Pride of Sullivan” can be used to leverage the existing Pride of NY program and would only be advisable for the buy local campaign initiative discussed in this Plan. This initiative would not need the resources, funding, or effort as a full branding campaign though. A local initiative to identify locally raised products would have much less relevance for promotion outside of the local market, as Sullivan County does not have strong enough recognition when compared to the wider recognition of the regional identifiers – the Hudson Valley and the Catskills.

Such a local initiative is important to promote the consumption and use of local farm-related products as well as vendors that sell or use these products on a local level targeting the local full-time, second-homeowners, and tourism market. This could include, for example, use of a Farm Fresh dining icon available to restaurants who feature locally-sourced produce, meats, cheeses, wines, etc, and could be a way to highlight the establishments that can offer this sought-after benefit.

The conclusion is that a Sullivan County ‘brand’ and marketing program may benefit local sales within the County, but would not offer greater opportunities to County farmers wishing to direct sale to urban and regional markets outside the County. This Plan recommends development of a buy-local initiative that promotes local produce, but that the effort build on, instead of compete with such widely known brands as Pure Catskills, and Hudson Valley Bounty.

Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley Bounty

Sponsored by the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC), Pure Catskills is an existing branding campaign to mobilize support for fresh foods grown, raised, and manufactured in the Catskills. They work with hundreds of farm, food and wood-product businesses throughout Delaware, Greene, Otsego, Schoharie, Sullivan and Ulster Counties. In addition to the buy local programs, they help their members make connections with buyers looking to purchase from Catskills farms for regionally grown and produced foods. An electronic guide is available and all business listings from it are searchable in the Find Local Food section of this site.



In addition, their program also extends to economic development for business members. Support offered includes holding an annual business-to-business conference called the Farm to Market Connection, collaborating on farmer education events related to direct marketing, and facilitating sales connections, both wholesale and retail, with regional markets. Pure Catskills also partners with numerous local, regional and state organizations that support regional economic development in agriculture and forestry.

Membership is open to any farm-related business within any of the six counties that WAC represents; the farm itself does not have to be located in the New York City watershed. WAC produces the Pure Catskills Guide both in print and online, maintains a Pure Catskills website with a searchable directory, and distributes Pure Catskills newsletter and e-bursts to promote farmers, food businesses, retailers, and entrepreneurs throughout the watershed.



Hudson Valley Bounty (HVB) is an initiative of the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation. It is designed to promote local foods and support connections between local agricultural producers and culinary businesses in what is now a ten-county region that includes Sullivan County. Membership is open to Hudson Valley farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, chefs, hotels and wineries. Participating farms are listed on the HVB website in a searchable directory and are featured in HVB marketing materials and on Facebook and Twitter.

Financial Assistance

In addition to the various State and federal financial assistance programs for farmers, several local programs are available for Sullivan County farmers. The Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management – offers the *Revolving Loan Funds - Agri-Business Loan Program and Agri-Business Micro-Enterprise Loan Program*. It provides low-interest loans ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 to facilitate the establishment or expansion of agricultural business activity in Sullivan County.

The County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency (IDA) also offers an *Agri-Business Revolving Loan Fund*. That program provides loans to facilitate the establishment or expansion of agricultural business activity in Sullivan County. Finally, the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development offers the *Sullivan Investments Revolving Loan Program*. That program offers financing in the form of loans for projects that generate new jobs and expand the County's economic base.

Other Ongoing Programs

Many ongoing programs and activities are offered by local, state, and federal agencies and private organizations to support farms, protect farmland, and market agricultural products in Sullivan County and the broader Hudson Valley/Catskills region. They include agricultural educational opportunities offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension; events like *Farmstock* that aim to raise public awareness of agriculture; and farmers' markets and the Harvest Festival at Bethel Woods, among others. These programs and activities are listed and described in **Appendix A**.

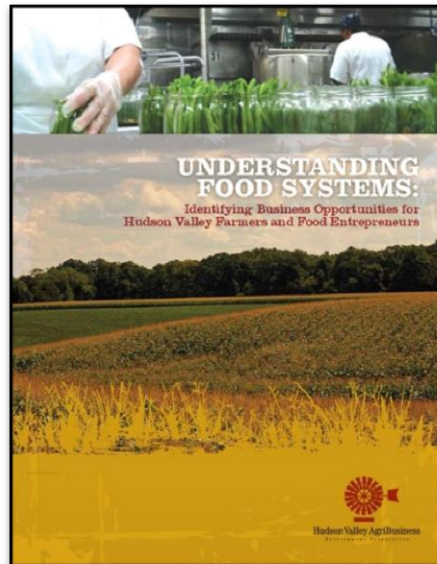


Chapter 4 – Sullivan County in the Region

Regional Context

Sullivan County is located in New York’s Mid-Hudson region where much work has been done to study and promote agriculture. The past decade has brought a keen interest in farming, farmland protection, and food systems throughout the region. There are many agencies and organizations working to that end and some have produced extensive, up-to-date and data-driven reports or studies. Many of these organizations have programs in place to improve and promote agriculture and connect farmers with consumers in the New York City market.

Parts of Sullivan County are also located within the New York City Watershed and the Catskill Park. Organizations like the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) exist to promote the economic viability of agriculture while protecting the quality of New York City’s water supply. Pure Catskills, a branding and marketing campaign sponsored by WAC, offers a range of resources to promote fresh foods grown, raised, and manufactured in the Catskills.



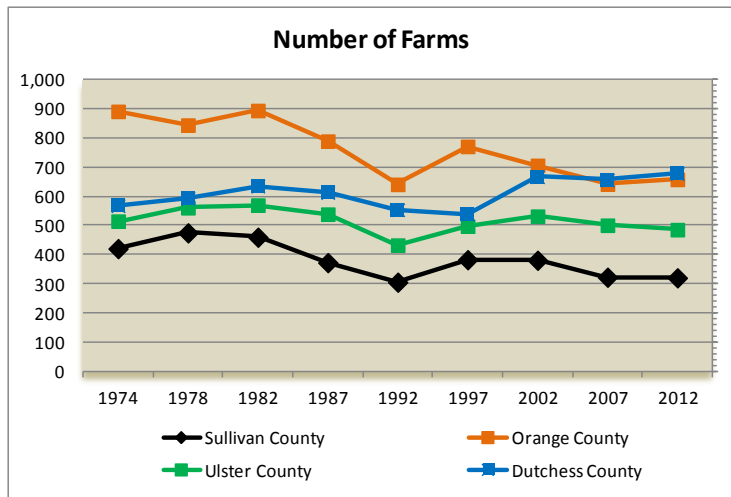
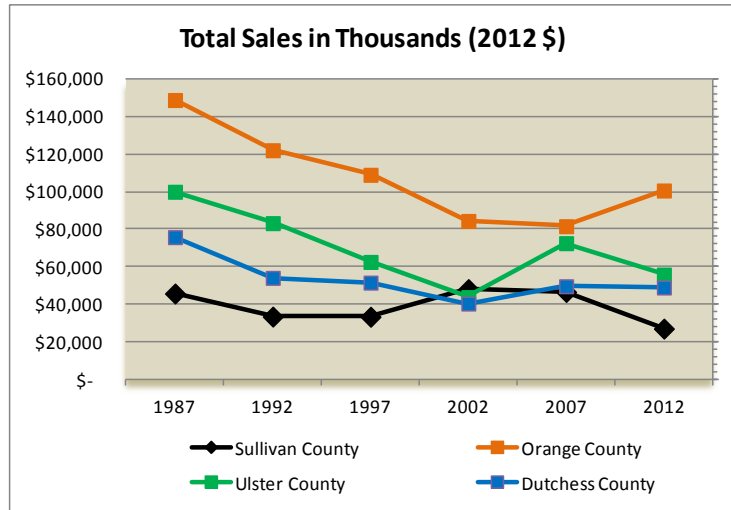
The upper Delaware River flows from the Town of Hancock in Delaware County to the Town of Deer Park in Orange County. This area has been designated by Congress as the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River under its National Wild and Scenic Rivers program. Also in this area is the state-designated Upper Delaware Scenic Byway. Both the river and the Byway line Sullivan County’s western border with Pennsylvania, taking in the six towns of Fremont, Delaware, Cohecton, Tusten, Highland, and Lumberland.

In 2010, the Glynwood Center issued a thorough report that detailed the state of agriculture in the Hudson Valley using the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture. The report highlighted the large, positive economic impact agriculture has in the region.⁴ It also recognized losses, transitions and declines the farm economy has faced. That is evidenced with reduced numbers of farms, farmed acres, and farmers’ net incomes. Data and conclusions from that report remain valid today, although some sectors of the farm economy have rebounded since 2007.

⁴ The Glynwood report covered the state of agriculture in twelve counties, from Westchester northward past Albany towards the upper part of the Hudson River: Albany, Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rensselaer, Rockland, Saratoga, Ulster, Washington, and Westchester. Although Sullivan was not specifically included in the analysis, the conditions and trends described in the report apply to Sullivan as well.

Appendix D offers a comparison of Agricultural Census data over the past few decades for Sullivan, Dutchess, Orange, and Ulster counties to provide a regional perspective on the state of agriculture. Highlights include the following:

- In 2012, there were 2,143 farms in the four-county region. About 326,000 acres were farmed, and although that is down from the 1974 level of 431,000 acres, it is an almost 17,000-acre increase since 2007.
- The number of farms regionally has increased since 2007.
- Farm sales in the four-county totaled nearly \$233 million in 2012. When indirect and induced effects are considered, using a 1.61 multiplier for New York State, those sales increase to about \$374.6 million in a variety of industries.
- There has been a large and steady increase in the dollar value of agricultural products sold directly to consumers.
- There has been a large and steady increase in crop sales, dominated by greenhouse and nursery crops.
- The number of dairy farms, and amount of dairy and livestock sales continues to decrease across the region.



Of the four counties, Sullivan County had the fewest farms and the smallest amount of farm acreage, although its average size farm is equal to that in Dutchess County and it has the highest number of large farms (over 180 acres). About half the farms in the County had sales in 2012 of less than \$10,000, which is similar to that in Ulster and Dutchess, but much higher than in Orange. About 13% of farms in the County earned more than \$100,000 – a lower percentage compared to Orange’s 23%, and Dutchess’ 17%. However there are slightly more farms in Sullivan with higher sales compared to Ulster.

Sullivan has the highest number of farms with cattle and calves, including beef and milk cows, as well as the highest number of sheep and lamb, layers, corn for silage, and land in orchards compared to the other counties. The average sales of Sullivan farms adjusted for 2012 dollars was lower than the other four counties. All four counties have shown a decrease in total sales since 1997, but unfortunately, Sullivan has had the largest decrease (195), compared to only 5% in Dutchess County.

Sullivan County also has a low level of direct-to-consumer sales of agricultural products in the four-county region, but the number of farms with direct sales is not very different from Orange or Dutchess (9.7% of farms in Sullivan compared to 8.1% in Orange and 10.6% in Dutchess). Ulster has the highest level of direct sales of the four counties, and its farms were less likely to be profitable.

Many of the issues facing farms and farmers in Sullivan County are similar to those found elsewhere in the mid-Hudson Valley and throughout New York State. Numerous studies have discussed these regional needs and are referenced in this plan.

Each county in the region faces difficulties related to:

- Lack of institutional organization to coordinate and collaborate on needed projects;
- Lack of coordinated business retention and attraction programs, including developing new and taking advantage of emerging markets;
- Lack of food processing facilities and infrastructure;
- Similar technical training and business planning needs;
- Repetition and duplication of efforts to address agricultural needs;
- Lack of funding for programs as well as insufficient mechanisms to help farmers understand existing funding opportunities;
- Lack of planning for farm transition and succession to the next generation;
- Lack of understanding of agriculture among the general public and elected officials; and
- Labor issues.

With Dutchess, Orange, and Sullivan counties all updating their Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plans concurrently, regional discussions have recently been initiated to explore common issues and mutual opportunities. There is recognition that some problems are better solved regionally. To address this, some recommended projects in this plan are identified as having potential for regional implementation.

Regional-Level Plans

Important findings, conclusions, and recommendations regarding agriculture can be found within numerous regional documents. This information should not be overlooked as Sullivan County works to implement its agricultural programs. Regional plans and studies reviewed for this plan update included:

- 2007 American Farmland Trust - Picking Up the Pace: A Road Map for Accelerating Farmland Protection in New York
- 2010 Columbia University – Ground Up: Cultivating Sustainable Agriculture in the Catskills
- 2010 Glynwood Center - The State of Agriculture in the Hudson Valley
- 2010 NYC City Council - FoodWorks: A Vision to Improve NYC’s Food System
- 2011 American Farmland Trust - Planning for Agriculture in NY: A Toolkit for Towns & Counties
- 2011 Catskill Mountainkeeper - Western Catskill Region Foodshed Research & Analysis
- 2011 Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation - Understanding Food Systems: Identifying Business Opportunities for Hudson Valley Farmers and Food Entrepreneurs
- 2011 Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council – Strategic Plan
- 2012 American Farmland Trust – Scaling Up: Strategies for Expanding Sales of Local Food to Public and Private Institutions in NY
- 2012 Cornell University - Agriculture-Based Economic Development in NYS: Trends and Prospects
- 2013 Hudson Valley Regional Council - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Hudson Valley Economic Development District 2013-14
- 2013 Mid-Hudson Regional Sustainability Plan
- 2013 Scenic Hudson - A Foodshed Conservation Plan for the Region
- 2013 Local Economies Project – Financing a Better Food System: A Study of Infrastructure Needs and Available Financing in the Hudson Valley



Chapter 5 – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

SWOT - Strengths are internal resources and capabilities affecting agriculture in Sullivan County. *Weaknesses* are internal deficiencies in resources and capabilities affecting agriculture in Sullivan County. *Opportunities* are potential initiatives and factors that can impact agriculture in a positive way, while *threats* are external issues that could negatively influence progress.



Summary of the SWOT

Below is a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) for agriculture in Sullivan County. Through the SWOT analysis, Sullivan County has identified a variety of strategies and actions to maintain the strengths, address the weaknesses, capitalize on the opportunities, and work to prevent the threats. A detailed version of the SWOT Analysis can be found in **Appendix G**. The major initiatives identified in this plan are designed to address the specific items in this SWOT.

STRENGTHS <i>to maintain</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access To The NYC Metro Market ▪ Available Land ▪ Agriculture-Related Manufacturing Activity ▪ Agricultural Support Groups and Organizations ▪ County Revolving Loan Funds ▪ Diverse Farm Operations and Products ▪ Farmers’ Market Network ▪ Increase in Direct Sales, Value-Added Production, and Food and Beverage Entrepreneurship ▪ New Agricultural Initiatives (e.g., food hubs, red meat processing facility) ▪ Poultry and Egg Production ▪ Public Support ▪ Pure Catskills Brand
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<p>WEAKNESSES to address</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges in Scaling Up and Distributing Agricultural Products ▪ Continued Decline in Traditional Dairy and Livestock Farms ▪ Farm-Unfriendly Land Use Regulations ▪ Farmers Unaware of Support Mechanisms and Programs ▪ High Production Costs ▪ Lack of Agricultural Labor ▪ Lack of Coordination and Communication ▪ Lack of Funding for Farmland Protection ▪ Lack of Marketing Expertise Among Farmers ▪ Lack of New and “Next Generation” Farmers ▪ Lack of Support by Town Governments ▪ Limited Vegetable and Crop Production With Low Sales ▪ Low Farm Profitability and Economic Viability ▪ Need for Succession Planning ▪ No Formal Farm Business Retention and Attraction Programs ▪ Perceived Lack of Support by County Government ▪ Reliance on Rented Land
<p>OPPORTUNITIES to capitalize on</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion ▪ Agritourism Enhancement ▪ Attraction of New Farmers ▪ Coordinated Financial and Technical Assistance to Farmers ▪ Direct Marketing ▪ Existing Regional Brands ▪ Farm Link Programs ▪ Food Hub Initiative ▪ Funding and Expansion of Farmland Protection Programs ▪ Public Education and Marketing ▪ Red Meat Processing Facility and Associated Processing ▪ Value-Added and Niche Markets
<p>THREATS to watch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competition Within the Region and State ▪ Conversion of Farmland to Non-Farm Uses ▪ Continued Loss of Market Share in Poultry and Egg Production ▪ Development Pressure ▪ Hydrofracking ▪ Loss of Critical Mass ▪ Volatility in Milk Prices

SWOT Priorities

The SWOT identifies a variety of issues negatively impacting farms and farmers in Sullivan County. In the long run, *all* of these issues need to be addressed in some way. However, there is no single cause and effect of the difficulties agriculture faces; the issues are complex and interwoven. Moreover, some of the threats to agriculture extend well beyond county boundaries, and require action to be taken at the state or national level.

That said, below is a list of the issues and opportunities that are most important at the current time, based on a review of the data and the input received from farmers and other stakeholders. These are issues that if solved, will put agriculture on a much firmer basis in the future.

Priority Issues

- Farmers are unaware of support mechanisms and programs
- There is a lack of communication and coordination
- There is a lack of marketing expertise among farmers
- There is a lack of new and “next generation” farmers
- There is limited vegetable and crop production with low sales
- There is low farm profitability and economic viability of many farms

Priority Opportunities

- Agricultural business retention and expansion
- Enhancing agritourism
- Attraction of new farmers
- Coordinated financial and technical assistance to farmers
- Taking advantage of existing regional brands and efforts

Chapter 6 – Vision, Goals, and Strategies

Vision for Agriculture

Sullivan County’s vision for the future of agriculture is as follows:

Farms in Sullivan County are financially successful and produce a diversity of much sought-after food, fiber crops, and agriculture-related services. The area is known for the freshest, tastiest and most nutritious local produce in the region. Agriculture is a top economic driver in the County and it contributes significantly in many positive ways to our community. The public as a whole is very educated about the many roles agriculture plays and highly value farms, farmlands, farmers, and the accessibility they have to locally grown foods and farm products. The County has shaped a positive and vital environment for agriculture together with farmers, farm support agencies, and local agricultural organizations. Promotion and enhancement of agriculture is a priority that contributes to growing the area’s economy. The County has established programs and policies that support agriculture with open communication, transparency and positive outreach. Quality farmland is available for the future. The agricultural resources and conditions in Sullivan County make farming a stable, viable and exciting career opportunity for the next generation of farmers.

Goals

Goals are statements that express the specific direction needed in order to attain the vision. Some goals from Sullivan County’s first Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan remain intact; others have been changed or updated to reflect the status of agriculture in the County and input received from farmers and the public. Sullivan County has established the following updated goals:

- 1. Maintain the County’s valuable farmland in active agricultural use.**
- 2. Increase the financial success and stability of farm operations.**
- 3. Integrate agricultural economic development into County economic strategies.**
- 4. Increase public recognition of the value of agriculture and farmland, and develop a better understanding of farm issues by non-farmers.**
- 5. Attract new entrepreneurs and younger households to farming ventures and assist this next generation of farmers.**

The 2008 *Sullivan County Open Space Plan* outlined four goals for agriculture that this plan also addresses. These are:

1. Protect and maintain existing farms.
2. Continue development of emerging agri-businesses and ag-diversification.
3. Maintain history and preserve rural quality of Sullivan County.
4. Promote and market current and future farms.

Recommended Initiatives and Projects

This section outlines recommended programs and projects that can be implemented to address critical issues and capitalize on agricultural opportunities in Sullivan County. Ultimately, implementation will require leadership, collaboration and communication between many people and agencies. The County, Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Industrial Development Agency, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, and other groups and organizations – and of course, the farm community – all have important roles to play in implementing these initiatives. Efficient assignment of tasks, solid communication to prevent duplication, monitoring, and reporting are all important to the success of implementing this plan.

Six initiatives have been identified as priorities that should be implemented first, as they serve as the foundation for other successful outcomes. These were identified by the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, members of the Agricultural Advisory Board, and the consultants, taking into consideration farmer and stakeholder input and evaluation of the SWOT presented in this plan. Further, these priorities attempt to build on the County’s existing initiatives (Chapter 3) but also address those immediate and urgent problems that need to be addressed. The initiatives that will yield the largest and most effective benefit are:

1. Building Capacity, Organization, and Collaboration
2. Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program
3. Agritourism Enhancement
4. New/Young Farmer Program
5. Value-Added and Diversification Initiative
6. Buy Local Initiative

Some strategies are short-term and low cost, while others are more complex and need more funding. Many can address more than one goal. This interrelationship of projects mirrors the interrelationships and complexities seen in the food system as a whole. That makes it critical that the County pay attention to collaboration and communication. All the initiatives and actions will require partnerships and close collaboration between the various agencies and organizations that can lend expertise; some of these are within the County while others are most efficient to be implemented at a regional level. Some recommended actions have potential for implementation at a regional level and are identified with an “R”

In addition to these six priorities, there are two other important project initiatives for the County to implement: farmland preservation/access and marketing/public relations programs. Both of these have parts that can be integrated into the six priorities; however, they also need to be looked at independently. These two initiatives are discussed separately below. Finally, there are other projects that have been identified that would be considered the “second tier” of initiatives – interesting and important, but not critical to be accomplished as first steps at this time. These are outlined in the table on page 91.

Priority Initiative 1: Building Capacity, Organization, and Collaboration

Background

Many of the problems, or lack of solutions to known problems in the County, stem from not having the capacity, communication, and collaboration in place to support implementation. Agencies and organizations involved with agriculture, both within the County and the region, need to work together, efficiently use the many existing talents of staff and volunteers, find ways to eliminate duplication and fill gaps in programs, and build relationships. This initiative is a foundation for success in implementation – as important as adequate funding support.

Implementation of this is critical, and must take place before, or at least at the beginning of work on the other strategies. This entails discussions about staff, tasks and scope of work for staff and agencies, coordination of efforts, setting up effective communication systems and creating a positive direction where everyone is working together without duplication of effort and with mutual support. Further, disseminating information about this plan and the projects it recommends is another important part of building capacity, organization and collaboration.



Central to this effort is the creation of the Agricultural BR&E Program Coordinator position. The Agricultural Program Coordinator, discussed in Priority Initiative 2 below, could wear many hats. One of the most important hats is to serve as spokesperson and coordinator of agricultural programs, and a person who can facilitate and foster collaboration and communication.

Action Steps

- Establish and create the Agricultural BR&E Program Coordinator position. See Priority Initiative 2 actions.
- Continue to support and fund the Hudson Valley Agricultural Development Corporation, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Sullivan County SWCD so that they can continue to provide or expand programing that supports farms.
- Continue to promote Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County as a major resource / one-stop shop for agricultural information in Sullivan County.
- Disseminate and coordinate information resources as described below. Create and maintain an email/distribution list of all agencies and organizations involved in agricultural-related programs.

Use a website, twitter, or blogs to share information among these entities. This should include consolidating farmer and agri-business mailing lists and email lists from agencies and organizations within the County to create a single comprehensive list that can be used.

- Regularly convene a meeting of implementation partners to discuss these priority project needs and assign lead agencies to carry out specific actions. Using the organizations in the table below, evaluate existing programs and gaps in services, identify duplication of effort and establish annual actions as well as benchmarks for success.
- The Sullivan County Legislature should create an Agricultural Task Force to spearhead implementation and guide efforts. This Task Force should report every six months to the full Legislature and should work directly on an on-going basis with the County Community and Economic Development Committee to forward initiatives identified in this Plan. Members of the Task Force shall represent Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County, the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, County of Sullivan IDA, Farm Bureau, Agriculture Advisory Board, Active Farmers, the Legislature, the SC Visitors Association, and the County Division of Planning and Environmental Management. Representatives from educational institutions in the County and agriculturally-related businesses shall also be represented on this Task Force, depending on the scope of the project. The Task Force would work with the Agricultural BR&E Economic Development Coordinator and County staff to provide leadership, assistance, coordination, and support to implement the priority projects identified in this plan. The Task Force should meet on a regular basis to discuss the status of agricultural projects and share information.
- Schedule quarterly multi-county meetings between Planning staff, HVADC, CCE, and others as needed to facilitate more coordination between the counties in the region. Use these meetings to discuss issues of regional concern and identify ways to share programming. This core group could hold annual or bi-annual agricultural summits to coordinate and collaborate on implementing priority projects outlined in this plan that are regional in nature. **R**
- Build staffing capacity in order to assist farmers and agribusinesses with production and technical assistance. **R**

Information Dissemination Plan

The agricultural implementation Task Force, along with the Agricultural Program Coordinator and other staff, can use the following information dissemination plan to chart out effective implementation strategies. A comprehensive website would be an efficient way to accomplish this.

- A. There are three major goals of this dissemination plan. There is a need to disseminate for awareness, understanding, and action. Each has different approaches and audiences. Each has multiple audiences to reach as follows:
 1. Disseminate information about this plan and its recommendations for understanding and to build support, understanding, awareness, and enthusiasm for the plan. This is for target audiences that do not require a detailed knowledge of the plan, but need to be aware of the

activity, direction and potential outcomes of implementing (or consequences of not implementing) the plan. This will help foster discussion and “word of mouth” to help build support.

- a. Farmers and agribusinesses
- b. Elected officials (County, state, and federal legislators and town/village officials)
- c. Farm-related agencies and organizations, county-wide and regional (see table listing partners, below)
- d. Other agencies and organizations, such as educational institutions, economic development agencies, and business organizations, with potential for greater involvement
- e. General public

Partner Agencies and Organizations That Support Agriculture in Sullivan County*	
Name	Role As Related to Agriculture
CADE – Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship	Works to increase the number and diversity of successful farm enterprises and related businesses in New York. CADE connects producers of farm products to markets by providing professional, individualized and confidential business and marketing consulting to agricultural entrepreneurs. CADE is a catalyst for strengthening multiple sectors of regional food systems.
Catskill Mountainkeeper	Promotes sustainable growth and the protection of natural resources in the Catskill region; advocate for local agriculture through its Catskill Food Initiative
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County	Offers outreach, education, and research-supported technical assistance to farmers and landowners; coordinates numerous events to raise public awareness of agriculture
County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency	Lead agency in the development and construction of the red meat processing facility and a food hub; administers a revolving loan fund for agriculture
Delaware Highlands Conservancy	A land trust dedicated to conserving the natural heritage and quality of life in the Upper Delaware River region; offers information on conservation easements and other tools for land protection
Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation	An economic development agency established to develop, promote, enhance, and maintain the agricultural industry; offers technical assistance, business development services, and the coordination of financial resources to farms and agriculture-related businesses
Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB)	Advises and make recommendations to the County Legislature regarding agricultural districts, reviews and endorses applications for state PDR funding
Sullivan County Agricultural Advisory Board	Works with county, state and federal legislators on policy issues while identifying high priority agricultural infrastructure projects
Sullivan County Department of Public Health	Involved in efforts to encourage large consumers such as school districts and prisons to purchase local farm products
Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management	Leads agriculture and farmland protection planning and implementation for the County; provides staff support to the AFPB and REAP; administers revolving loan funds for agriculture

Partner Agencies and Organizations That Support Agriculture in Sullivan County*	
Name	Role As Related to Agriculture
Sullivan County Farm Bureau	Local affiliate of the New York Farm Bureau, a membership-supported organization that serves as an advocate for the agricultural industry
Sullivan County Farm Network	A coalition of farmers and non-farmers interested in expanding agricultural activities in Sullivan County; organizes Farmstock, series of “open farm” days
Sullivan County Farmers’ Market Association	Coordinates farmers’ markets in Callicoon and Liberty, and hosts an annual farm-to-table dinner
Sullivan County Soil and Water Conservation District	Provides technical and financial assistance to farmers to address water quality issues and implement environmental projects
Sullivan County Visitors Association	Serve as Sullivan County’s designated tourism promotion agency; promotes local farms and agricultural products, farmers’ markets, breweries, distilleries, farm tours, and other agritourism activities as part of its overall marketing program
Sullivan Renaissance	Offers a limited number of grants for projects that protect, enhance or conserve natural resources, including innovative agricultural initiatives
Sullivan-Wawarsing Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone	Designated by the USDA; a pilot technical assistance program with a plan to mitigate lack of employment and job loss. Its strategic plan includes the creation and funding of an agricultural economic development office and support for many of the initiatives outlined in the agricultural and farmland protection plan.
USDA Farm Service Agency	Offers a variety of financing options for farmland ownership, operating expenses, beginning farmer financing programs, etc. as well as crop insurance and other specialty programs.
Watershed Agricultural Council	Works with farmers to protect water quality through land conservation, while supporting the economic viability of agriculture and forestry; through its Pure Catskills branding campaign, offers opportunities to help farmers’ market their products to NYC buyers

* See Appendix A for additional information on partners. Many other organizations not listed here, such as the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development, Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce, Sullivan County BOCES, and SUNY Sullivan could play more significant roles in supporting agriculture in the future.

2. Disseminate information about administrative, funding, institutional, staffing, and coordination needs to successfully implement projects. These are the groups that are in the position to influence and bring about change within their organization. They need to have the knowledge and understanding of the project needs in order to work together to bring about real change.
 - a. Farm-related agencies and organizations, county-wide and regional
 - b. Reporting to elected officials, agency/organization directors

3. Disseminate information about specific projects, programs, and initiatives to gain project participants. There are a number of audiences to target directly. These are those that can directly benefit from the projects suggested in the plan and those involved in implementing it. These groups need a deeper understanding. It is essential that there is a shared vision and common understanding of what you want to accomplish. It is important to identify and be clear about who the stakeholders are and then map them to one of the projects outlined in this plan. Use the graphic below to map out who and how different groups can be reached.
 - a. Farmers and agri-businesses

- b. Farm-related agencies and organizations, county-wide and regional
 - c. Reporting to elected officials
 - d. Specific groups targeted on a project by project basis (for example, planning boards would be an audience for training projects)

- B. To clearly articulate your message, identify the issues/problems that the plan or a project will help to overcome and which target audiences/groups these will apply to. Note that different audiences will view their issues/problems differently and are likely to be working in differing contexts. Therefore the "message" may need altering.

- C. When disseminating information about the plan, a project or to the agencies that can help implement them, identify the information for the following essential elements:
 1. **Goals:** Describe what you hope to accomplish, and who and what the benefits will be.
 2. **Objectives:** Identify the major areas of accomplishments and what might be needed for success?
 3. **Users:** Describe the scope and characteristics of the "potential users" that your dissemination activities are designed to reach for each of your objectives.
 4. **Content:** Identify, at least, the basic elements of the projected content you have to disseminate to each of the potential user groups identified.
 5. **Source(s):** Identify the primary source or sources that each potential user group is already tied into or most respects as an information source. Consider ways to partner with these sources in your dissemination efforts. Ensure that the entity taking a lead on a project is perceived by user groups as an active information resource. Do users regard the project staff as highly knowledgeable resources in the project technical area?
 6. **Medium/Media:** Describe the medium or media that can best be used for each target audience and understand the cost, capabilities and resources that will be required for each. No one method will work, so use a combination of mailing lists, newsletters/e-newsletters, briefings, short timeframe summits, e-mail. Reports, workshops, one-on-one, mailings, websites, press releases, print and broadcast media, social media and take advantage of events to disseminate information such as at farmers' markets, Farmstock, etc.
 7. **Success:** Decide what criteria will be used to know if the dissemination activities have been successful. If data is to be gathered, describe how, when, and who will gather it.
 8. **Access:** Describe how you will promote access to the plan or project information.
 9. **Barriers:** Identify any potential barriers that may interfere with the message and develop actions to reduce these barriers.

Marketing Tools

- Create an executive summary and brochure of the plan for distribution to elected officials, farm-related agencies, organizations and the public. This summary or the plan itself could be posted on the Sullivan County government website.

- Create a PowerPoint version of the executive summary, to be used when presenting information on the plan to farmers and other constituents.
- Farmers - Utilize direct mail, press releases for local media (especially weekly publications), or e-blasts to those on e-mail lists for notifications. Newsletters to which farmers regularly subscribe may also be appropriate. Summits and informational workshops are relevant to this target market.
- Farm-related agencies and organizations - Notices and messages, e-mail notices, direct mail, press releases for local media, and e-blasts to those on e-mail lists. Distribute reports at meetings and via e-mail. Website postings on calendars for meeting dates. Summits and informational workshops are relevant to this target market.
- Elected officials – Notices and messages, e-mail notices, direct mail, press releases for local media, and e-blasts to those on e-mail lists. Distribute reports at meetings and via e-mail. Website postings on calendars for meeting dates.
- General public – Communications can point to further information posted on relevant websites. Utilize press releases (print and broadcast media), posters, social media, newsletters, websites, public forums, farmers’ markets, and farm-related events. Develop a brochure from the Executive Summary to utilize as outreach for the public.
- When issuing press releases, do not only hit major publications like the *Times Herald Record*, but weeklies and online publications, such as the *Watershed Post*, as well.

Priority Initiative 2: Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Program

This program will provide a framework for communicating directly with farmers to increase their awareness of available resources, improve their profitability, and solve problems. It will be linked with a wide range of other economic development activities, including the New/Young Farmer Program and Value-Added and Diversification Initiative, financial and technical assistance programs, business planning workshops, and others.

Background

Business retention and expansion is one of the core components of economic development programs. In contrast to business attraction activities which bring new companies to a community, business retention and expansion (BR&E) programs focus on *existing* companies, with the recognition that it is far easier to retain a company already located in the community than to recruit one from somewhere else.

The purpose of a BR&E program is to regularly communicate with local businesses in order to understand, anticipate, and ultimately address their needs, challenges, and opportunities. Typical BR&E activities include:

- Developing and maintaining a business database;
- Engaging in ongoing communications – through e-newsletters, websites, mailings, surveys, face-to-face meetings, roundtable discussions, etc. – to inform businesses about potential resources and learn about their needs; and
- Working with a proactive team of professionals that can develop and/or make referrals to resources to support business growth and address issues, such as financial planning, business planning, estate planning, tax planning, retirement planning, farm transfers and cash flow projections.

**Program Objectives
Agricultural BR&E Program**

- Demonstrate support for Sullivan County farms
- Improve awareness of resources and programs
- Increase the economic viability and profitability of farms
- Help address concerns and solve problems

Because the services provided are based on the needs of the customer, BR&E depends heavily on a customer service orientation. Successful BR&E must begin, however, with an effective business visitation program. These visits put economic development staff in direct contact with business leaders, and often provide useful information on the status of individual companies and industries.

The BR&E model would be beneficial in Sullivan County where agriculture is such an important economic driver. Each farm should be considered a business. An Agricultural BR&E Program would send the message that the retention and expansion of farms is a County priority. It would also provide a mechanism for tracking the local agricultural sector and responding swiftly to any issues or concerns to keep farms from going out of business. Visiting farms, rather than waiting for farmers to contact County agencies, would also be **proactive**, providing direct opportunities to deliver information and resources and solve problems.

Ideally, the Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program should be delivered by staff in an economic development capacity. Options for creating this Agricultural BR&E Economic Development Coordinator position include staffing through:

- a. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County⁵
- b. Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management
- c. County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency or Partnership for Economic Development
- d. Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce
- e. Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- f. Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board as leader/director of the program with this person as their staff
- g. Sullivan-Wawarsing REAP Zone (USDA Rural Development)

Each option should be evaluated on the following criteria:

⁵ Cornell Cooperative Extension has farm business management and agricultural economic development programs in other areas, such as Oneida County, that could serve as the basis for the Agricultural BR&E Program.

- *Existing vs. New Staff:* Are there staff that can be reassigned or would another person need to be hired? Related to this question is what their existing experience is or whether someone new would need to be brought on – Do existing staff have the experience needed for the position? Or does it require someone new?
- *Budget:* Where will the funding come from? The funding source may help target the appropriate agency to house the position.
- *Location:* Which agency is the most likely to be visible and accessible to farmers, farm-related agencies and organizations, and others that need to be involved to make this work? In other words, which agency can get this program up and running and accepted the quickest and most effectively? This criteria requires some assessment of attitudes – which agency is going to be perceived as the most effective, most able to get the job done? It is important that the constituents of this position have confidence in that aspect.
- *Consistency with Agency/Organization Mission:* Is this position consistent with the mission of the department or organization? Can the position fit comfortably within the existing nature of the agency/organization, or is it a stretch?
- *Longevity:* What is the ability to administer and house this position in the County and community long-term? This program will require time and longevity.
- *Public vs. Private:* Should this position be housed within a public/government-funded agency or a private organization? This affects pay and benefits, and there could also be some issues regarding confidentiality and effectiveness. Will a private organization be able to effect change at the County level, or does the position need to have direct ties to the County in order to accomplish this?

According to *Financing a Better Food System: A Study of Infrastructure Needs and Available Financing in the Hudson Valley*, a white paper produced for the Local Economies Project, many food and farm businesses have difficulty accessing traditional bank financing, especially if they are entering a new market or beginning a new type of food venture. In addition, many of these businesses are not “investment ready” and need technical assistance much more specialized than what is currently offered.

The Agricultural BR&E Program will help to address these issues by providing direct assistance and/or referring farmers to sources of financial and technical assistance that are appropriate to the agricultural sector.

The Agricultural BR&E Economic Development Program Coordinator must have strong communication skills; working knowledge of programs and resources available to assist farmers and agribusinesses; and the ability to collaborate with a wide range of agencies and organizations.

Depending on an individual farmer’s needs, the staff person may provide direct technical assistance, act as a broker between the farmer and a service provider, and/or package several forms of assistance available from multiple providers. He/she would act as a “navigator,” able to direct farmers to the programs or tools that are most appropriate. The Coordinator should also be a good listener, able to understand and identify farm business needs. Someone who has previously worked with farmers and

agribusinesses, or who has farming experience themselves, is preferable, as they have greater credibility and are thus more likely to gain the trust of local farmers.

It is important to note that **the Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program will be tied to, and will in fact be a critical factor in the success of, many activities and projects related to agricultural economic development.** It is anticipated that the Agricultural BR&E Economic Development Program Coordinator will be responsible for referring farmers to appropriate resources in such areas as business planning, marketing, value-added processing, and diversification. In that sense, he or she will play a role in the other priority initiatives, including Agritourism Enhancement, the New /Young Farmer Program, the Value-Added and Diversification Initiative, and the Buy Local Initiative. He or she may also be assigned to coordinate with local farmers to aid in the success of the red meat processing facility, the food hubs, and other agricultural infrastructure projects such as a mobile poultry processing facility.

An alternative would be to support BR&E activities using a volunteer committee. Swift County, Minnesota created a farm BR&E program that was administered by a local leadership team made up of residents representing business, farming, and consumer interests.

Working with a local university, the team designed and implemented a survey instrument with questions focused on issues that lent themselves to local action. Some farmers were subsequently referred to specific organizations that could meet their immediate needs. The input received was also used to identify priority areas for action.

Action Steps

- Develop a structure for the Agricultural BR&E Program that fully defines its mission, objectives, and operations.
- Determine how program will be administered – redeploying existing staff vs. hiring new staff? Which agency or organization?
- Recruit and hire staff (see sample job description below).
- Develop an initial database of farms in Sullivan County, using mailing lists and records from organizations such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, chambers of commerce, county agencies, etc. Many economic development agencies use packaged software programs like Synchronist, which provides tracking/outcome tools, but this may not be necessary. Confidentiality must be assured.
- Develop a business visitation program: identify the types/sizes of farms to be surveyed annually, establish visitation schedule, create visitation/survey questions, and contact farm operators. If program will be administered by a committee, provide business visitation training.
- Update database records accordingly. Visitation should be planned for all farms, not just those who show initial interest in the program.
- Provide farmers with general business support and assistance (e.g., regarding health insurance, labor issues, and regulations). Some farmers may require assistance in areas such as business planning, farm management, succession planning, obtaining financing, securing and training workers, and reducing production costs.

- Work with the Center for Workforce Development to assist farmers with farm worker recruitment and connect them to people looking for agricultural employment.
- Collaborate regularly with agency partners to provide referrals, follow-up, etc. This includes agencies that provide business planning assistance and offer loans and grants to farmers.
- Develop marketing tools, including a website with links to programs and resources for farmers (see below).
- To the extent possible, simplify existing agri-business loan fund programs, which are underutilized. Revise application forms and program descriptions so that they are easier to understand and more “farmer-friendly.” Contact funding agencies to clarify program requirements and information needed from applicants. Update program marketing.
- Develop Farm Infrastructure Funding Programs. Based off input gathered from farm visits, farmland protection plan and community needs, develop a farm infrastructure funding program; ie: funding program to increase storage capacity for vegetable producers or funding programs supporting infrastructure for waste management systems for dairy farms. The program could also including the funding of shared farm equipment. Possible funding sources could include the NYS Consolidated Funding Application or the USDA RBEG.
- Work with agency partners to develop other communication tools: press releases, newsletters, e-blasts, etc. Other activities could include regular roundtable discussions, seminars, and networking opportunities.

Marketing Tools

- Among the most important marketing tools associated with the Agricultural BR&E Program is the establishment of a website as a portal to programs, resources, and support for farmers in Sullivan County, preferably with a simple, easy to remember URL. There could also be a form on the site to “Request a Farm Visit,” which would send an email to the Agricultural Program Coordinator. A print version of such a website could be compiled into a Sullivan County Farmers’ Resource Guide, for those who may not have the time or inclination to access web tools. This piece could be distributed to farmers during regular business visits.
- Develop “Agricultural BR&E Economic Development Coordinator” events to familiarize the farmers with the resource. This event could take place within several towns, on various dates to allow for the possibility of greater attendance. Develop fact sheets on “How We Can Help,” appointment sign-ups for farm visitations, and promotional materials for the website in advance of the events.
- Promote events through postcard mailings, community calendar listings in weekly publications and on radio stations, press releases to the *Times Herald Record*, *Watershed Post*, etc

Project Team/Partners

- Sullivan County Division of Planning & Environmental Management
- County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency
- Sullivan County Legislature
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County

- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- Sullivan County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board
- Center for Workforce Development
- Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development
- Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce
- Soil & Water Conservation District
- Other agencies and organizations as needed

Metrics

- Number of farm visits per year: 90-100 (average of 1-2 per week)
- Percentage of County farms visited per year: 30%
- Number of referrals resulting from farm visits per year: to be determined, based on activity during the first full year of operation
- Number of farms with business plans in place per year: 20



Sample Job Description – Jefferson County Agricultural Coordinator

General Statement of Duties. The Jefferson County Agricultural Coordinator assists in the stabilization, growth and promotion of the agricultural industry of Jefferson County. The Coordinator serves as a resource to help develop financial and marketing programs and acts as a spokesperson for agriculture. The community may utilize the Coordinator as a person to help find solutions to agricultural needs and concerns.

Distinguishing Features of the Position. The Agricultural Coordinator is responsible for working with individuals and/or entities interested in establishing new agricultural enterprises or improving the viability of existing operations in Jefferson County. The Coordinator will aid in assembling financial packages and plans available to help finance agricultural interests. This person will assist in identifying agricultural needs and developing coordinated solutions. Better marketing programs for products and opportunities will be created. The person in this position will work with existing agencies and organizations to coordinate efforts helping agriculture in Jefferson County grow stronger and more prominent.

Typical Duties Include But Are Not Limited To:

Identifying Agricultural Needs and Developing Solutions

- Prepare, implement and update strategic plans for agricultural economic development.
- Facilitate the development of solutions to the needs and concerns of agriculture including the shortage of trained, skilled labor and profitable markets for agricultural products.
- Work with public and private sector interests to provide coordination of resources for the ag. industry.
- Maintain a complete knowledge and understanding of the interrelationships of resources available for agriculture.
- Help develop linkages with other nonagricultural industries.
- Work with natural resources agencies to provide for an assessment of natural resources in Jefferson County.

Agricultural Financing

- Developing financial packages to help new agricultural ventures establish in Jefferson County including the development of feasibility studies and business plans.
- Attracting new investments in agriculture including agribusiness, production agriculture, and agritourism.
- Providing assistance to the agriculture industry with endeavors to diversify.
- Explore, evaluate and implement creative and innovative methods to maintain existing and new agricultural enterprises to help increase the value of the industry measured in total annual sales and increased retained earnings.
- Encouraging and helping agricultural entrepreneurs take advantage of funding resources available.

Agricultural Marketing

- Identifying, developing and implementing promotion and marketing programs of agricultural products and opportunities, and the importance of the agriculture industry in Jefferson County.
- Explore and utilize leads and opportunities in marketing and funding agriculture in Jefferson County.
- Promote better brand recognition of Jefferson County agricultural products.

Education and Public Relations

- Facilitate the development and implementation of programs training students in agricultural industries and careers.
- Assume role as a spokesperson for agriculture. Serve as ombudsman for the local agriculture industry.
- Support and serve as a resource to the County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board.

Priority Initiative 3: Agritourism Enhancement

This program will entail moving agritourism to the forefront. It will include new opportunities for both farmers and visitors, as well as leveraging existing efforts such as Pure Catskills, tourism marketing and promotion, mapping and wayfinding, signage, lodging, and special events.

Background

The County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan has identified tourism – along with agriculture and health care – as one of the primary drivers of the local economy. Enhancing agri-tourism is a priority action to expand the financial success of agriculture in the County.

According to a 2012 report by Tourism Economics, tourism is a \$364 million industry in Sullivan County, directly employing nearly 3,200 people and generating more than \$24 million annually in local taxes. Moreover, visitor spending in the County has been increasing, from \$349 million in 2011, \$345 million in 2010, and \$311 million in 2009.

Agritourism has been identified as a strong niche by the Sullivan County Visitors Association (SCVA), the designated tourism promotion agency for the County. Farm-based tourism was also identified as an opportunity in the original Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan in 1999 and the Sullivan County Open Space Plan in 2008. According to the Agricultural Census, just 15 farms in Sullivan County reported that they earned income from agritourism and recreational services in 2012.⁶ This suggests that many farmers are missing out on a potential revenue source.

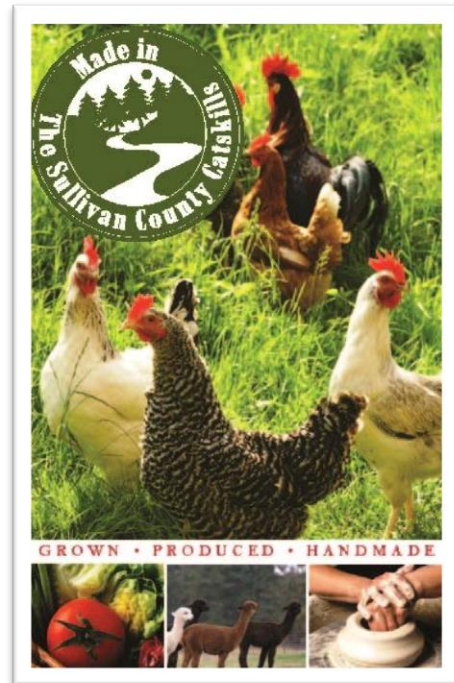
Agritourism Defined

There is no universally-accepted definition of agritourism; most combine elements of tourism with elements of agriculture. Below are a few examples:

- “Any business activity that brings the public to a farm/rural setting in an effort to market farm-raised or -produced products or the enjoyment of related outdoor activities”
- “Farming-related activities offered on a working farm or other agricultural setting for entertainment or educational purposes”
- “An activity, enterprise or business that combines primary elements and characteristics of agriculture and tourism and provides an experience for visitors that stimulates economic activity and impacts both farm and community income.”

⁶ The total income earned from agritourism and recreational services by Sullivan County farmers was \$300,000 (average \$20,000). In comparison, 46 farmers in Orange County earned income from agri-tourism, totaling \$2,362,000 (average \$51,300). Orange County ranked third in the state for agritourism income.

The “locavore” movement and a greater demand for healthy, fresh foods are among the trends that are driving the popularity of agritourism. Travelers are also taking shorter, but more frequent weekend and day trips within a few hours of their home. Many of them seek out rural destinations out of a desire for peace and tranquility, a need to escape an urban environment (or a busy lifestyle), a search for inexpensive or less commercialized vacation alternatives, or an interest in nature and the outdoors. In addition, visitors are increasingly looking to “experience” rather than merely *observe* the places they visit, whether to establish a deeper connection with their natural and cultural heritage or simply learn more about them. Farms and wineries can provide this experience.



Agriculture has been promoted by the SCVA for many years. Farms, farmers’ markets, breweries and distilleries, and events like Farmstock are listed in the annual *Sullivan County Travel Guide*, which is available both online and in print. The SCVA has also produced *Made in the Sullivan County Catskills*, an online and print guide, which provides a wealth of information on the County’s agricultural heritage as well as on locally-grown, produced, and handmade items. In 2013, the SCVA developed and distributed the *Fresh from the Farm* agricultural trail map.

Marketing Sullivan County farms and markets goes well beyond brochures and websites. Agritourism opportunities are promoted through social media – e.g., Facebook, Twitter, a blog, weekly e-newsletters. The SCVA attends travel and trade shows, networks with key contacts in the New York City metro area, and sends travel writers and bloggers throughout the County to draw attention to local farms, restaurants, breweries, and other resources. There is also a considerable amount of cross-promotion and word-of-mouth marketing through literature exchanges and referrals between farms, B&Bs, dining establishments, tourism associations in neighboring counties, and so on.

Agricultural-related special events in the County are produced or coordinated by Cornell Cooperative Extension, Sullivan County Farm Network, Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, the Little World’s Fair and others. Of these, only Farmstock (June through September) and the Harvest Festival at Bethel Woods (September) seem to be aimed specifically at visitors. While not directly related to agriculture, last year’s inaugural Bagel Festival in Monticello reportedly received positive reviews, with an estimated 5,000 attendees.

Farm-to-table dinners are held at restaurants in Livingston Manor, Narrowsburg, and occasionally Callicoon Center, but this information could be better promoted.⁷ “Foodie” events, where celebrity chefs cook with local farm products, have become very popular in the Hudson Valley and are starting to emerge in Sullivan County. One such event is “Pig Mountain”.

These and other efforts to develop and promote farm-based tourism in Sullivan County have been beneficial. However, they have not reached their full potential. There is a need to develop new agritourism products, experiences, and events; leverage the resources of and coordinate with existing organizations involved in agriculture and tourism; and make the County more “tourism-friendly.” This would provide additional opportunities for farmers to diversify and increase their incomes, while bringing valuable external dollars into the County.

Specific recommendations for enhancing agritourism include the following:

- *Develop additional events or festivals* focused on agriculture. Whether they are “one-off” events at a single location or activities held at multiple venues, special events can, with proper promotion, lure new visitors and attract media attention while increasing awareness of local farms and food products. Events featuring locally-produced food and beverages can be particularly appealing. Further, it is important to develop these events to collaborate with traditional and non-traditional partners. Each event should attempt to tie tourism to current food availability and potential new markets. For example, involving restaurants during tomato season with a season-long promotion that ties tourism with encouraging restaurants to serve Sullivan fresh tomatoes.
- Increase the *online presence* of Sullivan County farms open to the public through existing tools, such as Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley Bounty (see also Marketing Tools section, below).
- Improve the *Fresh from the Farm* agricultural trail map developed in 2013. This map and brochure is an excellent resource, but it is difficult to find on the SCVA website. The agricultural map should also be made available online, with the option for users to add the locations of nearby restaurants, lodging, public restrooms, and other amenities on a single map for printing or viewing on a smartphone.
- Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County and SCVA to develop rack cards or brochures for specific sectors of agriculture; ie maple producers, Christmas tree farms, farmers’ markets and CSA’s.

[Studies have confirmed that] *as people come into an area to visit local agritourism attractions, they also spend money and support many other local businesses. U.S. agritourism therefore not only has the potential to benefit specific farms, but also significantly contribute to the broader local economy.*

-Agritourism: Cultivating Tourists on the Farm
Washington State University Extension,
Small Farms Team

⁷ Information on farm-to-table restaurants in Sullivan County was found by searching the website knowwhereyourfoodcomesfrom.com.

- Work with interested farmers to *create farmstays*. Agritourism in many European countries consists primarily of lodging and meals on the farm, with visitors often able to assist with farm chores or participate in other activities that give them a chance to “experience” life on an authentic working farm. The accommodations may range from rustic to relatively upscale. Farmstays would supplement the existing lodging facilities in Sullivan County and encourage more “heads in beds,” an important strategy in building the County’s tourism economy.



- Work with interested farmers to *increase agritourism activities*. While not suitable for all farmers, agritourism and recreational activities can serve as a source of income to supplement the sales of farm products. Workshops on developing an agritourism enterprise may be offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension and SCVA. (See “Considerations for Farmers” in the table below.)
 - In California, agritourism intensive classes are held that use hands-on, interactive activities to guide participants in assessing their own farms or ranches for agritourism potential and starting their own business, risk management, and marketing plans. They recruit local agritourism operators to share their experiences, and those who are willing to consult with farmers and ranchers in the class about their own business plans. Participants are introduced to people they would work with as agritourism operators: their county planning department and environmental health staff, local Small Business Development Center, local tour organizers, insurance agents, marketing professionals, and visitors’ bureau managers.
- *Improve coordination of existing agencies, groups, and organizations* involved in agritourism efforts. These include not only the SCVA, County agencies, and Cornell Cooperative Extension but also, potentially, local chambers of commerce, downtown improvement groups, etc. One idea is to expand the SCVA’s Agritourism Task Force to include additional organizations, but coordination could also be facilitated through something more informal, like an e-mail list.
- *Develop a coordinated effort* between Sullivan County’s farmers’ markets. There is confusion because the Sullivan County Farmers’ Market Association serves as the umbrella organization for just two of the six farmers’ markets in the County. All markets need to work together to better promote farmers’ markets overall. One idea is to develop a rack card listing all Sullivan County Farmers’ Markets.
- *Promote the Green Tourism Conference*. The main goal of the conference is to increase tourism revenue by facilitating collaboration throughout the region, spanning Delaware, Greene, Orange, Sullivan, and Ulster counties of New York; and Wayne, Monroe and Pike counties of Pennsylvania. The conference will include a “Taste of the Region” reception, green training

workshops, a recognition luncheon, plus an exhibition hall hosting dozens of regional tourist industry product and service vendors, and recreational activity organizations. **R**

- *Consider collaborating* on some agritourism activities with neighboring counties, including Orange in New York and Wayne and Pike in Pennsylvania. Potential benefits include the ability to market a critical mass of farms and farm-based activities, share successes, and ultimately attract a higher level of visitation. **R**
 - For example, additional work could be done with the SCVA to expand an agricultural tract under the Confluence Project in Sullivan County. This is a self-guided, place-based audio tour currently centered around the Delaware River, but it could offer unique Internet and mobile app-based agritourism opportunities in Sullivan County.
 - Work to expand the existing Trailkeeper.com website to include agricultural locations.
- Undertake initiatives to *make Sullivan County more “agritourism-friendly.”*
 - Local towns should update zoning to define agritourism in zoning and add it to the use schedule as a permitted use wherever agricultural uses are allowed. This should include u-pick, farmstays, bed and breakfasts, farm retail markets, wineries/wine tasting, breweries, farm tours, etc. Zoning should also allow for multiple farm-related businesses on a parcel, and on-premise signs.
 - Develop a wayfinding signage program that is coordinated with farms, organizations and other sign-planning efforts and connect it with a mobile phone app, possibly utilizing the Pure Catskills brand. Expand on innovative programs such as the recent ‘Confluence’ project to create an online tourism mechanism and mobile apps.
 - Use the Sullivan County Farm Network to function as an agritourism association of farms that offer agritourism activities. Help the group expand its communications via its website and a blog for members. It is important to develop a unified voice representing the agritourism industry in the County. Although some networking, training and marketing opportunities are already underway, lack of organizational and marketing expertise and minimal financial or staff support can be barriers to success. Collaboration among local agritourism providers and agencies and organizations involved in promoting agritourism needs to be strengthened.

Agritourism for Farmers

While agritourism can help farmers diversify, it is not a panacea for agriculture. Potential drawbacks include the work needed to keep a farm clean, safe, and presentable to the public; impact on existing farm operations; lack of privacy; labor/staffing issues; and liability risks. For some farmers, however, agritourism can be an interesting and rewarding way to supplement a farm’s income. As with any business endeavor, planning is essential.

Considerations For Farmers

▪ Business plan	▪ Labor requirements
▪ Market identification and evaluation	▪ Land use regulations
▪ Farm location	▪ Animal welfare/public contact with farm animals
▪ Farm aesthetics – appearance, facilities	▪ Financial management

Agritourism for Farmers	
▪ Insurance needs and safety	▪ Marketing and advertising
▪ Ability to deal with the public and make visitors feel welcome	▪ Other regulations specific to proposed activities (e.g., serving food, operating a B&B)
Examples of Farm-Based Activities	
▪ Antique Shows	▪ Farm Market / Country Store / Bakery
▪ Barbecues	▪ Farm Tours
▪ Bed and Breakfast	▪ Farmstays / Farm Vacations
▪ Blacksmithing	▪ Farm Stands
▪ Cheese-Making Classes	▪ Haunted Houses
▪ Chuckwagons	▪ Hay Rides
▪ Cider Pressing	▪ Horseback Riding
▪ Cooking Demonstrations/Classes	▪ Nature Trails
▪ Corn Mazes	▪ On-Farm Café
▪ Dude Ranches	▪ Petting Zoos
▪ Entertainment	▪ Pumpkin Patches
▪ Equestrian Therapy	▪ U-Cut Christmas Trees
▪ Farming Demonstrations	▪ U-Pick Fruit, Vegetables, Flowers
▪ Special Events: Birthday Parties, Weddings, Reunions	

Action Steps

- Create an Agritourism Task Force, or coordinating group, made up of SCVA staff, planners, farmers, and others to enhance existing and plan additional events or festivals focused on agriculture and local foods. This group will be charged with brainstorming ideas and themes, identifying locations, organizing attractions and vendors for events, developing promotional strategies, etc. in coordination with the SCVA.
- Increase the participation of Sullivan County farms in Pure Catskills and/or Hudson Valley Bounty. The Agricultural BR&E Program Coordinator would be responsible for telling farmers about these programs and encouraging them to become members.
- Work with Cornell Cooperative Extension and other partners to provide training on developing an agritourism enterprise. Assess the level of interest by Sullivan County farms in farmstays and other agritourism activities.
- Obtain cost estimates for and then initiate updates to the *Fresh from the Farm* agricultural trail map online, along with specific agricultural product rack cards and brochures.

Marketing Tools

- Expand marketing of farms, farmers’ markets, farmstands, distilleries and breweries, etc.
 - Distilleries and breweries should have attractive websites, brochures, *active* Facebook and Twitter presence for marketing purposes, posting events, new products, specials, etc. regularly.
 - Farmers with “visit-able” farms also need attractive, family-friendly websites, brochures, Facebook pages for posting events, u-pick schedules, etc. Using customer appreciation

- vehicles is also important, since good customers are your best sales force. Collect customer contact info for e-blasts or postcard mailings of special “best customer only events.”
- Encourage participation by Sullivan County farms and restaurants in cooperative advertising and marketing campaigns including Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley Bounty. Currently eight farms and three restaurants in Sullivan County are on Hudson Valley Bounty and there are opportunities for many more to participate. **See Appendix K.**
 - *Pure Catskills*: Only \$35 per year to join. Benefits include farm or farm-related business listings on the PureCatskills.com site and in the Guide to Catskills Products. They will include special farm events in their Facebook postings; members can also purchase additional advertising in the Guide.” Businesses with added-value products will have access to list their products for sale on the upcoming Pure Catskills Marketplace. Members receive a Pure Catskills Member “Goody Bag” – files with point of purchase materials like a Pure Catskills member sign, bumper stickers, hang tags, etc.
 - *Hudson Valley Bounty*: \$50 yearly membership for farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, chefs, hotels and wineries. Benefits include directory listing on their site, featured in HVB marketing materials, on their Facebook page and Twitter promotions. Discounts on training sessions; free participation in their events, newsletter and more.
 - Increase public relations to highlight new “foodie” events.
 - Leverage Facebook to reach interested audiences via the pages of SCVA, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Pure Catskills, and other local and regional organizations.
 - Take advantage of free calendar listings on websites for radio stations, online press, print publications (weekly newspapers, daily news), and tourism sites - not only SCVA but also Visitthecatskills.com (Catskills Area Tourism).
 - Events can be listed on Escapemaker.com, a site that primarily targets the NYC metro market and does a significant amount of promotion of their site in major media. Events can be listed on their calendar for a yearly fee of \$250, for unlimited postings. If the SCVA purchased a Destination Advertising Sponsorship, for about \$5,000 annually, it would get a travel writer's profile of the destination, banner, button, event calendar, 4 dedicated E-blasts, a listing for every tourism-related business in the area, and promotion in all of its marketing efforts in the NYC metro area, including consumer trade shows. This could be solely for agritourism businesses, or a joint promotion with SCVA.
 - Agritourismworld.com offers free listings for agritourism locations and events and is searchable by state. Bethel Woods and Apple Pond Farm are among the Sullivan County locations listed, but many more could list here.

Project Team/Partners

- Sullivan County Visitors Association
- Sullivan County Division of Planning & Environmental Management
- Sullivan County Farm Network
- Sullivan County Farmers’ Market Association and other farmers’ markets

- Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County
- Sullivan Renaissance
- Watershed Agricultural Council / Pure Catskills

Priority Initiative 4: New/Young Farmer Program

Background

New farmers face barriers in four major areas including:

- Access to training, education, and technical assistance
- Access to land
- Access to capital and credit
- Access to markets

In addition, they often experience inadequate support from family, community, farmer and service networks, which impacts the other four areas. New farmers need programs and services that enable them to acquire the information and resources they need to succeed. They need a responsive "service infrastructure" – from production and legal consultants, equipment, feed and seed dealers, and lenders, to trade organizations and publications.

There is a need for an expanded effort to recruit new farmers to Sullivan County. This is especially important given the aging of the current farm operators. An associated issue for the County to address is the need for more transition and succession planning with existing farmers.

This program represents a concerted effort to “sell” Sullivan County as a good place to farm, targeted to young farmers and the next generation of farmers. It includes initiatives such as mentoring, agricultural incubation, training, coordination with organizations such as the Glynwood Center, apprenticeships, and educational efforts via schools, BOCES, and SUNY Sullivan.

Action Steps

- Promote year-round farming opportunities as a growth area for new and expanding farms in Sullivan County. Provide technical training in farming to take advantage of emerging markets. For Sullivan, enterprises in organic, hoop houses/year round growing, niche dairy, hops, forest products, grain, orchard, poultry and kosher products are areas to concentrate on. Training should also include farm business planning that covers land acquisition, leasing arrangements and securing credit. These programs should take advantage of and give one-on-one support to involve new farmers in existing grant and loan programs in the County. The

Agricultural BR&E Program Coordinator position together with Cornell Cooperative Extension will play key roles in accomplishing this.

- Work with public schools and Cornell Cooperative Extension (Ag in the Classroom) to advocate for the integration of agricultural issues into primary and secondary school curricula. This effort can be tied to a program with Sullivan County BOCES or SUNY Sullivan to establish a student intern program to promote Ag in the Classroom programs in local elementary schools.
- Adapt the Orange County New Farmer Manual for use in Sullivan County. Make available online.
- Create fact sheets with information gleaned from this plan, and resources from Cornell and other research that outlines market opportunities that may be viable for new farmers. Make these available online.
- New farmer recruitment should be part of the farmer/farmland match programs discussed under Farmland Preservation. To aid in this effort, create a commodity-targeted set of statistics and data that detail market needs and demand. This data will help new farmers understand market opportunities and is key to their business planning.
- Provide incentives, and advertise existing funding opportunities for farm start-up operations. Work with Farm Credit and ensure representatives from USDA, NRCS, and FSA are actively involved in helping disseminate information about their existing programs to farmers in the County.
- Promote existing Sullivan County agribusiness loan programs and work to help new and expanding farmers understand and participate in these programs.
- Increase programmatic support for Cornell Cooperative Extension educational programs in 4-H to build interest among youth in agriculture.
- Convene a meeting of school district officials to discuss mechanisms to get schools involved in agriculture. This could be support of FFA activities, community gardening on school grounds, and student/staff involvement with farm to school programs. This should also include working with Sullivan County BOCES to help agricultural student's transition to continuing education, agricultural employment and farming.
- Provide general and one-on-one training and support to help farmers transition out of farming, or to new farm activities, and plan for succession to the next generation of farmers. As part of this, involve Glynwood in expanding incubator, apprenticeship and mentor programs they are involved with in Sullivan County. Recruit from local schools, BOCES and SUNY Sullivan for these programs. **R**
- Tap into and promote veterans in farming programs. There are several programs already in existence that encourage veterans to engage in farming (such as Heroic Food Farm). Set up a mechanism to identify interested vets in Sullivan County and then work with them, perhaps via an incubator program, to keep them in the County.
- Work with the real property and tax departments of the County to identify and remove farm properties from the Tax Foreclosure list. These lands have the potential to be used as an educational incubator farm or sold to a beginner farmer for a discounted price. Tie this program to a requirement that the interested farmer go through a beginner farmer training program.

- Create a list of organic farms in Sullivan County that want to participate with NE WOOF (Northeast Workers on Organic Farms).
- Address costs of land by advocating to NYS to offer state income tax credit incentives to those that lease land to new and beginning farmers as well as to those that sell land to new or beginning farmers. Another option is to advocate for being able to offer a reduction in state capital gains tax applied on sales to new farmers.
- Work with local realtors to develop a list of available agricultural property that would appeal to new and existing farmers looking to start or expand a farm operation in Sullivan County.
- Study and evaluate methods to increase affordability and accessibility. Help coordinate regionally to hold a summit oriented to land affordability for new and young farmers. Invite organizations such as Equity Trust or Dirt Capital⁸ to participate and use that opportunity to identify viable options to address the issue. Explore innovative options such as shared ownership to ensure affordability of land for new farmers. R
- Work with Farm Credit East, Catskill Mountainkeeper and local banks to create a set-aside to provide capital or loan guarantees to qualified new and beginning farmers to purchase land, or lease land with option to buy.

Marketing Tools

- Utilize NYFarmlink.com, an existing established site to post farms and farmland for sale. This site also allows famers with land available for rent or sale to search for farm seekers. Beginning farmers, as well as farmers looking to expand or relocate their operations, might use this website as a resource.
- CatskillsFarmLink.org is an underutilized website for farm listing opportunities as well, which should be more widely used. The Agricultural BR&E Economic Development Coordinator would have this website in his or her “toolkit” of resources.
- When developing a FarmSullivan website as a resource for existing farmers, this could also be expanded to be a resource for beginning farmers, or develop a separate site that is modeled after Comefarmwithus.com of Jefferson County. The site should include a searchable database where farmers could post land for sale or for rent. It could also post available funding for start-ups and guidelines for submission of applications.
- BeginningFarmers.org is a website with over 100,000 page views. It also has a very active Facebook page where information can be posted, as well as a Twitter account. Banner ads are available to promote any Sullivan County “new farmer” initiatives that have a web presence.
- Facebook should also be used to cross-promote Catskill CRAFT events, as well new farmer initiatives that develop as a part of this plan. Twitter accounts for FarmSullivanCtyNY could be created to encourage new farmers to the county – by announcing funding available, promoting success stories, Agricultural Summit events and more.

⁸ See Resources in Appendix A.

Project Team/Partners

- Sullivan County Division of Planning & Environmental Management
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- County school districts (FFA)
- SUNY Sullivan
- Sullivan County BOCES
- Glynwood Center

Priority Initiative 5: Value-Added and Diversification Initiative

This program has two parts. The first part is to take agricultural initiatives already underway and make them successful. This part is oriented to good organization, planning, coordination with farmers, getting the right operators, and marketing. The second part is oriented to providing farms with training, business planning, and assistance in identifying and understanding market opportunities, and helping farmers take advantage of funding that can be used for value-added processing, diversification and expansion. This initiative will work in conjunction with the Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program and the New/Young Farmer Program.

Background

Red Meat Processing Facility and Food Hub

An important consideration in making farming in Sullivan County more economically viable is the success of two of the agricultural initiatives currently underway: the red meat processing facility, and the food distribution hub.

The new red meat processing facility being developed in Liberty is a project that has been years in the planning. Local livestock farmers have been cautious, unwilling to commit to using the slaughterhouse until it is actually up and running. An important question raised at the conclusion of the 2007 feasibility study for the operation is: “How much volume and business will the Liberty Red Meat Facility attract and how long will it take producers to switch from existing relationships?” This will likely depend on how the plant is managed, but an operator will not be selected until early in 2015.

A recent study of small-scale meat and poultry processors for local markets identified several elements essential for success:

- Farmers must commit, either individually or in coordinated groups, to providing a steady supply of livestock to process. A steady supply generates steady revenue, which is necessary for long-term viability.
- Having a base of “anchor” customers that provide consistent business allows processors to more easily serve small, local farms.

- So-called “aggregators” that source livestock from multiple farmers can be valuable partners for processing facilities. Not only do they provide a steady flow of livestock, they also help farmers by serving as a central point of contact and working with the processor to coordinate consistent scheduling.
- Processors can build loyalty and increase demand for their services by developing good working relationships with their customers and providing informal advice on marketing and distribution.
- Effective two-way communication between farmers and processors is critical to developing and maintaining strong business relationships.
- Farmer-processor commitment is strengthened when farmers invest time and money in the processing facility. The investment may be in the form of loans, stock purchases, equipment financing, or expertise.
- Although public resources can be used to enhance processing infrastructure, the commitment between farmers and processors is still fundamental to success.⁹

As the study points out, meat processing is “complex, high risk, and marked by thin profit margins.” A very small processing facility requires annual volumes of hundreds of animals just to break even. Processors that offer additional services require significantly higher volumes to remain viable. Without a steady supply of livestock, they cannot generate enough revenue to pay for the labor and equipment required to provide those services.

Already, some community members in Sullivan County have called for the development of a smokehouse or a “cut and wrap” operation to piggy-back on the red meat processing facility. Before such a project can be executed, however, its feasibility must be fully evaluated to determine potential demand. There are many other issues that would need to be considered as well, not least of which is identifying who would be responsible for establishing these operations.

Regarding the food hub, some of the factors that contribute to success include:

- Developing a strategic plan with clearly defined goals, a mission statement, and an operations plan describing how products and services will be delivered;
- Engaging farmers as well as individuals from the public sector, academic, and business communities who can serve as project advisors;
- Providing support and training to local farmers in such areas as production planning, quality control, packaging, and delivery;
- Understanding the requirements of end-users, including having Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) programs in place or carrying product liability insurance; and
- Effective management, typically by supervisors with experience in food retailing, marketing, processing, and/or warehousing/distribution.¹⁰

⁹ Lauren Gwin and Arion Thiboumery, *From Convenience to Commitment: Securing the Long-Term Viability of Local Meat and Poultry Processing*, Oregon State University: Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network Technical Report, 2013. Downloaded from <http://www.nichemeatprocessing.org/nmpan-research>.

A national survey of food hubs conducted in 2013 found that financially, the most successful food hubs tend to be for-profit and cooperative in structure and work with a relatively large number of farmers. The majority of food hubs, according to the survey, offer aggregation and distribution services and more than half sell wholesale and/or retail to customers. In addition, most offer marketing and promotional services to producers and actively help farmers identify new markets.¹¹

The involvement of Farm-to-Institution New York State (FINYS) in providing training to farmers will be beneficial to the success of the food hub in Sullivan County. Another plus is the role of Ginsberg's Foods, a for-profit food distributor with extensive experience in product delivery. As the food hub project gets underway, there may be opportunities for other entities to get involved. Ultimately, the support and collaborative efforts of County departments, agencies, and farm support organizations like Cornell Cooperative Extension to work with farmers and management of the facility will be necessary to ensure its success.

Diversification

One of the greatest challenges faced by farmers in Sullivan County is low profitability and economic viability. The Agricultural Census reports that only one in three farms in the County in 2012 was profitable. Net cash farm income averaged just \$8,322 per farm. Moreover, average sales per farm vary by commodity; farms selling fruit, vegetables, grain, and nursery and greenhouse products earned far less than those selling milk, poultry and eggs, and livestock. These trends have been exacerbated by the globalization of our food system and consolidation in the nation's dairy industry.

In an effort to improve their financial stability, some farmers are diversifying, developing value-added products for greater profits. Others are producing and selling goods that are not necessarily "mainstream," such as cut flowers, goat meat, and maple products. Another strategy is to supplement the sales of agricultural products by offering agritourism and recreational activities or providing services, such as plowing, to other farmers. Aside from cutting expenses as much as possible and having other household members earn income from off-farm employment, some farm operators have little choice but to be entrepreneurial in order to make a decent living.

Previous planning efforts have identified a number of potential "niche" product and market opportunities for Sullivan County farmers. Others were identified, based on current information, during the process of preparing this plan. These opportunities are briefly described below.

¹⁰ James Matson, Martha Sullins, and Chris Cook, "Keys to Success for Food Hubs," in *Rural Cooperatives*, May/June 2011, pp. 9-11. Downloaded from <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/supportdocuments/CoopMag-may11.pdf>.

¹¹ M. Fischer, M. Hamm, R. Pirog, J. Fisk, J. Farbman, and S. Kiraly. *Findings of the 2013 National Food Hub Survey*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems & The Wallace Center at Winrock International, 2013. Downloaded from <http://foodsystems.msu.edu/activities/food-hub-survey>.

Organic products – According to the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, the demand for organic foods has been growing at a rate of more than 9% per year, and this market is expected to continue to expand for the foreseeable future. While organic farming can be profitable, it is very knowledge-intensive, and there are strong cultural and institutional barriers to organic production. Converting existing farmland to organic also requires a three-year transition period before those crops can be sold as USDA-certified organic.

Small organic farmers usually sell their products through Community-Supported Agriculture and at farmstands and farmers' markets; many customers at NYC Greenmarkets are willing to pay a premium for organic produce. However, nationally, most organic sales are through wholesale channels. The development of the new Amy's Kitchen facility in Goshen, Orange County, is expected to create demand for organic farm products.

The mission of the **Agricultural Marketing Resource Center** (www.agmrc.org) is to provide independent producers and processors with critical information needed to build successful agricultural enterprises. It offers an extensive online library with resources on value-added and specialty agriculture, including commodities and products, markets, business development, and renewable energy.

- *Cheese production* – Nationally, cheese consumption is on the rise, driven in part by the product's versatility, the increasing availability of specialty cheeses from both U.S. and European producers, and the mainstream acceptance of Italian, Mexican, and other ethnic cuisines that tend to use a lot of cheese. So-called "artisanal" cheeses, produced primarily by hand, in small batches, have become more accessible, available at specialty food stores and farmers' markets. This includes cheeses made from the milk of sheep, goats, and even buffalo as well as cows.

There are several examples of "cheese trails" as an agritourism attraction, including the Finger Lakes Cheese Trail, which currently lists 19 farms/cheesemakers, about half of them open to the public year-round. The cheese trail in Berkshire County, MA is one of three "taste trails" in the county. The Vermont Cheese Trail, a network of more than 40 farms, traverses hundreds of miles, making visitors aware of the state's bounty of high-quality artisanal cheese producers.

- *Farm-based breweries, wineries, and distilleries* – According to a recent press release from Governor Cuomo's office, the number of farm-based businesses manufacturing wine, beer, spirits, and cider using ingredients grown in New York has increased dramatically in the last three years. Under state regulations that went into effect in 2013, farm-based breweries and wineries may open up to five off-site retail outlets, open restaurants, conduct tastings, and sell related products, including souvenirs, food to complement beer tastings, and equipment and supplies. This offers yet another avenue for local farmers to diversify and generate sales.

The development of new farm-based beverage enterprises capitalizes on the continuing strong demand for quality craft beers, takes advantage of existing efforts to market New York State wines and beverages, and connects agriculture to tourism. It also builds on our heritage: before Prohibition, the state had hundreds of small distilleries producing spirits from fruit grown in the Hudson Valley and grain from central New York. In Sullivan County, the southern portion, consisting of the Town of Mamakating, provides an ideal climate for winery and cider production, due to the valley climate, prime soils and water resources.



- *Malt, barley, and hops production* – New York’s Farm Brewery law has specific guidelines on the share of ingredients (malt and hops) that must be grown in New York. Currently, the percentage is 20%, but the requirements will increase to 60% in 2019 and 90% in 2024. Already, farm brewers across the state are concerned about whether these larger thresholds can be met. To address the issue, funding has been provided to Cornell University to determine which varieties of hops work best for craft brewing and which pest management techniques work best to combat certain diseases that affect hops. Cornell has also begun research on malted barley, most of which is currently sourced from the western U.S. and Europe. The feasibility of producing these grains in Sullivan County, based on local soils, climate, and other conditions, is unknown at this time. However, in 2013, SUNY Sullivan developed an experimental hop garden on its campus with a grant from Sullivan Renaissance. The productivity and quality of several varieties of hops was tracked through student projects. The demonstration garden will help local farmers and brewers better understand the future potential for hop farming in Sullivan County.

The New York State Brewers Association (NYSBA) is an excellent resource for information on breweries and brewing-affiliated businesses in the state, along with the Northeast Hops Alliance for information on hops production. The NYSBA has posted a map of New York farmers growing malting barley and distilling grains, as well as distilleries and farm breweries purchasing these products, on its website, at <http://thinknydrinkny.com/farm-brewery>.

- *Livestock Processing & Profitability*-The livestock sector currently has the largest number of farms in Sullivan County. Much of Sullivan County does not contain prime soils, however, the terrain is suitable for livestock production, especially with the anticipated Red Meat Processing Facility. Based off this need, Cornell Cooperative Extension is currently in the planning stages to develop a “Closing the Gap: Livestock Processing and Profitability” program in order to help current farms diversify and expand into the livestock sector, through educational programming, technical assistance and a Livestock Manual. For example, dairy farmers can gain additional income or transition into beef production, dormant farms can be revived through new or existing beef operations and existing farms can expand into value added or direct sales, or

simply receive educational training on livestock management and herd health in order to increase their profitability.

- *Hormone-free, pasture-raised, and grass-fed beef* – While still considered a niche product, the market for organically-produced and grass-fed beef has been rising in the U.S., with many indications that there is not enough supply to meet demand. Production costs are higher than for conventionally-raised beef due to lower productivity, increased marketing costs, and additional risks. Another challenge is competition with cheaper grass-fed beef imported to the U.S. from countries like Uruguay. Nevertheless, the premium on grass-fed beef is ultimately expected to attract more producers into the industry. The USDA only recently started tracking monthly grass-fed beef prices, an indication of growing volume.

The website Eat Wild has a list and map of farms that produce grass-fed meats, eggs, and dairy products. According to the site, there are fewer than ten such farms in the Hudson Valley, including one in Sullivan County that produces pasture-raised lamb and goats. A nationally-acclaimed butcher shop in Kingston sells pasture-raised meats exclusively, sourcing them all from farms located within a 50-mile radius.

- *Kosher food products* – Sometimes market opportunities are defined by *consumer* type rather than *product* type. An example is the kosher market. The U.S. market for kosher food products is very large, and is growing by an estimated 10-15% per year. Surprisingly, while many Jewish people purchase kosher foods, they no longer represent the majority of buyers. Most consumers buy Kosher for its food quality, or because of concerns about health and safety.

One farm in Sullivan County has tapped into this market, producing dairy products, meat and poultry that are both Kosher and organic. Farmers can obtain kosher certification from one of many certifying organizations (e.g., Orthodox Union). Most fruits, vegetables, and grains are certifiable as Kosher, but there are very specific requirements regarding meat and dairy products that affect how animals are raised and slaughtered, consistent with kosher dietary law. Producers should work closely with their certifier to ensure that their products can be certified and marketed as Kosher.

- *Season extensions using high tunnels* - Sullivan County is in an excellent position to take advantage of huge year-round markets. Growing vegetables, small fruits, cut flowers, and other crops year-round through use of high tunnels is an opportunity for farm start-up and expansion. High tunnel greenhouses would allow farmers to expand their growing seasons, minimize risk (as the greenhouses provide protection from pests, diseases, and cool temperatures), and earn more revenue.
- *Orchard Production* – New York is the second largest apple producing state in the country. Orchard production offers a range of marketing and business opportunities, ranging from u-pick

to direct sales, to even hard cider processing. Sullivan County offers a number of wild apple orchards that are suitable for the growing hard cider industry. Currently, there is a growing interest to diversify into orchard production, either as a sole operation or an additional source of income for existing farms.

- *Agroforestry* - Agroforestry is another opportunity for Sullivan County farmers. Agroforestry is explained by the USDA as:
 - a unique land management approach that intentionally blends agriculture and forestry to enhance productivity, profitability, and environmental stewardship. Agroforestry can be a key tool for farmers, ranchers, woodland owners, communities, and others who want to use sustainable strategies that enhance agricultural practices and protect natural resources. Agroforestry opens new opportunities to create prosperity while providing vital protection to natural resources... Agroforestry practices can resemble a living patchwork quilt across entire watersheds. For instance, managed forest canopies in a woodland can protect a range of crops grown for food, landscaping, and medicinal use—plants such as shiitake mushrooms, ramps, ginseng, goldenseal, curly willow, and sword fern. Additionally, farmers and ranchers who plant pine trees on land used for livestock and forage production can add to their profits by selling pine straw and high value sawlogs.¹²

The USDA has a variety of strategies and programs to advance agroforestry. With a large amount of land in woodland or fallow fields in Sullivan County, agroforestry represents another opportunity for farmers and landowners that the County should promote.

It is important to recognize that there is no single opportunity for diversification that is suitable for all farms and farmers, nor is there one product that will guarantee a certain amount of income for the average farm. As with any business, it is up to the individual farm operator to research the market, determine whether they have the conditions necessary for production, and develop a business plan. This initiative, however, is aimed at helping farmers learn about and potentially access these opportunities.

Action Steps

- Facilitate the development of specialty farm operations and products.
- Work with Sullivan County dairy farmers and establish niche dairy and value-added dairy products to support the dairy industry in the County. Work with HVADC regionally to expand milk processing facilities to support this. **R**
- Promote the red meat processing facility in Liberty to livestock farms in Sullivan County and other adjacent counties. This will require recruiting farmers throughout the region to commit to using the facility, and then over time, identifying other value-added processing needs that are

¹² From the USDA Agroforestry Strategic Framework, “Enriching Our Lives with Trees That Work” brochure, available at http://www.usda.gov/documents/OC/FactSheet_final_8-1-11.pdf.

related such as a smokehouse. This includes implementing Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County's "*Bridging the Gap: Livestock Processing to Profitability*" program. **R**

- Determine the potential demand for other facilities or services to piggy-back on the red meat processing facility, including value-added processing (e.g., a smokehouse to turn meat into sausage, ham, and bacon) and a "cut and wrap" operation. **R**
- Coordinate efforts to expand processing facilities that serve County farmers. Work with regional partners to develop a mobile poultry processing unit to address this need. Regional approaches to expanding processing facilities are needed. Coordinate evaluation and planning of food processing facilities with at least Orange and Ulster County. Of critical importance is to recover from the recent loss of small poultry processing. This creates a void locally and regionally for small farmers to be able to process their poultry. **R**
- Work with livestock producers and cooperatives like the Adirondack Grazers Cooperative (<http://adkgrazers.com>) in other counties to market and sell meat from the processing facility. **R**
- Continue to develop and operate the new CCE Entrepreneurial & Teaching (EaT) Kitchen, a commercial kitchen designed to support value-added production opportunities, and consider adding cheese-making programs and installing the necessary equipment.
- Through the Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program and other tools, identify niche, value-added, and diversification needs. Match training or technical assistance programs for farmers to these growth opportunities. Training should also include farm business planning and marketing. As part of this, identify value-added processing needs and work regionally to provide for them. **R**
- Tap into expertise available at Cornell University, SUNY Sullivan and other regional colleges and universities to help farmers diversify their operations and develop new products and services, by providing educational and technical assistance in order to diversify or develop value-added products. **R**
- Develop and publicize a catalog of potential niche/specialty crops that can be grown in Sullivan County. Create demonstration plots to showcase and allow sampling or use of niche/specialty crops.
- Continue to work with and develop the high tunnel program at CCE, and develop a funding mechanism for farmers to purchase high tunnels after completing training.
- Support Diversification or value added production/expansion through Sullivan County's Agr-Business Revolving Loan Fund.

Marketing Tools

- The website Taste NY (<http://taste.ny.gov>) is an initiative of the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets to boost the sales and heighten profiles of New York State-produced foods and

beverages. The site lists wineries, breweries and distilleries, as well as farmers' markets and the producers of certain niche products such as maple syrup and cider. Farms or producers of these foods and beverages should be sure they are listed in the site's directories. The site also links to various industry-related sites, including the Northeast Dairy Foods Association, Farmers Market Federation of NY and others. Producers should keep association listings up to date because of these additional marketing links.

- A component of the Taste of NY Initiative is the Pride of New York Pledge, with restaurants across the state pledging to utilize agricultural products grown or produced in New York State. Each restaurant participating in the initiative has agreed to increase the sourcing of New York State grown and made products and ingredients; feature wines, beers, spirits, ciders and other locally produced beverages on their drink menus; introduce new New York themed dishes made with locally sourced and seasonal products; consistently communicate their commitment with suppliers, peers and the public to encourage more support of New York State food and beverages; and educate staff and maintain knowledge of New York State's locally grown and made products. Producers of specialty food and beverage products in Sullivan County should directly market to the restaurants that have taken the pledge. The list can be found at <http://governor.ny.gov/press/03142014-pride-of-ny-pledge> (most are in the NYC metropolitan area).

Project Team/Partners

- Sullivan County Division of Planning & Environmental Management
- Sullivan County Visitors Association
- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Sullivan County
- County of Sullivan Industrial Development Agency
- Farm-to-Institution New York State (FINYS)
- HVADC



Priority Initiative 6: Buy Local Initiative

This initiative is aimed at improving the local sales of and demand for fresh, local foods. Project components include farm-to-table, farm-to-institution, and farm-to-business programs, as well as local marketing/public relations and a Sullivan Fresh initiative to highlight businesses that use or sell local produce and products.

Background

Although direct sales of agricultural products in Sullivan County increased dramatically between 1997 and 2012, from \$276,000 to \$649,000, the amount of revenue should be significantly higher when one considers the large demand for locally-grown foods both in the region and in NYC urban markets. By way of comparison, direct-to-consumer sales reached \$1.4 million in Delaware County, \$3.5 million in Ulster County, and \$7.6 million in Orange County in 2012. Some Sullivan County farms have roadside farm stands, but the level of participation in farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSAs) is relatively low. This needs to be increased so farmers can take advantage of direct marketing opportunities and increase sales. As noted in the Western Catskill Region Farmshed Study: "Farmers receive a greater share of retail price when they market directly, thus increasing their profitability and sustainability."¹³

Another area that should be strengthened is the sale of farm products to institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. A program that establishes market opportunities for schools and other institutions to purchase locally produced food is an important pathway that could benefit Sullivan County farmers in the future. In addition, the development of County policies favoring local sourcing of food and farm products would send the message that Sullivan County firmly supports its agricultural sector.

Finally, there is a need to better educate consumers in Sullivan County about the benefits of eating fresh local foods. This educational campaign would be used to raise awareness of agriculture in the County, inform consumers of opportunities to buy directly from local producers, and increase access to healthy food choices. Given that approximately 13% of full-time residents in Sullivan County are Hispanic, materials should be available in English and Spanish.

At the local scale, Sullivan County could procure local produce and milk for district schools and other institutions. The implementation of farm-to-school programs would give struggling farmers a stable, consistent market...

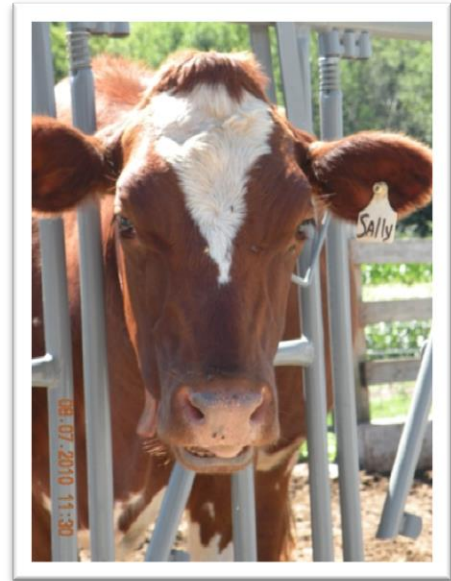
The implementation of a Farm to School milk program [in which Sullivan County schools were required to serve local milk] could stabilize income for 16 local dairy farms by securing a daily demand of 43 gallons, at five times the purchase price from a processing plant like Dairylea.

*-Columbia University,
Ground Up: Cultivating Sustainable Agriculture
in the Catskill Region.*

¹³ Catskill Mountainkeeper, *Western Catskill Region Foodshed Research and Analysis*, April 2011, page 8.

Action Steps

- Instead of developing a Sullivan County brand for local products, concentrate on expand farmer participation in the Pride of New York and Pure Catskills branding campaigns, and continue to distribute the *Guide to Pure Catskills Products* throughout Sullivan County. Utilize other marketing tools – see section below and Appendix K.
- Initiate a Sullivan Fresh initiative. This is crucial to expand local use of Sullivan County agricultural products in stores and restaurants. Coordinated with the Pure Catskills, Pride of New York and other marketing initiatives, this program reaches out to local businesses and a) works to match their needs with local products, and b) provides a “Sullivan Fresh” logo or tag line that they can use to advertise the fact that local agricultural products are sold or used. Expanding on the existing Farm to Business approach will be important to create new local markets which will be especially important for smaller farms in the County.
- Continue and expand efforts to create a Farm-to-School Program in Sullivan County. Contact school districts and other institutions to request a list of food products they use or would like to use. Identify any gaps on which local farmers could capitalize; extending the growing season through the use of high tunnels might be one way to meet the demand for produce for most of the year. Consider focusing on one or two products that are consistently and widely available locally (e.g., hamburger meat). Host a Farmer-School networking event with Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Develop a local food procurement policy for Sullivan County agencies and institutions, possibly with a 10% or 20% local sourcing requirement.
- Request that the County of Sullivan IDA encourage businesses receiving IDA assistance to commit to local purchasing agricultural commodities and/or in some way supporting local agriculture.
- Continue existing consumer education efforts and farmers’ markets to help the public understand the importance of agriculture. Incorporate cooking demonstrations and other activities as appropriate to strengthen the connection with buying locally.



Marketing Tools

- Create a Sullivan County Buy Local brand, message, and tag line for promotion. This should be something that allows consumers to find and select local products and at the same time promotes the producers to personalize the buying experience. This buy local message could

play off the Pride of New York brand with the name “Pride of Sullivan,” relating to agricultural products as well as restaurants, breweries, wineries, distilleries, and B&Bs that offer farm-to-table menus.

- Develop a Pride of Sullivan or Sullivan Fresh marketing/media plan to advertise these farms and farm products to the general public. Develop a campaign kit that farmers receive when they participate. These could include posters, stickers, or table tents.
- Develop marketing brochures and rack cards promoting specific agricultural areas, such as Christmas Tree Farms, Farmstands/CSA’s, Maple Producers, Farmers’ Markets, Value Added Dairy. Continue to promote the expansion of the “On the Move with Maple Syrup” program.
- Create window decals and digital logos that can be used by establishments that produce or utilize farm-fresh products. The decals can be displayed in windows, on menus, websites, etc.
- Develop educational materials in English and Spanish that explain the benefits of buying locally-grown and raised farm products and the positive effects on the local economy. Tie in with other efforts in Sullivan County to improve nutrition and reduce obesity.
- Hold a kick-off event and invite the news media as well as representatives of farm support agencies.
- Consider establishing a Sullivan Fresh or Pride of Sullivan Discount Card program that would provide some sort of discount or savings as an incentive for consumers to buy local farm products. The discount cards would be sold for a nominal fee (\$10 or \$15) to cover costs. A list of participating farms, farmers’ markets, and food businesses could be made available online and in the marketing materials for the buy-local program.
- For marketing regionally and in the NYC metro market, it’s best to leverage an existing successful effort like Pure Catskills. The low cost membership (\$35) is open to any and all farms, restaurants, farm markets distilleries, etc. in Sullivan County, whether or not they are in the watershed area.
- The Pure Catskills marketplace is forecasted to go live before the end of 2014, and it will offer an online storefront for all non-perishable local farm products (added-value items, wool, etc). This agency will supply many of the items suggested above (see <http://purecatskills.com/user/register>).
- Hudson Valley Bounty is a project of the HVADC, designed to promote local foods throughout the Hudson Valley region. Its mission is to promote and support networking connections between local agricultural producers and culinary businesses, while educating the community about the preservation of local farms and the use of local and regional sustainable food products. Covering Columbia, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester counties, all Hudson Valley farmers and chefs are welcome to join. The \$50 membership fee entitles members to a directory listing and opportunities to be featured in Hudson Valley Bounty marketing materials.

Project Team/Partners

- Sullivan County Division of Planning & Environmental Management

- Watershed Agricultural Council
- Sullivan County Farmers' Market Association and other farmers' markets
- Sullivan County Department of Public Health
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- HVADC
- Pure Catskills
- Local Business Associations
- Sullivan Renaissance

Strategies That Support Priority Initiatives

Farmland Preservation

While Sullivan County is not under intense development pressure, farmland loss still occurs due to both conversion to non-farm uses as well as abandonment as farmland. Although the best way to preserve farmland is to have economically successful farmers, the complexity of issues facing farmers today makes it imperative that farmlands remain available and cost effective to farmers, especially young and new farmers. In Sullivan County, land costs may be more of an issue than the lack of lands to farm. There is a great need for affordable and accessible land.



There are many methods to address protecting farmland. Some strategies are direct land preservation techniques such as purchase, lease and transfer of development rights. Others are oriented towards promoting farm-friendly regulations and training for local officials that may allow for new lands to be used for farming and to mitigate adverse impacts on lands near where development occurs.

Zoning should help put into effect the community's plans for future development. It can help prevent development from moving into prime farmland areas, allow for a variety of agricultural operations, and establish development guidelines that address how open space and natural features are protected. Zoning is also set up to ensure the health, safety and welfare of residents. Sometimes though, there are conflicts between the different purposes zoning is trying to accomplish. Zoning can place unnecessary barriers to farming by unreasonably regulating farm operations with strict standards such as large setbacks, minimum acreage requirements, lengthy permit procedures, and limitations on the number and type of farm animals.

Beyond the actual law, the proper administration of zoning is also important. Effectiveness of any local law depends on the people who administer it. Many communities in Sullivan County do not have any farm representation on planning boards, zoning board of appeals, or even town boards. At the least, having farmers involved in local planning decisions will help inform and ensure that agricultural needs are addressed.

It is also highly recommended that each town, especially those with significant farm activities, have citizen and farmer involvement to advocate for local programs that support and promote farms. Appointment of an agricultural implementation Task Force at the County level, supported by similar committees at the municipal level, can go a long way to providing an ongoing, local voice for agriculture (see **Appendix J** for model resolution to set up local committees).

Action Steps

- Establish a PDR Program.
 - Identify any large clusters of existing farmland for linkage as agricultural land corridors during future development reviews.
 - Use Important Farmlands Map in this Plan to target lands for this program.
 - Work with the Delaware Highlands Conservancy, local land trusts, and other organizations to identify alternative funding sources and financing structures for county and local PDR programs including the adoption of a real estate transfer tax, fees, municipal funds, state and federal funds, general appropriations, bond fees, PILOTs, fundraising, and assistance from social investors.
- Establish a Leasing of Development Rights (LDR) program. While LDR does not provide the permanent protection PDR does, it can provide some measure of temporary protection, allowing the land to remain as farmland until funds can be raised for purchase or transfer of the development rights. It can also help lower the entry costs for new farmers looking for land for a new agricultural enterprise.
 - Steps to put this into action include establishing participation criteria, creating application materials, and most importantly, accessing funding.

Transfer of Development Rights

Another option to consider in the future is the development of a transfer of development rights (TDR) program. Sending areas should be targeted to lands identified on the Important Farmlands Map and receiving areas should be towns and villages with acceptable infrastructure and able to take on additional density. County Planning can provide information and models to assist towns in initiating TDR programs.

A TDR program does not require the same type of investment of money to lease or purchase development rights, and the protection is permanent. However, the process of setting up such a program is more complicated, and usually works best when multiple municipalities are involved. It is recommended, therefore, that Sullivan County assist local municipalities interested in participating in a TDR program with the tools and research needed to start a municipal or regional TDR program. The priority farmlands map should be used as a guide to identify sending and receiving areas suitable for a TDR program. The TDR program works best when there is enough development pressure to provide a market demand.

- Develop farm-friendly regulatory models for local municipalities.
 - Develop a farm-friendly zoning guideline or tool box to be distributed to towns that discusses conservation subdivisions, average lot density, agricultural overlay districts, agricultural zoning, and other zoning related methods that protect farmlands. Provide model language of farm-friendly land use regulations and assist towns in implementing them into local zoning. The information in **Appendix J** can be used as a baseline for developing these models.

- Provide maps of prime farmland soils, soils of statewide importance, and agricultural districts to the community when they are writing or updating a plan.
- Provide other data from the Agricultural Census, decennial Census, and other sources to provide them with a snapshot of the quantity (acres, farms, parcels, volume) of agricultural activities taking place in the community.
- Provide sample goals related to promoting and strengthening agriculture that they could consider.
- Provide training and informational materials to towns to show the benefits of agriculture in the community.
- Provide a project review checklist for planning boards and zoning boards of appeals that detail the data and kinds of questions they need to ask and evaluate during a project review. This is especially important in locations within a NYS certified Agricultural District.
- Provide language to towns so that they use the Agricultural Data Statement and Disclosure Notice (see **Appendix J**).
- There are several towns in Sullivan County that currently do not have right to farm laws. Work specifically with these municipalities to assist them in adopting a local law (see **Appendix I** for model).
- Provide training for local officials.
 - Hold presentations at different locations in the County and invite town board, planning board, and zoning board of appeals members along with assessors and clerks to inform them of this plan and the tools it provides. Use the executive summary as a handout.
 - Provide training to planning boards and ZBAs about farming and evaluating project impacts on farming. At each training session or on each material produced by the County a info box should be provided about this plan to keep people informed of it.
 - Provide information to towns about appointing an agricultural member to their planning board and encourage them to do so.
 - Provide a project review checklist for planning boards to use in evaluating projects that may impact farms or farmland.
 - Develop training and educational materials for assessors and for landowners to help them understand farm assessment practices and tax bills.
- Provide for succession and transition planning so that farms remain active during transitions and transfer to a new generation.
- Initiate a Farm and Land Match Program.
 - Engage the realtor community to identify farmlands before they are converted to non-farm uses.
 - Develop educational materials for second homeowners that help them understand farm opportunities on their properties.
 - Tie with a farmer attraction marketing initiative, like Jefferson County's Come Farm with Us program, via a website. Advertise the benefits of farming in Sullivan County as well as provide an inventory of farmland resources available.

- Promote farmland protection through use of foreclosed properties. Each year, some lands that are suitable for farming are foreclosed upon by the County. The County should consider establishing a program that allows the County to keep that foreclosed land, place conservation easements on it, and then make that land available to beginning farmers. This initiative addresses both farmland protection and new farmer promotion needs. As an alternative, the County could explore allowing landowners to keep land that is to be foreclosed upon, provided an easement is placed on the land and the land is rented to farmers.

Marketing Opportunities

An inventory of existing marketing opportunities for farmers in Sullivan County is provided in **Appendix K**. Farmers need to take advantage of the wide range of websites on which farms can be listed, in some cases at no cost. These websites allow users to search by location or product, while providing farmers with access to local, regional, and even national markets.

Farmers should also look at ways they can tap into the New York City metro market as there is huge growth potential there. This is best achieved by leveraging existing marketing and branding programs such as Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley Bounty. Outside the county, references to Sullivan County are simply not as powerful as references to the Catskills or the Hudson Valley. Both Pure Catskills and Hudson Valley aim to market their membership, and that is what they do effectively. Coupled with the “Sullivan Fresh” initiative to promote buy-local, expanded use of existing marketing, branding, and online mechanisms should be promoted.

Other general recommendations for marketing Sullivan County farms and agriculture are listed below.

- Host an Agricultural Marketing Tools Seminar. Hire a consultant to conduct an Agricultural Marketing Tools seminar to educate farm-based businesses on tips and tools to market their products, agritourism activities, farm stands, and farmers’ markets more effectively. The seminar could cover:
 - Online tools: Educate farmers on the use of existing tools like foodmarketmaker.com, which connects willing markets and quality sources of food from farm and fisheries in New York, or FarmersWeb.com, which helps chefs and purchasing managers to order fresh produce, meat, and poultry, dairy and other products from local farms.
 - Web presence: Underscore the importance of even the most basic website as a web presence and how it should be attractive and user-friendly to make a difference. The seminar would include best practices of what to do and what not to do.
 - Social media: Social media practices 101 – how to set-up a Facebook page and what types of contents to post and how often. Learn “What are the benefits?”
 - Direct marketing: face-to-face, custom mailing or phone connections. Marketing to the customers who want your products, including restaurants, hotels, inns, and institutions.

- Avoid duplicating efforts where there might be established methods, organizations or agencies that you can partner with to achieve the same goals, locally, regionally or beyond.
- Develop a messaging platform that will include basic talking points for all marketing efforts. This is a foundation on which all communications are based. This process is typically achieved working with a qualified branding or marketing consultant. It would be especially pertinent when developing a buy local campaign in particular.

Other Projects to Enhance Agriculture

Other projects and strategies have also been identified to address the goals established in this plan. The table below lists those projects. These additional initiatives are important, but are not considered to be foundational like the six priorities. Note that some of these projects are also identified as having the potential for regional implementation and have been discussed in the agricultural and farmland protection plans of Orange and Dutchess Counties as well.

	Project/Strategy	Description	Comments
1	Realtor Education	Educate realtors and new home owners or landowners about the value of agriculture farmland, and opportunities for using their land for agricultural purposes through seminars, brochures, and outreach.	
2	Purchasing Cooperatives	Facilitate the development of purchasing cooperatives and other formal or informal alliances for farmers to reduce the cost of doing business.	Could be implemented regionally
3	Renewable Energy Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide support and education about renewable energy programs that could serve to decrease energy costs. NYSERDA has resources to “help dairy farmers convert farm waste to energy and develop individualized business and environmental plans to reduce operating costs and increase profitability.” ▪ Facilitate a county-wide solar project that provides volume discounts for purchasing of solar systems. 	
4	Advocacy for Agriculture	Lobby for changes to state and federal policy that benefit agriculture including policies related to environment, labor laws and hiring requirements.	Could be implemented regionally
5	Farm Labor Initiative	Work with other organizations and agencies to ensure intern, mentoring and apprenticeship programs are available and linked to Sullivan County farmers.	
6	Enhanced Financing	Work with Farm Credit East and/or other food system investors to develop new sources of capital for agricultural economic development with fewer regulatory constraints.	Could be implemented regionally and in partnership with HVADC
7	Improve Awareness about Agricultural Assessments	Develop resource materials such as a fact sheet for farmers to help inform them about agricultural assessments and how they are determined.	

Implementation Plan

The priority initiatives identified in this plan should guide implementation of projects. Projects will be initiated through the leadership and direction of the Sullivan County Legislative Committee of Community and Economic Development, the Division of Planning and Environmental Management and the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, with support from the agricultural implementation Task Force recommended under Priority Initiative #1. However, this plan recognizes that neither the County nor the AFPB can implement all the strategies alone.

The following steps are recommended to begin the successful implementation of this plan:

- As a first step, the Legislature should formally designate or create the recommended agricultural Task Force and work with the AFPB and the County Community and Economic Development Legislative Committee to create a 2015 annual work plan and a checklist that can be used to evaluate progress.
- Appoint representatives of the agricultural sector to help with implementation efforts, and continue to involve them in committees and the task force related to agriculture and economic development.
- Improve communication, collaboration, and cooperation among all those involved with agriculture, including farmers, county agencies, farm support agencies, and other local and regional stakeholders. This is a critical component of accomplishing all of these strategies and projects. This would involve an expansion of the Agricultural Summit theme but with specific assignments, time frames, benchmarks, and reporting for partner agencies.
- Schedule quarterly multi-county meetings between staff, CCE, and the HVADC to facilitate coordination between the counties in the region.
- The priority project to begin implementation on is to create the Agricultural Business Retention and Expansion Program.
- Work with neighboring counties to identify a priority project suitable for a New York State Consolidated Funding Application. The counties should identify a project that can best be accomplished regionally. Given dairy farms in each county are struggling, evaluation of small milk processing or another dairy-related niche processing may be valuable.
- Maintain working relationships between the various farm support agencies and other organizations, such as the SCVA and Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce, to distribute brochures and promotional materials related to agriculture and farming.
- Provide opportunities for the business community to better understand the state of agriculture in Sullivan County and build relationships with farmers and other agricultural enterprises.
- Concentrate on programs that expand the public's understanding of agriculture in the County and promote its important role in the economy.
- Keep this plan current and consider updating it along with the 8-year Agricultural District reviews. This can be facilitated by annual progress reports from the AFPB.

- On an annual basis, evaluate the progress that has been made on plan implementation and identify any emerging issues and trends. Use this information to report to the County Legislature and make adjustments as needed.

Guidelines for Project Implementation

- Identify goals and objectives of the project
- Identify users/beneficiaries of the project
- Identify partners to help implement
- Identify a lead agency or project coordinator
- Create a task list of items to be accomplished
- Make assignments of people or agencies for each task, or form working groups
- Establish a time frame and schedule to get specific steps done
- Outline reporting mechanisms so that working groups or people/agencies report and communicate with each other
- Estimate costs for each step
- Identify grants and other funding sources that can be tapped
- Disseminate information on the project per this plan.