



Watershed Agricultural Council

Farm To Market Update

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All Aboard, Manhattan!

The Leprechaun bus pulled up to the parking lot at Belleayre Mountain at 6:30 am on December 15, 2005. Nearly forty farmers from six counties climbed on board for a trip to see the underbelly of the beast – the New York City Marketplace. First stop, the Bronx.

Baldor Specialty Foods, located in a 150,000 square foot refrigerated warehouse just outside of the Hunts Point Market, rolled out the red carpet for the *Pure Catskills* group that came to see the inventory and logistics of New York City’s largest produce distributor. Upon arrival, several senior Baldor employees greeted the group warmly and escorted them in groups of ten on a behind the scenes tour of the entire facility. The sheer quantity of fresh goods being handled on a daily basis by Baldor fueled the farmers’ imaginations. With the creative juices flowing, the farmers had a working lunch provided by Baldor where they were free to ask questions of the sales staff and buyers. Seed orders were already being contemplated after witnessing the market value of such items as purslane, miniature purple cauliflower, pansies, agretii and wild Italian arugula. Baldor, in turn, requested a seasonal availability list from the farmers so that local produce charts could be distributed in time for chefs to start planning their menus.

After lunch, the group was back on the bus and headed for a tour of the retail marketplace at the new Balducci’s flagship store. The company’s vice president, Tim Whelan, and head chef, Katy Sparks, addressed the group avowing their commitment to buying local products. Chef Sparks made it clear that the most important reason to buy locally was the superior quality of agricultural products that are grown close to home. They were quick to point out, however, the mistakes of the past when buying local products such as inadequate packaging and unreliable distribution. Balducci’s management alluded to the Tuscarora Organic Growers’ Cooperative as a model of an organization that has successfully handled these logistical problems. It wasn’t long before everyone was back on the bus talking about the possibility of creating a growers’ network.

Last stop, dinner! Weary from being stuck in gridlock traffic, the group sat down to enjoy the flavorful and robust cuisine of **Butter’s** chef, Alexandra Guarnaschelli. Guarnaschelli starts every day by attending the local farmers’ markets and buying products that meet her approval. Schooled in France, Chef

Guarnaschelli changes her menus based on the seasonality of available product. Her buffet consisted of an unforgettable silken squash soup, grass-fed local beef, tarragon scented cranberry beans, roasted root vegetables with chicken livers, and a watercress and apple salad. There wasn’t anything on her menu that couldn’t be grown or raised right here in the Catskills.

The farmers that attended the Market Tour have requested a follow-up meeting to start planning for the season ahead. *Pure Catskills* is making arrangements for a meeting to be held by the end of January. For further information regarding this trip or the follow-up meeting, please contact Allison Bennett at (607) 865-7790, ext. 125, or go to www.buypurecatskills.com.

Organic Farming & Gardening Conference – January 27-29, 2006 in Syracuse

Learn how to farm organically, share ideas, and better understand just what "organic" means when you grow or buy organic food at the Northeast Organic Farming Association-NY annual conference “Cooperation with Nature, Neighbors and Local Economies” on January 27-29 at the Holiday Inn Liverpool/Syracuse. This state-wide gathering features nationally-known speakers, intensives and workshops for farmers, gardeners, young people and children.

On Friday January 27, farmers and gardeners can learn in-depth about Soil Fertility Management, Farm to School, Organic Seed Breeding, Starting a Cooperative and Growing A Sustainable Business. A free orientation on Organic Certification and Transitioning to Organic Dairy will be given by NOFA-NY Certified Organic LLC.

Over forty sessions on growing, marketing, distribution, gardening, animal and human health take place from Friday evening through Sunday, with special programs for children, teens and young adults. Representatives from the major dairy processors will be available to talk to farmers about the premiums and technical assistance they offer for transitioning to organic.

Find a complete list of speakers, schedule and registration form at www.nofany.org or call NOFA-NY at 607-652-6632 or 518-922-7937 to request a brochure.

Profiting from Local Farm Products – February 2-5, 2006 in Cobleskill

Come and learn how to market your farm products, increase visibility in the market, and increase your market share by attending at a 4-day conference titled “Profiting from Local Farm Products” at SUNY Cobleskill this February. The conference will bring new ideas together with classic marketing strategies to help today’s farms grow their businesses.

Over 50 classes will be offered, along with crop insurance consultations, SUNY Cobleskill lab tours and networking opportunities. Meals will feature a variety of foods produced in the Schoharie Valley region.

The Watershed Agricultural Council will be offering cost-share scholarships for farmers to attend the conference. Farmers in the counties of Schoharie, Sullivan, Greene, Delaware, Ulster and Otsego are eligible to participate. The first 100 registrants may attend the conference at a discounted rate of \$20 per day. Pre-register for the conference and you will be notified if you are the recipient of a scholarship. You will receive a reimbursement check when you sign in at conference registration.

Register on line at www.nysfdma.com or call (877) 384-8829. This conference is sponsored by the NYS Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association and partners.

Winterfest – February 4-5, 2006 in Manhattan

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets is coordinating a “Pride of NY” Warming Tent and outdoor farmers’ market at the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation’s Winter Festival 2006 taking place Saturday and Sunday, February 4-5, 2006 from 10:00am to 3:00pm in the East Meadow of Central Park at Fifth Ave. between E. 97 & E. 99th Sts. in New York City.

While the primary purpose of the Winter Festival is to provide NYC residents with an opportunity to enjoy winter sports activities and demonstrations and meet representatives of NY State ski and snowboard centers, it also provides a means of increasing city residents’ awareness of NY State agriculture and “Pride of NY” food products – especially those produced in the areas where major ski centers are located. The Watershed Agricultural Council will be present to promote the *Pure Catskills* branding campaign. There will be free samples of hot cider, apples, cheese, and ice cream with maple topping from New York State. Approximately 25,000 people are expected to attend the event over the two days.

Grants

Senator Clinton is pleased to announce that the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) has just posted the availability of approximately \$19.5 million for the Value-Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG) for fiscal year 2006 and urges New York agricultural entrepreneurs to apply for these funds.

The primary objective of the Value-Added Producer Grant Program is to help agricultural producers, groups, cooperatives, and businesses develop viable business plans and create new marketing opportunities for their products through value-added activities. Value-added can be achieved by changes in the processing, packaging, and marketing of agricultural commodities and can include economic benefits realized from the production of farm- or ranch-based renewable energy. RBS will competitively award grants to fund one of the following two activities: 1) Planning activities needed to establish a viable value-added marketing opportunity for an agricultural product (e.g. conduct a feasibility study, develop a business plan, develop a marketing plan); or 2) acquire working capital to operate a value-added business venture that will allow producers to better compete in domestic and international markets. The maximum grant amount for a planning grant is \$100,000 and the maximum grant amount for a working capital grant is \$300,000.

Applications must be received by March 31, 2006 to be eligible for FY 2006 grant funding with an anticipated award date of August 31, 2006. Application guidelines and materials for a VAPG can be obtained at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm> or by contacting the USDA Rural Development Office for New York State at (315) 477-6409.

Healthy Eating Research: *Building Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity*

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is pleased to announce the launch of **Healthy Eating Research**, an \$11-million national program that will support research to identify, analyze and evaluate environmental and policy strategies that can promote healthy eating and prevent obesity among children.

The program’s first Call for Proposals focuses on school food policies and environments and is available at www.rwjf.org/cfp/her. A total of approximately \$3 million will be awarded in this round of funding for two types of research grants:

- * Studies to identify and/or evaluate promising school food environment and policy changes (grants of up to \$400,000).
- * Analyses of the macro-level policy or system determinants of school food environments and policies (grants of up to \$75,000).

The application deadline is March 7, 2006 at 3:00 PM EST. For additional information on **Healthy Eating Research** and this funding opportunity, please visit www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

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