

## AGRICULTURE DRAFT AGENDA

**TASK FORCE CHAIR:** Judith LaBelle, President, Glynwood.

**PARTICIPANTS:** Janet Crawshaw ([Valley Table](#)), Ralph Erenzo ([Tuthilltown Spirits](#)), Jennifer Grossman ([Open Space Institute](#)), David Haight ([American Farmland Trust](#)), Lael Locke ([NY Planning Federation](#)), Benedict McCaffree ([Office of Congressman Scott Murphy](#)), Seth McKee ([Scenic Hudson](#)), John Mylod (Fisherman), Sarah Olson (Superintendent, [Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites](#)), Eric Ooms (President, [Columbia County Farm Bureau](#)), Peter Paden (Executive Director, [Columbia Land Conservancy](#)), Laura Pensiero (Gigi's Marketplace and Restaurant), Martin Ping (Executive Director, [Hawthorne Valley](#)), Cheryl Rogowski ([W. Rogowski Farm](#)), Matthew Scott ([Pampered Cow](#)), Sam Simon ([Hudson Valley Fresh](#)), Paul Wigsten (Produce Buyer, [Culinary Institute of America](#)).

**VISION:** The Hudson Valley is universally recognized as a world class landscape producing world class food. The Hudson Valley and the Napa Valley are coastal brackets for a country that has rediscovered its respect for food and for the people, water and land that produce it.

Agriculture is a robust element of the region's economy. Farmers are respected as businessmen and professionals. Farms are profitable and closely connected with a strong network of related food and tourism businesses. The importance of agriculture to the region's quality of life – its economic and environmental well-being and the health of its residents – is understood and supported by public officials at every level, as well as residents in the entire metropolitan region.

The vitality of the agricultural landscape and the Hudson River itself and the value of the products being produced from both provide opportunities for young people and families to make their living and spend their lives in the Valley.

The Valley stands as a national model for how the many and complex

components of a major metropolitan region can work together to support a food and agricultural system that benefits all its residents.

## **PROPOSITIONS:**

### **1/ RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT FOOD AND FARMING AS CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE REGION'S ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

*Challenge: Agriculture is the region's "invisible economy" – critical to many communities and to other businesses – but all too often taken for granted. Economic development officials, in particular, often do not recognize the critical role they can play in encouraging farmers to continue or increase production or how they can encourage realization of the great potential represented by the entrepreneurial interest in creating food-related businesses. Encouraging food and farming related businesses must be recognized as an economic necessity for the region.*

*People protect what they know and understand. Yet too many of the Valley's residents are unaware of the role that farmers play as stewards of the Valley's environment and cultural heritage or of the many health and other benefits provided by fresh local food*

#### **A) Make the case for the economic importance of regional agriculture**

1. Compile existing data that could be used to foster appreciation of agriculture's importance to the region's economy, communities and people. This might include:

- Data from Comptroller DiNapoli's recent report; American Farmland Trust's economic study, information generated by Glynwood's Keep Farming program, and the Agricultural Census data and other federal, state and county research.
- Data regarding the open space protection and its relation to the protection of working lands, such as Cost of Government Services

studies.

2. Determine what additional data is needed and create and pursue a research agenda. This might include:

- A detailed economic analysis of the region's potential productive capacity and the potential future contribution of agriculture to the Valley's economy, including an analysis of land that could be brought back into production and the related businesses and jobs that could be created;
- Identification of the many entrepreneurs interested in food related businesses in the Valley, the potential economic benefit from their activity, and analysis of how the barriers to their entry could be overcome.
- An analysis like that done by Michael Hamm, Ph.D., in Michigan, to connect the impact of eating a healthy diet based on local foods to the potential economic support for farmers, protection of the land base, and strengthening of the regional food system.
- An analysis of the economic viability of various types of agriculture in the Valley and an assessment of what must be done to ensure that the region's farmers make a sustainable economic return and that beginning farmers can enter agriculture.
- An analysis of the potential statutory authority of industrial development authorities (IDAs) and whether one or more should be created specifically to support agriculture and related businesses in the Valley or, alternatively, whether a broadening of the mandate of the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation would meet the same ends.

3. Share this data and analysis as it becomes available with economic development officials, members of chambers of commerce, other local and regional officials and the press to increase the understanding of the importance of agriculture to the Valley's economy and the steps that must be taken to enhance its long-term viability.

## **B) Cultivate an Understanding of the Many and Varied Benefits of Regional Agriculture**

1. Articulate the many benefits of regional agriculture, including the economy, the health of the environment and residents, support for viable communities, the protection of the region's heritage and cultural landscape, so that all residents know why they should care.

2. In particular, help consumers understand the difference between choosing food based on its price, and choosing based on its quality and value and the impact of the way it was produced and brought to market.

- For example, the Healthy Children, Healthy Futures afterschool program is a model for educating kids about healthy eating and the connection between health and fresh, regional foods.

## **C) Encourage the development of new agricultural products that allow farmers to diversify and enhance their economic viability.**

1. For example, farm wineries, farm distilleries and micro brewers making use of NY agricultural raw materials should be recognized as agricultural uses and as such be under the umbrella of the state Department of Agriculture and Markets.

2. In recognition of the severe challenges faced by dairy farmers, creation and expansion facilities that support production of regionally branded milk and other value-added dairy products, such as yogurt, should be given high priority.

## **D) Consider convening a Hudson Valley Agricultural Economic Summit, to bring together the best minds in economic development, finance and sustainable agriculture to develop plans and strategies for supporting agriculture in the Valley.**

## **2/ PRESERVE AND GROW THE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE AND ENCOURAGE ITS PRODUCTIVE USE.**

*According to the 1994 US Census, there were nearly 20 million people living in the New York Consolidated Metropolitan Area – nearly 1/13th of the entire US population. Not surprisingly then, American Farmland Trust's "Farming on the Edge" study identified the Hudson Valley as the 11th Most Threatened Farming Region in America due to the high degree of development pressure. While Valley farmers enjoy the opportunities provided by nearby markets, they also grapple with high land values that make entry or expansion difficult, with the result that much productive agricultural land has been developed or is owned by non-farming landowners.*

*The Agricultural Census Data indicates that the region's farmers are also burdened with real property taxes and other costs of doing business that are much higher than in other agricultural regions.*

### **Increase funding and financial incentives for protection of agricultural land.**

1. Increase federal, state, local and private funding to support the permanent protection of farmland and its continued agricultural use.
  - The Hudson Valley's farms can and should play a larger role as a food supply for the entire metropolitan area. Therefore it would be appropriate for New York City to help fund conservation of agricultural land in the Valley to enhance the security of its food supply, just as it has taken deliberate steps to protect the watershed that provides millions of New Yorkers with clean drinking water.
  - Any future statewide bond act must include a fair share of funding for protection of agricultural land in the Valley.
  - Federal and state officials must help the Hudson Valley obtain its fair share of government money for farmland protection.
  
2. Innovative financial methods to stabilize agricultural land must be created and adopted, including:

- Devices to allow farmers to recognize value from their land without selling it for development, which might include purchase and transfer of development rights; or other devices for Black Dirt or other farmers whose land does not have development potential
  - Techniques designed to avoid the future sale of agricultural land covered by conservation easements for non-agricultural use, development such as options to purchase at ag value (OPAV);
  - incentives to encourage non-farming landowners to make their land available for productive use by established and new entry farmers, possibly including tax credits for leases or sales to farmers.
  - Innovative ways to fund the protection of farmland with private funds, including from Slow Money investors or corporate sponsors.
3. Expand the constituency in support of farmland protection by educating consumers that one of the critical factors limiting food production in the Hudson Valley is the availability of and farmers' access to farmland.

### **3/ INCREASE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT TO SUPPORT THE REGION'S FOOD AND FARMING ECONOMY**

*The infrastructure the region's farmers need to move product from the field to the consumer – the processing distribution and marketing system – is badly frayed. Moreover, in recent years farmers' access to credit has been severely restricted and become increasingly expensive.*

*Local, state, federal and private investment should be encouraged in agriculture as well as related value added processing, distribution and marketing businesses.*

#### **Increase public and private investment that supports food and farming related businesses.**

1. In particular, the *infrastructure* on which farmers rely to move their product from the farm to the consumer must be strengthened or recreated. This should include:

- Creation of various forms of processing infrastructure needed to add value to local products.

- Creation one or more “depots” or “agricultural industrial parks” that allow farmers to share resources and facilities, and access materials and services in a more cost effective way.
- Completion of the renovation of Hunts Point and the creation of a new wholesale farmers market in New York City, both designed to be as ‘farmer friendly’ as possible.
- Exploration of opportunities to transport products via the Hudson, in the context of waterfront revitalization efforts. For example, might there be staging area to connect trucks used to aggregate goods from small farms with barges?
- Creation of a Hudson Valley Public market to serve as a tourist destination as well as food emporium with wholesale and retail outlets.
- Funding for funding pavilions, buildings and other infrastructure needed to for farmers markets throughout the Valley itself.
- Creation of a ‘one stop shop’ to provide services for new and existing farmers. All agencies created to support farmers should begin to deliver services in a coordinated, efficient manner that reflects the current and future farm economy, not the past.

2. When creating new distribution companies and wholesalers, employ corporate and financial structures that ensure that farmers continue to receive a fair price and profits don’t migrate to middlemen.

3. Ensure that farmers are able to access appropriate, needed credit.

4. Strengthen/expand the Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation to the extent possible. If necessary, create a new economic development corporation or authority to support agriculture, with the fullest possible authority to facilitate financing, credit and loans, as well as the ability to make direct loans to farmers and agriculturally-related businesses.

#### **4/ CULTIVATE A STRONG REGIONAL IDENTITY**

*There is not a Hudson Valley brand – or even a cohesive regional identity*

*– to support Valley products and ensure that products command a price commensurate with their quality.*

**A) Develop a unified identity for the region that will support the marketing of farm products and encourage tourism, including agritourism.**

1. Build awareness of the sub-regions of the Valley and their contributions to the identity of the whole.
2. Turn the region's seasonality into a virtue by stressing how the cuisine changes through the seasons. (Take that, CA!)
3. Work toward an integrated approach to tourism and agriculture, like that of the Po Valley in Italy.
4. Explore creation of a system of standards to help brand and enhance the value of local products, like the DOC model. Determine how standards could be enforced over time.
5. Develop and support "storytellers" who will help build the region's identity.
6. Encourage tourism sites with farming legacies to underscore this part of their story.

**B) Encourage greater coordination among the various counties with regard to economic development and tourism activities and provide greater funding support/or incentives for those activities.**