



Agriculture Work Group
Thursday, March 1, 2012
9:00 – 11:00 am

Niagara County Center for Economic Development

6311 Inducon Corporate Drive, Sanborn, NY 14132

Meeting Notes

Work Group Members Present:

Duncan Ross (Chair) – Arrowhead Spring Vineyards
Amy Fisk – Niagara County Economic Development
Richard Zink – Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board
Graham Smith – Buffalo Niagara Enterprise
Megan Mills Hoffman – WNY Land Conservancy
Deb Roberts – Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County
Francine DelMonte
Lisa Tucker – Field & Fork Network/Edible Buffalo

Others Present:

Charles Kesterson – USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Margo Sue Bittner – Margim Manor
Wright H. Ellis – Supervisor, Town of Cambria, Niagara County, NY
Glenn Nellis – Supervisor, Town of Eden, Erie County, NY
Rich Woodbridge – McCollum Orchards, LLC
Bree Bacon – McCollum Orchards, LLC
Jessie Gouck – Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus/Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities

State Resource and Work Group Staff:

Christina Orsi – Regional Director, WNY Empire State Development
Phil Giltner – NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets
Patrick Hooker – Empire State Development
Jim Strickland – NYS DEC Region 9
Dave Denk – NYS DEC Region 9
Darren Kempner – UB Regional Institute

Regional Council Update

- Christina Orsi thanked the group for their work and summarized recent Regional Economic Development Council history and next steps
 - The Niagara Wine Trail project was funded at \$30,000 (see update below)
 - The work group should work to monitor and make progress on this and other projects, key initiatives and reforms in the next few months and identify new projects
 - The next round of Consolidated Funding Applications should be available in late spring with 2-3 months for

- Councilmember and Work Group Chair Duncan Ross emphasized the importance of identifying new projects and asked Margo Sue Bittner to summarize progress on the Niagara Wine Trail signage project

Niagara Wine Trail Signage Update

- 16 wineries participate in the Niagara Wine Trail; 3 have opened in the last 4 months
- 155 signs will be installed with the money
- Wineries are providing the \$20,000 required match
- Looking to co-locate on Seaway Trail signage to keep cost per sign down
- the wine trail will support the \$50/year per sign paid to DOT
- Signage will start at Millersport/NY-78 through Lockport and at I-990 and North French
- The Trail will finish signage maps in the next couple of weeks
- Duncan Ross asked who will maintain the signs – Margo will check into this

Southtowns Farm Trail

- Glenn Nellis passed around the Brand Portfolio and Communications Plan prepared in February 2012 by the UB Regional Institute for the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition and the Southtowns Farm Trail
- The Plan identifies recommendations and next steps for implementing marketing tools for the 2012 season to extend visitor stays
 - The Plan recommends the Trail develop the following from February 2012 through May 2012:
 - Farms for inclusion on the Trail
 - Collect content from participating farms for use in marketing tools
 - Create a web presence for the Trail
 - Begin planning and populating online tools
 - The Plan recommends the Trail develop the following from May 2012 through December 2012:
 - Develop an e-newsletter
 - Install signage

Regional Food Branding

- Phil Giltner spoke about the recent NYS Agriculture and Markets RFP (closed in February 2012) that \$18,550 was available per NYS Ag and Markets region for organizations interested in development of regional food brands that tie to the NYS “Pride of NY” branding program
 - He cited a 15 percent increase for Long Island producers after branded promotion in NYC markets
 - NYS Ag and Markets will likely announce the awards under this program on March 15 with money to be spent this fiscal year
- The “Greater Niagara” region (Erie, Niagara, Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming) was the only regional markets that did not submit a proposal in this RFP round
- Richard Zink and Southern Tier West did submit a proposal for Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties
 - Richard stated the importance of identifying the goals of the regional brand (i.e. marketing to NYC, more local food purchases)
 - Richard will head up a sub-group of the Agriculture Work Group to identify next steps for all 5 counties in the WNY ESD region
 - Deb Roberts, Lisa Tucker and Jessie Gouck volunteered to participate and bring back an update at the next Agriculture Work Group meeting
 - Christina Orsi suggested that Jeff Culhane, Vice President of Perishable Marketing for Tops Markets be invited to join the sub-group
- Deb Roberts noted that Erie County developed a local foods branding campaign in the 1980s; the group will connect with Erie County Environment & Planning to see what work is available
- A tie in with Chautauqua County wineries, NYS wine branding and the New York Wine and Culinary Center (i.e. Becky Jablonski) was suggested
- NYS Ag and Markets is developing a database of producers to help consumers and wholesalers identify what is in season, available and where it is available

- There was considerable discussion around regional agricultural differences, Cornell Cooperative Extension's role in local food systems, land use issues and which organization should be responsible for branding

Regional Food Hub

- Patrick Hooker spoke about an interagency state team that is looking into the establishment of regional and sub-regional food hubs
 - The team has taken the approach that interest in food hub projects has to come from the ground up
 - He recommended the group look into the USDAs work on the concept and contact Jim Barnum @ the USDA food hub office
 - NYS ESD wants to be the last money in on any regional food hub project
 - He cited Eden Valley Growers, Central NY Bounty and a Genesee Valley Authority study as examples and helpful work
 - He cited some work he is doing with NYC distributors and some work Cornell and Columbia have done to identify opportunities
- Lisa Tucker spoke about the importance of meeting the needs of WNYers through a regional food hub
- Duncan Ross spoke on how wine production and distribution have unique challenges and opportunities and emphasized the need for not just wine, but for all local food production, to generate a pull from the consumer, most likely generated through a regional branding effort

Regulatory Reforms

- Jim Strickland spoke on NYS Pesticide Regulation and noted that several states approve pesticide use at the State level
 - He attributed delays in pesticide use approvals to staffing and resource problems
- Duncan Ross asked that Jim write up NYS DEC's reasons for continuing state pesticide use approvals
- Rich Woodbridge asked Jim to provide statistics on the percentage of EPA approved pesticides denied or modified by NYS
- Jim and Dave Denk passed around a handout on "DEC Interactions with the Agricultural Sector" and noted that the Department is working on revisions to SEQR, CAFO and solid waste management on farms regulations, state facility air permitting, aquaculture regulations, electronic permitting and approvals and increased public access to records through the Internet
- Patrick Hooker noted that the NYS Department of State is working with the NYS Farm Bureau on alternative uses for temporary agricultural buildings (i.e. sugar houses, upicks)
- Duncan Ross distributed a handout on winery reform
- Phil Giltner spoke about wholesale re-write of State Liquor Authority laws
- Jim Bittner (not present) is working with the Niagara County Farm Bureau and Homeland Security on H2A visa and labor regulation issues

Next Steps

- Additional updates on Niagara Wine Trail Signage Project
- Follow-up with DEC on pesticide and other regulations
- Branding sub-group to meet
- ESD/UBRI to follow-up on farmers markets contact with NYS Thruway Authority
- Full Agriculture Work Group meeting in April
 - Request for UB Professor Samina Raja and her students to speak on their Erie County Food System study
 - Request for the Niagara County Community College program on promoting careers in agriculture to speak