



**Schuyler County's Agriculture Economic Strategy**

October 2009

**Focused Development  
of Agriculture Assets**



**Cornell University**  
Cooperative Extension

Developed by  
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## Executive Summary

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Schuyler County's agriculture economy is in a good position to grow. Over the past 10 years, many farms in the County have adjusted their production and marketing to respond to local, national, and international trends. The County Legislature, the Schuyler County Partnership for Economic Development (SCOPEd), and Cornell Cooperative Extension are looking for the right combination of actions and incentives to propel the local farm economy to new levels, creating more income, more jobs, and more prosperity in the County's rural and agriculture communities.

This strategy of "Focused Development of Agriculture Assets" provides a credible mix of important actions and emphases within the small farm business sector. If Schuyler County implements this plan to deliberately foster the commerce and open space amenities of farming, jobs and agriculture economic success will follow.

Schuyler County will achieve many key agriculture economic development accomplishments by focusing on the following strategic points of focus and in the coming years, and deliberately cultivating opportunities within these points:

- 1) Grassland farming
- 2) Agritourism development for tourists from cities and suburbs
- 3) Niche product farming
- 4) Forest land and timber
- 5) Community sense of self-sufficiency and sustainability

This strategy provides more than two dozen action steps within these focus areas, such as:

- ◆ Increasing educational offerings and technical assistance for grazing farms.
- ◆ Introducing models and programs that encourage the production of high-quality hay and forages for regional, national, and international markets.
- ◆ Fostering grass biomass energy awareness entrepreneurship by attracting university and private industry research plots, trials, and tours to Schuyler County.
- ◆ Maintaining agritourism integrity by encouraging authentic farm experiences (you-pick, working farm tours, farm product sampling), occasionally supplemented by purely entertainment activities.
- ◆ Creating demonstration opportunities to showcase and allow sampling or use of niche farm products.
- ◆ Creating a county-wide program for resident and non-resident forest owners to improve their overall woodlot management habits.
- ◆ Orienting educational tourism opportunities to Schuyler County forestlands in the form of adventure trips, forestry education, and woodland skill ventures throughout the year.
- ◆ Actively assisting institutions and farmers in the procurement and distribution of local farm products.



This plan hinges on two important factors. First, it relies on the delineated teamwork of county-level services, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, SCOPED, Chamber of Commerce, and the Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Board. Second, this plan will be successful only if farm managers engage in business training to make the most of the action steps coordinated by the county.

Schuyler County has a golden opportunity to maintain its ongoing support of dairy, grape, and crop farming, while intentionally fostering new progress in the areas of grassland farming, agritourism, niche product development, forest management, and making the most of a self-reliant community of people. The specific plans that are generated within this strategy will open up fresh and economically valuable prospects for agriculture and rural community development in Schuyler County.

## **Introduction**

Schuyler County's agriculture economy has been growing and developing steadily for more than 10 years. Because of the combined efforts of the Schuyler County Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension, SCOPED, the Chamber of Commerce, Schuyler County Farm Bureau, and Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District, Schuyler County is now in the top 20 percent of the "Best Places to Farm" in 2009, according to Farm Futures magazine (April, 2009). Expanded dairies, new farms, improved marketing, value-added enterprises, agritourism, outreach to schools, and pastured livestock operations all demonstrate the ability of the agriculture community in Schuyler County to change with the times.

Cash receipts for agriculture products in Schuyler County exceeded \$35.4 million in 2008 according to the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service. This is more than double the value of cash receipts for agriculture products in Schuyler County only 10 years earlier (\$15.3 million in 1998). For comparison, the equivalent tourism statistic is visitor spending, which totaled \$26.4 million in 2008, according to the firm Tourism Economics. Both tourism and agriculture have enormous impacts on Schuyler County's overall economy.

This course of steady growth in agriculture will keep farming viable, but not necessarily robust in Schuyler County for many years to come. Sensing this, SCOPED and Cornell Cooperative Extension are seeking an Agriculture Economic Development strategy. Such a strategy will identify and promote the strongest assets, showing how to seize the right opportunities to trigger enhanced economic growth in the agriculture sector. Such a strategy also needs to be rooted in reality, avoiding wishful thinking and improbable assumptions.

This report puts forth a straightforward, deliberate, and immediately functional prescription for agriculture development over the next 4 - 6 years. It is based on many hours of discussions with the farmers and agriculture support personnel of Schuyler County, researching opportunities and dead-ends, analyzing farming assets and challenges, and formulating a strategy that will catalyze Schuyler County's agriculture economy.

### **Core principles of Schuyler County Agriculture Economic Development**

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Agriculture Economic Development relies on a number of things that go beyond being supportive of agriculture as needed. Schuyler County will achieve its hoped-for agriculture economic development accomplishments by:

- ◆ Having three or four strategic points of focus and continually cultivating opportunities within those points.
- ◆ Enhancing the skills and knowledge of farm managers in the areas of business organization, marketing, business transfer, customer relations, and financial management.

- ◆ Delineating services provided by county-level agencies and organizations that synergize each other's talents and strengths, rather than overlapping. Recognize though, that overlaps can be beneficial to farming where reinforced at the municipal, state and federal level.
- ◆ Building connections and integrating farming with other major economic development initiatives.
- ◆ Adopting a land use philosophy that is intentional, rather than opportunistic.

### **Theme: Focused Development of Agriculture Assets**

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The recurring theme of this strategy is "focused development of agriculture assets" and is a combination of the following:

**Focused** - putting the greatest logistical, financial, and human resource support behind selected components of Schuyler County's agriculture. Such a focus will directly benefit some sectors and indirectly benefit others.

**Development** - an increase in the resources spent, the support provided, and the fostering of greater participation.

**Agriculture** - money-making production and sale of crops, trees, livestock, horticulture and farm-modified products.

**Assets** - the strongest and most valuable features or qualities present in a community.

### **Important but often overlooked facts about farming Schuyler County**

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- ◆ Schuyler County agriculture is stronger than it appears. Many long-time residents can recall when farms were more abundant. The national trend of condensation in agriculture has created fewer, but much more productive farms in Schuyler County.
- ◆ There is a passion for small-scale family farming. Unfortunately, it is not consistently coupled with skilled employment opportunities nor easy access to urban amenities for the rest of the family.
- ◆ Schuyler County has not been blessed with lots of good agriculture soil. Most farm operators work within significant agriculture soil limitations - drainage, fertility, overgrowth, and slopes.
- ◆ Future farmers will need broadband Internet access at their farms to communicate and sell things.

- ◆ Land use patterns in the county are stable. However, the pattern includes a gradual shift away from farmer-owned farmland. Development intentions will slowly reduce the amount of farmland available for production agriculture interests.
- ◆ Agriculture development does not hinge on a key facility or project or “golden goose.” It is an everyday process of learning, applying, networking, and creating (7 days a week, 365 days a year).
- ◆ The curbside appeal of farms is not very appealing in many places. This signals agriculture apathy to town people and tourists and suggests that agriculture does not have much of a future. Well-kept farmsteads are a feature of successful agritourism and incentives to refurbish and de-junk farmsteads will be helpful.

## PART 1: THE ASSETS - RATED AND RANKED

Schuyler County contains many important agriculture assets - the valuable stuff of a local farm economy. The twelve most-often cited by farm managers and agriculture support personnel are as follows:

Asset 1: **Available land in production** - Schuyler County has about 67,900 acres out of its 99,000 Agriculture District acres currently being farmed. This land already in production is readily available for various agriculture development opportunities and there is yet room to grow.

Asset 2: **Forest land / timber** - Schuyler County has more than 60,000 acres of saw timber forests (mature, ready for harvesting or pre-harvest thinning) that are still substantially undermanaged for economic growth and forest stand improvement.

Asset 3: **Vineyard microclimate and soils** - Near Seneca Lake, on the east and west slopes, lies Schuyler County's noteworthy vineyard land. The topography, microclimate, and soil are generally beneficial for the production of any of the Finger Lake's best wine, juice, and table grapes.

Asset 4: **Seasonal residents** - These are folks who reside in Schuyler County during spring, summer, and fall months. Many have moderate wealth and spend a greater proportion of their family budgets on discretionary items than most year-round residents.

Asset 5: **Dairy farms** - Schuyler County continues to have a viable dairy industry that is surprisingly diverse - from grazing organic farms to value-added dairies & cheeseries, to large-herd farms. Dairy farms bring in more than 60% of Schuyler County's total farm income.

Asset 6: **Emerging niche product farming** - Still often overlooked as part of the agriculture sector, some crop / livestock farmers continue to produce and offer products that are not mainstream and not commodities (e.g. meat goats, maple products, forest-grown crops, cut flowers).

Asset 7: **Agritourism development** - Schuyler County's recent and continuing efforts to develop and promote farm-based tourism is beneficial, but not yet at its potential level.

Asset 8: **Grassland farming** - Because Schuyler County has not been blessed with prime farmland, hay and other perennial grass farm types persist. Livestock grazing is common and widespread.

Asset 9: **Tourists from cities and suburbs** - Racing tourists and fans, park visitors, and lake and wine enthusiasts find a lot of opportunities in Schuyler County. Many of these families are day or weekend visitors, bringing money they intend to spend in the area.

Asset 10: **Community sense of self-sufficiency and sustainability** - Though it is not formally documented, the Schuyler County community generally puts a high value on self-sufficiency and sustainable, non-consumptive living. Individuals and families tend to seek ways to raise their own food, or get what they need locally.

Asset 11: **Grazing capacity for small ruminants** - Small ruminants (sheep, goats, llamas / alpacas) are able to be raised on farmland that is often unsuitable for tillage or even grazing cattle. They tolerate slopes and have less overall bodyweight. The same capacity favors poultry, swine, and horses (non-ruminants) as well.

Asset 12: **Existing economic development projects** - Light industry, retail, and other non-farm business development is an agriculture asset, as it has the potential to draw in skilled workers who seek a self-sufficient, land-based lifestyle.

### **Criteria used to organize agriculture assets into a priority ranking**

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A dozen agriculture assets are too many to pay attention to all at once. Schuyler County will achieve its hoped-for agriculture economic development accomplishments by focusing on just a few strategic points of focus and continually cultivating opportunities within those points.

The following criteria were applied to each of the assets:

Criteria 1: The asset must be regionally significant. This means the asset is of currently considerable size and value within the multi-county Southern Finger Lakes region.

Criteria 2: The asset is valued highly by the non-agriculture community.

Criteria 3: The asset provides direct and indirect net income potential for farm owners.

Criteria 4: Geographically distributed across the county. The most valuable assets should be available to farms no matter where they are in the county.

Criteria 5: Asset is available annually and across multiple seasons. To maximize the economic impact, the asset should not have a short season.

Criteria 6: Asset has room to grow and will not reach a finite point in the near future. This is a measure of linear growth.



Criteria 7: Asset has potential to snowball into something bigger. Other businesses and income-generating entities can benefit from the asset, beyond the farm level. This is a measure of geometric growth.

Criteria 8: There is potential external funding support. The asset could be supported by grant, stimulus, and other public and private funding support.

Criteria 9: The asset is accessible by many farm managers, regardless of scale.

Criteria 10: The asset creates more inter-farm networking.

### **Subjective scoring of the assets**

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Each asset was rated against each criterion through a subjective rating process. A rating number was applied for all 12 assets, rated against the 10 criteria. The number expresses the level that the asset meets fullest sense of the criterion.

**Please see Appendix B for details on how the assets were numerically rated and ranked.**

## **PART 2 - THE STRATEGY: FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE ASSETS**

Schuyler County will achieve its hoped-for agriculture economic development accomplishments by focusing on the following strategic points of focus and in the coming years, and deliberately cultivating opportunities within these points:

- 1) Grassland farming
- 2) Agritourism development for tourists from cities and suburbs
- 3) Niche product farming
- 4) Forest land and timber
- 5) Community sense of self-sufficiency and sustainability

The other assets listed earlier will remain assets through the life of this strategy. This strategy does not suggest divestment in those assets. For example, dairy and grape farms are crucial to the overall agriculture economy of Schuyler County. It may be surprising that these farms are not directly represented in the top 5 strategic points of focus. In Schuyler County, grape and dairy farms are at a more advanced stage of maturation and agriculture economic investment. This strategy focuses on the aspects of Schuyler County agriculture that have the greatest potential for return on investment (time, effort, money), and have the benefit of a relatively fresh perspective.

Woven through each of the 5 strategic points should be two important initiatives:

- 1) An education program led by Cornell Cooperative Extension and SCOPED to increase the scope and delivery of programs to increase business expertise among farm owners regarding marketing practices, business structures, business viability analysis, strategic planning, tax programs, business agreements, and farm transition planning. See Appendix A for examples of effective business training classes for farm managers.
- 2) A clearer delineation of strengths and responsibilities among the five entities responsible for fostering agriculture development in Schuyler County. An effective team structure is already in place, but it will be necessary for each of the partnering entities to focus further on what they do best.
  - ◆ Cornell Cooperative Extension focuses on education and community planning,
  - ◆ Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District focuses on technical land management assistance,
  - ◆ SCOPED focuses on business and commerce infrastructure,
  - ◆ Chamber of Commerce focuses on tourism promotion and business networking, and
  - ◆ Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Board focuses on agriculture land retention and promoting agriculture-oriented public policies.More specific recommendations about agency roles are listed further in the report.

## **The vision for Schuyler County Agriculture Economic Development**

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The entities in charge of fostering agriculture business development in Schuyler County are

- ◆ retaining and establishing a net gain of farms and farm jobs,
- ◆ enhancing grassland agriculture production and related processing entities,
- ◆ improving the quality and quantity of agritourism opportunities and private forest management decisions,
- ◆ securing economic development funds and incentive packages for farm-based projects,
- ◆ facilitating farm manager skills and know-how in business organization, customer service, entrepreneurship, and financial management, and
- ◆ increasing community-based support for agriculture through local marketing and farm-to-institution and farm-to-consumer connections.

## **Action plan for Agriculture Economic Development in Schuyler County**

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**Focus #1: Stimulate and expand grassland farming in Schuyler County, including higher quality hay production and marketing, livestock grazing infrastructure, and grass biomass raw material farming and processing facilities.**

Agriculture Economic Development approach:

- 1) Introduce models and programs that encourage the production of high-quality hay and forages for regional, national, and international markets. Create a collaborative marketing and branding for Schuyler County hay, based on its quality, consistency, and compatibility with farm ecosystems.
- 2) Through education and demonstration, create a measurable standard of hay and forage production that exceeds typical current practices. Encourage a habit of quantitative forage testing, hay evaluation, and hay stand improvement and consider underwriting forage testing to encourage its use.
- 3) Increase educational offerings and technical assistance for grazing farms. Host forums for people interested in starting grazing farms, and actively network underused pasture resources with those seeking additional acreage. Put extra emphasis on processes to convert brushy fields to active grass-based grazing.
- 4) Foster grass biomass energy awareness entrepreneurship by attracting university and private industry research plots, trials, and tours to Schuyler County. Map parcels and determine potential acreage favorable for grass biomass feedstock development.

5) Explore the business feasibility of forming a proposed Perennial Biomass Energy Development Center, by collaborating with Cornell University, SUNY, Penn State, and the NRCS Plant Materials Center.

6) Identify and solicit small and mid-scale biomass processing entities, using the resources identified in #4 (above). Market Schuyler County as a host site for conferences, symposia, presentations, and educational offerings on grass biomass energy development.

**Focus #2: Continue, but speed up and stimulate agritourism development for tourists from cities and suburbs, providing a regionally-recognized level of customer service, destination variety, and authentic experiences to augment wine tourism.**

Agriculture Economic Development approach:

1) Develop and market visitor guides targeted to Northeastern suburban / urban travelers that highlight Schuyler County's farm destinations. Develop Internet-based maps, profiles, and easier navigation plans.

2) Maintain agritourism integrity by encouraging authentic farm experiences (you-pick, working farm tours, farm product sampling), occasionally supplemented by purely entertainment activities (games, mazes, animal exposition).

3) Increase farm tourism and wine tourism inter-networking by organizing cross-visitation, peer problem-solving, and collaborative marketing. (For example, a winery and you-pick farm trade a staff person or family member for a week to learn more about each other's operation).

4) Help agriculture and non-agriculture businesses increase customer service training, incentive and recognition, and educational opportunities to learn more about agritourism philosophies.

**Focus #3: Deliberately encourage niche farm product development, new agriculture product ventures, and availability of specialized crops.**

Agriculture Economic Development approach:

1) Brainstorm and publicize a creative list of niche products that can be grown in Schuyler County, and invite farm managers of all scales to select ones they would consider producing. The idea is to identify items that show potential, but are far from proven, and assist entrepreneurs in the development and test marketing process.

- 2) Identify and share practices that reduce financial risk and avoid venture debt, such as mini-grants, micro-scale test production, and collaborative product development.
- 3) Create demonstration opportunities at public facilities to showcase and allow sampling or use of niche products, such as at the Arnot Forest, Watkins Glen International, and cooperating wineries.
- 4) Orient farm operators and associates to grant opportunities and typical selection criteria; enhance grant writing skills among agriculture operators. Foster agriculture entrepreneurial activity with business research, networking, and identifying sources of capital.
- 5) Advise new and expanding entities about business plan development and presentation skills to optimize opportunities for funding.

**Focus area #4: Develop Schuyler County's private forest land to maximize financial equity (value-per-acre), minimize erosion risks, maintain wildlife habitats, and increase natural resource income opportunities.**

Agriculture Economic Development approach:

- 1) Create a county-wide program for resident and non-resident forest owners to improve their overall woodlot management habits, pointing out the numerous financial and ecological benefits. This program can include direct-mailed directories of forest assistance, model woodlots, incentives (such as free seedling trees) and Schuyler County-based cost-share or tax abatement assistance for professional consulting.
- 2) Actively support timber harvesting and milling businesses to improve workforce availability, safety training, job satisfaction, and compensation.
- 3) Promote existing certification programs for sustainable forestry, logger training, and overall woodland management (e.g. New York Logger Training, American Tree Farm System) and adapt existing forest stewardship programs like the Watershed Agriculture Council's Watershed Forestry Program (Walton, NY).
- 4) Orient educational tourism opportunities to Schuyler County forestlands in the form of adventure trips, forestry education, extended woodland skill ventures throughout the year.
- 5) Increase the scope and delivery of educational programs about forest farming and special forest product development and marketing.



**Focus area #5: Capitalize on the tendency of Schuyler County residents toward self-reliance and sustainability practices.**

Agriculture Economic Development approach:

- 1) Inventory Schuyler County to identify farms and families that engage in sustainable rural living, and develop an educational and skill-sharing network among those desiring collaboration; suggest and support collaborative purchasing agreements to maximize farm expense efficiency.
- 2) Identify example farms and homesteads that have achieved a notable level of self-support in food production, energy use, and permaculture systems. Determine which are interested and available to share self-reliance expertise regionally as an entrepreneurial activity.
- 3) Actively assist institutions and farmers in the procurement and distribution of local farm products. Sample institutions include, but not limited to the Odessa-Montour, Watkins Glen, and Bradford School Districts, Schuyler Hospital and Seneca View Nursing Home, and the Fire Academy.
- 4) Introduce models and programs appropriate for agriculture that show practical utility of renewable and alternative energy systems, like methane digestion, geothermal exchange, solar, and wind power; describe advantages and disadvantages of alternative energy systems.
- 5) Seek and apply for funding opportunities to offset the costs of adopting energy efficiency and renewable energy technology in cooperation with farms.

## PART 3 - ACTIVITIES RECOMMENDED TO SUPPORT THE STRATEGY

### ORGANIZATIONAL TEAMWORK, STAFFING, FINANCE PROGRAMS, AND COSTS

#### **Organizational teamwork**

The efficiency of county government is part of making an Agriculture Economic Development strategy work. Each county-level entity involved in Agriculture Economic Development has a special role to play.

#### **Agriculture Business Retention and Expansion Team**

A coordinating team representing Schuyler County's diverse agriculture will make a big difference as this strategy is implemented. This team would be accountable to the County Legislature for its agriculture economic development accomplishments, and would be comprised of a delegate from each of the following groups:

Cornell Cooperative Extension	County Legislature
Farm Bureau	Soil and Water Conservation Board
SCOPEd	Chamber of Commerce
Dairy farms	Vineyards
Forestry and forest products	ADFP Board

This Team would meet quarterly to maintain open communication on emerging ideas and prospects, provide a place for agriculture entrepreneurs to present their ideas, and coordinate activities tied to Agriculture Economic Development. An agriculture business retention and expansion team would not supplant the Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Board. It would be focused on business development actions in Schuyler County agriculture.

At the very least, the county-level entities each have an important and complementary role to play in this strategy, for example:

Cornell Cooperative Extension (Focus: education and community planning)

- ◆ Increase the scope and delivery of programs to increase business expertise among farm owners regarding marketing practices, business structures, business viability analysis, strategic planning, tax programs, business agreements, and farm transition planning.

Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District (focus: technical assistance)

- ◆ Continue promoting and implementing available opportunities to introduce and update conservation and agriculture assistance programs available specifically for grassland farming: grazing, grazing infrastructure and drainage improvement.

SCOPEd (focus: business and commerce infrastructure)

- ◆ Explore the business feasibility of forming a proposed Perennial Biomass Energy Development Center, by collaborating with Cornell University, SUNY, Penn State, and the NRCS Plant Materials Center. Strive to relocate biomass energy development businesses - plant breeding, seed development and distribution,

planting and harvesting equipment, biomass processing and combustion equipment.

- ◆ Take leadership for the development of broadband Internet connectivity to all agriculture areas of Schuyler County. High-speed Internet will make a profound difference for agriculture business development in Schuyler County.
- ◆ Intentionally attract workers to Schuyler County based on the ability to have both a farm lifestyle and access to high quality jobs and urban amenities, like high-speed Internet.

Chamber of Commerce (focus: tourism promotion & business networking)

- ◆ Follow up on each of the recommendations already provided in the 2007 Agritourism Strategy developed by Susan Payne and Monika Roth (pages 40 - 57).
- ◆ Initiate annual visits to known agritourism destinations in Schuyler County for evaluation and feedback on overall performance, customer service, way finding, accessibility, and value.
- ◆ Review and redevelop promotional literature and Internet content to emphasize available and upcoming agritourism events and destinations.

Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Board (focus: farmland retention and local agriculture policies)

- ◆ Follow through on Recommendation 4.4 from the Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Plan (2008 revision). Arrange and facilitate acquisition of farmland conservation easements and Purchase of Development Rights Programs
- ◆ Follow through on Recommendation 4.8 from the Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Plan (2008 revision). Promote the development of local agricultural and farmland protection plans

### **Staffing this Agriculture Economic Development strategy**

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There is a lot of work contained in this strategy that can be accomplished by existing human resources. If the county-level agencies and organizations named in this report put their talents and strengths to work for agriculture and focus action on the same agriculture assets, it will have the basic effect as a new position over the long haul.

A new position dedicated to the implementation of an Agriculture Economic Development strategy like this one will move things along much faster. As we would expect, everyone is pretty busy doing their current work and adding on new responsibilities means other work will be dropped. Indeed, a county with an agriculture sector growing more than 100% in ten years should be expanding its county-level agriculture support staff accordingly.

Schuyler County would benefit from hiring an agriculture business educator whose job it is to help all of the 300+ Schuyler County farm managers further develop the skills of record keeping, financial planning, business organization, insurance, marketing, public relations, and compliance with regulations. This individual will need to be proactive, assertive, confidential, professional, and able to show managers of farms of all sizes just how important these skills are. Such an individual would likely devote 15 - 25 hours a week to this effort, and could be hired under contract or as a part-time job. However, this could well be a full time job in a county with \$35 million in agriculture sales each year.

Housing an agriculture business educator will likely mean shared responsibilities between Cornell Cooperative Extension and SCOPED. Other counties have developed similar shared positions (e.g. Madison County, NY) and can be used as a reference.

### **Finance programs**

- ◆ Because the business of agriculture is land-based, and property tax payments are tied to the tax rate, amount, and market value of farmland, not to the value of the crop, consider developing a Local Agriculture Investment Credit for agriculture property taxes. This credit would be available to farm landowners in county-certified Agriculture Districts that are engaged in agricultural production. It might be worth 10 - 25% of the first \$25,000 expensed in a given year on farm improvements, such as new machinery, best management practices, junk removal, trellising materials, livestock fencing, or value-added farm product processing equipment. A maximum credit could be determined (e.g. \$5,500) and to provide better flexibility, unused credits may be carried forward for five years.
- ◆ Recommendation 4.1 in the Schuyler County Agriculture Development and Farmland Protection Plan "Financing Programs" is sound and should be fully implemented.
- ◆ A new state-level Agriculture Economic Development program is currently under development, and no details about who, how much, what, or when are available as of August 2009.
- ◆ The Grow NY Enterprise Program continues as a state program to assist agriculture-related businesses that create jobs for low- and moderate-income persons.

### **Total Agriculture Economic Development strategy costs**

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Nothing worthwhile is free and this strategy will require some cash to make agriculture development a reality. A budget of \$20,000 - 25,000 annually to implement it would be a good start. Much of the money needed to implement the plan is to pay personnel, with some added expenses for mini-grants, cost-share, and educational resource development.

The cost of tax credits and similar incentives is going to be much larger, and can be phased in over several years to see if the incentives are having a desired effect. For example, the Local Agriculture Investment Credit, if started at 10% of the first \$25,000 invested privately in farm improvements (above a \$10,000 base investment) would equal up to \$2,500 per farm. With possibly 40 farms participating, the public cost would be up to \$100,000 per year in credited property taxes. But those same farms would have invested between \$400,000 - \$1,000,000 to have earned the credit.

If both the implementation budget and the proposed property tax credit are taken into account as described above, this strategy will realistically cost approximately \$125,000 per year or 0.3% of the county's budget.



## APPENDIX A

### Schuyler County Agricultural Economic Development Suggested Farm Business Courses

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*Class list compiled by Laura Biasillo, Agricultural Economic Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension-Broome County in July 2009. Contact: Cornell Cooperative Extension-Broome County, 840 Upper Front Street, Binghamton, NY 13905  
Phone: (607) 584-5007*

#### **1) Let's Write Your Business Plan (optional workbook)**

Duration: 2-3 hours

Presenter: Ginny Robert, SUNY Broome Community College, Entrepreneurial Assistance Program

Cost: Original course covered by a grant, but cost for instructor would normally be \$50/hr

Charge: \$20/farm or business

This two-hour workshop will provide an overview of a comprehensive business plan – contents (both the narrative and financial statement components), format and how it can be used. The presenter, Ginny L. Robert, is the Director of the Entrepreneurial Assistance Program at BCC. She has specialized in entrepreneurship for 19 years, helping thousands of individuals to start and grow small businesses. Participants will be given a CD that has a template to develop the financial spreadsheets with Excel software. Optional purchase of Let's Write Your Business Plan, a workbook developed by the presenter, will also be available.

Notes for success: Presenter should be familiar with agricultural issues, in addition to small business issues. Class size was close to 50, which may have been too large. This course is an overview course but the number of participants will be directly linked to interactions with instructor and between participants. Original course was covered by a grant, but would suggest charging so participants have something invested in course.

Instructor: The instructor for this should have a business background (MBA, etc.), such as from the Small Business Development Center.

#### **2) Financing Your Business**

Duration: 2 hours

Presenters: Ed Staehr, NYFarmNet

Diane Julian, NBT Bank, NA

Noreen Atkins, Farm Service Agency

Cost: No cost other than printing of handouts (was advertised in local papers as a press release).

Charge: \$10/farm

This workshop will feature a traditional lending institution with an agricultural lending department (NBT Bank) and an agricultural referral agency (NYFarmNet) and an agricultural lender (Farm Service Agency). The presenters will discuss the types of financial support available for a business start-up, traditional or agricultural. They will also provide an overview of the issues surrounding application for financing, and steps that can be taken to better ensure securing start-up capital.

Notes for success: Having a wide variety of presenters helps show the diversity of financing options. While questions can tend to get personal, it is best to try and keep to generalities. It might also help to have a general presentation time, and build in time for one-on-one with the presenters while the participants network.

Instructor: This could be facilitated by Cornell Cooperative Extension but really needs to be a roundtable discussion for farmers to get the most out of it.

### **3) Farm & Small Business Accounting & Taxes**

Duration: 3-4 hours

Presenters: Tax Accountant with Greater Binghamton SCORE

Cost: Was proposed to group as a good will gesture to the agricultural community.

Charge: \$25/farm or business

Topics to include, but not limited to: Business Entities, Record Keeping, Profit or Loss from Business, What is/is not income, What is/is not deductible, Self-Employment Tax, Business Use of Car and Home, Estimated Tax Requirements, Basics of Accounting, NYS Income & Sales Taxes

Notes for success: Having a presenter who is familiar with agricultural tax issues is paramount to the success of this workshop. The topics can range according to what is most needed by participants. It should also be emphasized that while many tax forms do not need the attention of a professional, there are times their advice is better used before an issue arises. The first time this course was taught, there were 30 participants. This may have been too many, but it all depends on the room set-up and the comfort level of the presenter.

Instructor: This could be taught by a and extension farm business agent, an accountant, or someone who is very familiar with agriculture and taxes.

### **4) Targeting Your Marketing**

Duration: 2 hours

Presenter: Cheryl Fabrizi, SUNY Broome Community College ExCEL program

Cost: Original course covered by a grant, but cost for instructor would normally be \$50/hr

Charge: \$10/farm or business

Description: Entrepreneurs and small businesses are constantly faced with developing marketing strategies and financing marketing tactics. Targeting farm marketing through messaging and successful tactics can be a challenge for farms with limited time and resources. This skills-based, two hour session spearheaded by Cheryl A. Fabrizi, owner of Fab Idea, a freelance direct marketing idea and services company, drives participants to hone in on cost-effective ways to generate priceless, positive word of mouth, create an online presence, establish on-going communications with your most profitable customers, and assure you are touting your product or service benefits to your target customers. Session includes several workshops to zero in on action steps you can immediately capitalize upon.

Notes for success: This workshop is great to talk about different marketing methods. While it is helpful to have the presenter understand issues related to agricultural enterprises, it is more important to understand marketing to rural areas and for rural businesses. This workshop can have large numbers of participants, as the sharing of stories and information is often one of the most helpful parts of the workshop.

Instructor: Laura Biasillo, Cornell Cooperative Extension, could teach this; other instructors would include marketing consultants or advisors from the Small Business Development Center.

### **5) How to Design a Website in a Few Hours**

Duration: 2+ hours

Presenter: Cheryl Fabrizi, Owner, FabIdea & SUNY BCC

Cost: Original course covered by a grant, but cost for instructor would normally be \$50/hr

Charge: \$20/farm or business

Explore a quick and easy way to build a web site in a few hours yourself. This two-hour learning demonstration and workshop helps you identify your action steps to create your online marketing presence and allows you to explore all-in-one packages starting at \$4.99/month for a web site address, hosting and simple steps and templated selections through an online account you can access from anywhere. If you know how to use basic word document software, this course is great for you -- entrepreneurs and small businesses -- who want to launch and maintain a very cost-effective, professional-looking web site yourself. If you already have a web site address and but nothing else, you can take advantage of this class, too! No html, asp or other web site coding programming knowledge or experience is needed. Come with some of your initial thoughts and ideas.

Notes for success: This workshop will become even more applicable for Schuyler County as more farm owners move from dial-up to broadband Internet service. It captures the fact that most likely customers will use the Internet for finding information and doing research before they purchase products. The success of this project is reliant on doing the project where participants can follow along on a computer.

Instructor: Cornell Cooperative Extension - Broome could teach this, depending on the Internet connectivity in the county.

## **6) Insurance, Permits & Licenses for Agriculture**

Duration: 1.5-2 hours

Presenters: Dave Wheelock, Farm Family Insurance  
Monika Roth, CCE-Tompkins

Cost: None

Charge: \$10/farm or business

Do all the rules and regulations related to agriculture confuse you? Do you just wish that you had a chance to sit down with someone to find out specifically what you need to operate legally?

Notes for success: It is important to have presenters who understand not only the legalities of agricultural permits, insurance and licenses, but also the realities of operating an agricultural enterprise.

Instructor: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Broome County could teach the permits and licenses portion of the course. The insurance part really needs to be taught by an agent.

## **7) How to Turn a Hobby into a Successful Enterprise**

Duration: 1.5-2 hours

Presenters: Kara Christenson, Soaps –N-Such (Newark Valley)  
Stephanie Supa, 4-H swine/lamb  
Kathy Clark (landscaper)

Costs: None

Charge: \$5/farm or business

How often have you envied those people that get paid to do what they love? Have you ever wondered how you could make money with the herbs that you grow in your garden? Come to this workshop and

learn from the success of local entrepreneurs. Learn how to identify your local market and how to market your product and make a profit.

Notes for success: This is a great opportunity to have a roundtable session with new and experienced agricultural entrepreneurs so people can ask questions. Having a good mix of presenters is good.

Instructor: This needs a good facilitator who has chosen a good panel who can relay the pitfalls and lessons learned in their agricultural enterprise.

### **8) Pricing & Promotion Strategies for Agricultural Enterprises**

Duration: 2 hours

Presenters: Laura Biasillo, CCE-Broome

Patty Albaugh, Serenity Pet Treats (farmers' market manager & vendor)

Costs: Printing for handouts

Charge: \$10/farm

Do you make a great agricultural product or provide an agricultural service but don't know how much you should charge? Do the many marketing channels available confuse you? Would you rather just have someone else market your product or service for you? Come to a workshop to learn about the different types of promotion available and how to decide on a pricing structure.

Notes for success: This workshop should be geared towards those who have already started their agricultural enterprise and have production issues under control. They should know their costs and bring it to the class to figure out the total cost of their products and what the market will bear.

Instructor: Laura Biasillo of Cornell Cooperative Extension Broome County could teach this, and it could include a farmer/market vendor who has a good handle on their costs and how they figure out costs to translate into a pricing structure.

### **9) Using Media to Promote Your Enterprise**

Duration: 1.5-2 hours

Presenter: Laura Biasillo, CCE-Broome

Costs: Printing for handouts

Charges: \$10/farm

Have you wondered how to use the different types of media to advantage for your agricultural enterprise? Do the timelines and methods confuse you? Come to a workshop and learn about utilizing media and get your questions answered.

Notes for success: This workshop needs a presenter who understands the marketing channels available (both free and paid) in Schuyler County and online and how to best utilize them.

Instructor: Laura Biasillo could teach this class, but since each county is a little different, having someone who is familiar with the smaller weekly newspapers and has relationship with the area media is the best fit.

## APPENDIX B

### **Methodology: Subjective scoring of the assets**

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Each asset was rated against each criterion through a subjective rating process. The number (0 - 100) expresses the level that the asset meets fullest sense of the criterion. The number is a straightforward rating on a scale, not a pass / fail grade.

This methodology of analysis is called a Quantitative Ranking Scale. At each intersection of a given criterion and asset, the number was assigned based on the pertinent factors such as extensiveness to which the asset is present, exclusivity to Schuyler County, observed facts, past experience as an agriculture specialist, and professional judgment.

Since it is subjective, each rating is open to interpretation. The ratings were not based on a formula, and so they represent an art as much as a science. These ratings, in the end, represent an impartial, professional opinion. Other agriculture development specialists or farm managers might have assigned slightly different values to each of the assets for each criterion.

#### Examples:

When grape microclimate and soils are rated according to their regional significance, they are rated 95 out of 100 since few other areas in the southern Finger Lakes have this resource available. It is very regionally significant. However, dairy farms scored 45 out of 100 because the dairy farm assets of Schuyler County are fairly typical in size and value within the region.

Agritourism development has a positive ripple effect on other businesses and rated 80 out of 100 regarding its potential to snowball geometrically into something bigger. By contrast, agritourism development really is not as available to many farm managers, so it received a rating of 55 out of 100.



	regionally significant	valued highly by non-agriculture	direct and indirect net income potential for farm owners	geographically distributed across the county	available annually and across seasons	has room to grow - not finite (linear growth)	can snowball into something bigger (geometric)	potential external funding support	accessible by many farm managers, regardless of scale	create more inter-farm networks
Available land in production	50	50	95	50	65	90	50	40	60	50
Forest land / timber	60	50	80	75	90	90	50	55	65	70
Grape microclimate and soils	95	80	65	35	65	50	50	55	30	50
Seasonal residents	65	40	60	35	40	45	40	35	50	40
Dairy farms	45	35	70	40	90	60	50	40	40	65
Emerging niche product farming	65	50	75	70	90	90	75	65	55	75
Agritourism development	75	65	70	75	65	90	80	65	55	85
Grassland farming	85	40	80	80	75	90	75	75	65	80
Tourists from cities and suburbs	90	80	85	65	65	65	70	65	55	50
Community sense of self-sufficiency	70	75	60	85	90	50	40	35	80	65
Grazing capacity for small ruminants	80	40	60	80	75	75	50	50	50	55
Existing economic development projects	60	70	40	45	80	70	50	75	40	70

## Ranking and prioritization of the assets

Two systems were used to rank the assets. One was to use the simple cumulative score - which assets got the most points for making the most of the criteria. The other ranking system involved the median or middle value, for each of the assets. Statistically, the median provides a re-ranking to indicate which assets had too broad a range of ratings.

In both measures for ranking, the same six assets came out in the top six positions.

	total score	median value
<b>Grassland farming</b>	745	77.5
<b>Agritourism development</b>	725	72.5
<b>Emerging niche product farming</b>	710	72.5
<b>Tourists from cities and suburbs</b>	690	65
<b>Forest land / timber</b>	685	67.5
<b>Community sense of self-sufficiency and sustainability</b>	650	67.5
Grazing capacity for small ruminants	615	57.5
Available land in production	600	50
Existing economic development projects	600	65
Grape microclimate and soils	575	52.5
Dairy farms	535	47.5
Seasonal residents	450	40

## APPENDIX C

### Summary table of actions

	Cornell Cooperative Extension	SWCD	SCOPED	Chamber of Commerce	ADFPB
<b>Focus #1: Stimulate and expand grassland farming in Schuyler County</b>					
Encourage the production of high-quality hay and forages	✘	✘			
Create standards of hay and forage production that exceed current practices. Encourage quantitative forage testing.	✘	✘			
Increase educational offerings / technical assistance for grazing farms. Actively network underused pasture resources with those seeking additional acreage.	✘	✘			
Foster biomass entrepreneurship by attracting university and private industry research plots, trials, and tours.			✘	✘	
Map parcels and determine potential acreage favorable for grass biomass feedstock development.		✘			✘
Explore the business feasibility of forming a proposed Perennial Biomass Energy Development Center.	✘		✘		
Solicit and attract small- and mid-scale biomass processing entities.			✘	✘	
Market Schuyler County as a host site for conferences, presentations, and educational offerings on grass biomass energy development.	✘		✘	✘	
<b>Focus #2: Stimulate authentic, customer-oriented agritourism development for tourists from cities and suburbs.</b>					
Develop and market visitor guides targeted to Northeastern suburban / urban travelers that highlight Schuyler County's farm destinations.				✘	
Develop Internet-based maps / profiles / navigation plans.	✘			✘	
Encourage authentic farm experiences, occasionally supplemented by purely entertainment activities.	✘			✘	
Increase farm tourism and wine tourism inter-networking.				✘	
Increase customer service training, incentive, and recognition programs.				✘	
<b>Focus #3: Deliberately encourage niche farm product development, new agriculture product ventures, and availability of specialized crops.</b>					
Develop a catalog of potential niche products that can be grown in Schuyler County; encourage farm managers to identify ones they would consider producing.	✘				✘
Promote practices that reduce financial risk and avoid venture debt.	✘		✘		
Create demonstration opportunities at public facilities to showcase and allow sampling or use of niche products.	✘		✘	✘	
Orient farm operators and associates to grant opportunities and typical selection criteria.	✘		✘		✘
Foster agriculture entrepreneurial activity with business research, networking, and identifying sources of capital.	✘		✘		
Advise farm entities about business plan development and presentation skills	✘		✘	✘	

	Cornell Cooperative Extension	SWCD	SCOPEd	Chamber of Commerce	ADFPB
<b>Focus area #4: Develop Schuyler County's private forest land to maximize financial equity, improve environmental integrity, and increase related income opportunities.</b>					
Create a county-wide program to improve overall woodlot management habits.	✘				✘
Develop direct-mailed directories of forest assistance, model woodlots, incentives and cost-share or tax abatement assistance for professional consulting.	✘	✘			✘
Actively support timber harvesting and milling businesses.			✘	✘	
Promote certification programs for sustainable forestry, logger training, and overall woodland management	✘				✘
Orient educational tourism opportunities toward woodland adventure trips (birding, hiking, natural history), forestry education, and woodland skill ventures.	✘			✘	
Increase the scope and delivery of educational programs about forest farming / special forest product development.	✘				
<b>Focus area #5: Capitalize on the tendency of Schuyler County residents toward self-reliance and sustainability practices.</b>					
Identify farms and families that engage in sustainable rural living; develop an educational and skill-sharing network among those desiring collaboration.	✘		✘		✘
Determine which farms and homesteads are interested and available to share self-reliance and permaculture expertise regionally as an entrepreneurial activity.	✘		✘		✘
Actively assist institutions and farmers in the procurement and distribution of local farm products.	✘			✘	✘
Introduce models and programs appropriate for agriculture that show practical utility of renewable and alternative energy systems.	✘		✘		✘
Seek and apply for funding opportunities to offset the costs of adopting energy efficiency and renewable energy technology.	✘		✘		
Total tally of recommended actions	23	5	14	13	10

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