



February 5, 2010

AgriBusiness gets boost at Tech City

KINGSTON – The former IBM facility here built mainframe computers, but its workers were still fed 7,500 meals-a-day. Now the facility, known as Tech City, has been recruiting tenants for many years to fill the space, whether it's for a call center to order electrical parts or for the manufacture of solar energy components.

And bypassed by efforts to keep this facility viable was the kitchen and cafeteria, complete with stainless equipment.



Luc Roel, left, of Farm to Table Co-Packers, and Congressman Maurice Hinchey, tour the kitchen facilities at Tech City.

But that, however, is about to change. That facility, which formerly kept IBMers productive at work, will become a center of activity for the Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation, and producers, primarily on the Route 209 corridor between Kingston and Ellenville, to get their products to market.

"I think is going to be major and positive element for the agricultural industry here," said Congressman Maurice Hinchey, who obtained \$350,000 in federal funding for the project. "I think it will allow the agricultural industry to expand and grow more products."

That corridor is one of Ulster County's top agricultural regions along with the apple producers along the Hudson River, and it was one of first bread baskets in the North American colonies.

Butter produced in is Marbletown was revered by the British royalty and the ruling overlords. Later the flatlands along the Esopus Creek fed the Continental Army soldiers as they fought the British to gain American independence.

"The agricultural industry here in the Hudson Valley is critically important to all of us," said Hinchey. "This is an agricultural industry that was one of the first and most effective in this part of the world."

Farm to Table Co-Packers will take over the kitchen facility and renovations are now underway to help create 16 jobs here. Farm to Table Co-Packers formerly rented space at Poughkeepsie's Hudson Valley Food Works facility, which served as an incubator and production area.

“It was fantastic because I didn’t have to spend any money on overhead. You rented space by the hour, and you produced,” said Luc Roels, of Farm to Table. “But as we got bigger and bigger and became more successful, the model started working against us, so we finally decided to start moving out.”

It took Roels a couple of years to come up with an expansion solution and even considered a former auto body shop to do so. But then he made a deal with Tech City.

“It was a hidden gem,” said Roels, as workers completed nearby renovations.

The facility at Tech City will also work as an incubator and processing area to help the Rondout Valley Growers Association, a consortium of farmers primarily in the towns of Rochester and Marbletown who produce products ranging from maple syrup, to fruits and vegetable to Black Angus beef.

“It helps in immeasurable ways,” said Susan Perrin, executive director of the Rondout Valley Growers Association “All of our growers need value-added products, and we need a processing kitchen for that. Just having this facility here will expand our farmers’ business.”