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Seed Money

Hinchey Visits Tech City, Funds Agribusiness Corridor

By Brian Rubin

KINGSTON – Congressman Maurice Hinchey visited Tech City on Friday, February 5, to talk about \$350,000 in federal seed money that's being planted into the region's agricultural business industry. The funding will go toward helping to establish an agribusiness corridor in Ulster County.



The Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation, or HVADC, will receive the funds in order to develop plans for a cooperative comprised of local agricultural businesses. The hope is to make the Hudson Valley "brand" a commercial force that can bring revenue and new jobs into the region.

The funding will be used in locations spanning the Route 209 corridor, from Kingston all the way down to Ellenville. In fact, one of the primary commitments of the spending is to rent space in Ellenville's soon-to-be-vacant Gillette Creamery facility. The Gillette property's cold-storage capabilities will provide much needed freezer space to local farms and other agricultural concerns that are forced to compost unused surplus crops.

The announcement of Ellenville-stalwart Gillette's forthcoming move to Gardiner hit in December of 2009, with questions of what was to be done with their facility going unanswered. However, with the commitment of these funds, it seems assured that the Gillette facility will not be mothballed like other abandoned properties in the area, like the empty Schrade and Hydro manufacturing plants. However, just what kinds of

opportunities the facility's new use will offer to residents in terms of jobs remains to be seen.

"Whether the entity that operates that cold-storage and distribution facility is HVADC, a sub-entity, or whether an operator will be brought in hasn't been determined yet," said March Gallagher, the Deputy Director of Planning for Economic Development in Ulster County. "And it doesn't make sense to determine that until you know what resources you have."

The funding will also go toward aiding Farm to Table, a local co-packing and agribusiness incubator company, in their move to Kingston's Tech City facility. Luc Roels, one of the company's co-founders, led a tour of Tech City's kitchen, which was currently under renovation to make way for Farm to Table.

Farm to Table works with local agricultural concerns to process and package their products, allowing the farms themselves to provide more resources to actually farming, while leaving the co-packers to deal with the headaches of packaging, FDA-approved processing, and the like.

Ulster County's Gallagher added that the county will be looking to tap other organizations for a match in funding to support the agribusiness corridor's development. These organizations could possibly include Empire State Development, the Catskill Watershed Company, or the federal office of Economic Development Administration, which is a part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"There's a lot of different pieces to the puzzle, and this is the first piece," she said.