

# Daily Freeman

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## News

### Agribusiness group will use TechCity space

By Mid-Hudson News Network

TOWN OF ULSTER — At the peak of employment at the former IBM plant here, the kitchen was serving 7,500 meals a day.

Since IBM left in the mid-1990s, the complex, now known as Tech City, has been recruiting tenants to fill former mainframe computer manufacturing space, whether it's for a call center to order electrical parts or for the manufacture of solar energy components.

Bypassed by efforts to keep the facility viable was the plant's kitchen and cafeteria, which came complete with stainless equipment. That, however, is about to change.

The kitchen, which formerly helped keep IBMers productive at work, will become a center of activity for the Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp., and to help producers, primarily along the U.S. 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 U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-Hurley, who secured \$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 of the North American colonies. Butter produced in Marletown was revered by the British royalty and the ruling overlords. Later the flatlands along the Esopus Creek fed the Continental Army as its soldiers 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 former IBM kitchen, and renovations are now under way to help create 16 jobs at the site. 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. He even considered a former auto body shop. But then he made a deal with Tech City.

“It was a hidden gem,” Roels said 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.”