

Plan aims to market food grown in Ulster

By Adam Bosch

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ULSTER — Agribusiness officials are hatching a plan to package and deliver more of Ulster County's farm products to big consumer markets, including New York City.

That effort received a boost Friday when Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-Hurley, announced a \$350,000 federal grant to help establish a "food corridor" along Route 209. Towns in that corridor — stretching from Ellenville to Kingston — encompass 58 farms, orchards and other agricultural businesses.

"It's going to strengthen our agriculture and make our agriculture stay here," Hinchey said of the corridor.

The money will go toward two projects aimed at packaging and storing food before it's delivered to buyers.

A company called Farm to Table Co-Packers is turning the former IBM kitchen at Tech City into a plant where locally grown produce will be washed, sorted and packaged. It will also rent part of the space to entrepreneurs who want to make cakes, pies and other finished products from their food. Renovations to the kitchen should be finished by March.

The second project, headed by the Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp., would use the Gillette Creamery building in Ellenville as a storage space for produce while it awaits shipping to buyers. Gillette is moving to Gardiner.

Todd Erling, executive director of HVADC, said the ability to package and store food are two of the crucial steps toward selling more local food to groceries, restaurateurs and other consumers.

The structure of this farm-to-buyer model still needs to be figured out, however. Agribusiness officials aren't sure how they'll market and deliver the food. They're also brainstorming the payment and profit system for farmers.

"There are a lot of pieces to the puzzle that we still have to fit," Erling said. "There's no pun intended here, but this is just the seed money to get us started."

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