



February 11, 2010

Food corridor' to grow in Ulster

Jim Gordon

A new initiative aided with federal funding and local produce is seeking to bring farm fare from the Hudson Valley to the markets and tables of the Big Apple.

A cold storage facility in Ellenville and a new food packaging and shipping facility at Tech City in Kingston are the bookends of the "food corridor" stretching along state Route 209 in Ulster County that is being coordinated with the aid of the Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Corp. (HVADC). The idea is to help farmers along the corridor and throughout the Hudson Valley to act cooperatively to provide the fresh produce that is increasingly being sought by consumers and to particularly target the huge New York City market.

"Agricultural growers are very, very independent, but we think it might be a good idea to cooperate with each other in the context of marketing products," said Congressman Maurice Hinchey speaking at a Feb. 5 news conference announcing procurement of \$350,000 in federal funds to serve as startup money for the two businesses and other organizational aspects of coordinating agriculture activity in the area.

"We need to work together to effectively modernize this industry and this outreach," Hinchey said. "These combined efforts will improve the ability to have their products marketed successfully especially in New York City."

In Ellenville, the Gillette Creamery building will provide a cold storage facility in a project coordinated by the nonprofit HVADC to let local growers store their produce prior to shipping to market or packaging facilities. The Gillette company is moving their operations to a larger facility in Gardiner.

At Tech City, a company called Farm to Table CoPackers (FTC) is converting a 20,000-square-foot kitchen that used to serve meals to IBM employees into a co-packing facility with kitchen rental space and an incubator facility for startup food entrepreneurs. The facility will be a full, production kitchen inspected by the New York state Department of Agriculture and Markets and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). FTC already has 16 employees that were working in another facility that it will retain and move to the Tech City building. The company also plans to add an additional nine or 10 jobs.

Todd Erling, HVADC executive director, said that it is crucial to be able to store and package food as part of the process of marketing produce to grocery stores, restaurants and other consumers. The details on how the new initiative will coordinate farmers and

growers and packagers and markets are still being worked out, but Erling said that the federal funds would allow the enterprise to get off to a strong start.