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Farm ventures to be discussed

Sustainable success is focus

By Sarah Bradshaw
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Hudson Valley Agricultural Partnership will host a conference highlighting sustainable farming ventures that are positive models to follow, including some in Dutchess and Ulster counties, in order to secure the future of farming communities.

"Agriculture in the Hudson River Valley: Success Stories from Our Own Backyard" will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 16 at Columbia Greene Community College, 4400 Route 23, Hudson.

The Hudson Valley's farms produce a diverse variety of food and agricultural products, including beef, apples, sweet corn, milk, cheese, vegetables, organic produce, poultry and wine.

The products contribute to the economy, environment, culture and quality of life. Yet, the problems facing farmers are numerous: decreasing farmland, increasing costs, aging population of farmers, reliance on immigrant labor, government regulations, food security, pests and disease control, global competition and natural disasters. Despite these hurdles, there are farming success stories of adaptability and innovation. The conference hopes to highlight the positives and provide resources that will contribute to more success stories in the future.

Farmers, leaders to meet

In the spirit of collaboration, Hudson Valley Agricultural Partnership will bring together farmers and farm leaders, including Doug Glorie of Glorie Farm Winery in Marlboro, Mary Ann Johnson of Red Hook and facilitator of the Keep Farming Project, Cari Watkins-Bates of Scenic Hudson and Patrick Manning of Hudson Valley Fresh.

Manning will talk about the creation of Hudson Valley Fresh, a milk cooperative devoted to linking local farms with local customers, with increased sales of 700 percent in the last year, he said.

"We have a great story to tell that the locals need to know," said Manning. "Farmers have been disappointed for so long. But this is really exciting. Hudson Valley Fresh is the start-up being talked about up and down the Northeast."

Other guest speakers include experts from the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

Discussion topics will center around farm profitability, farmland protection and agricultural economic development. Some specific talks include: "Web-based agricultural marketing," "Getting a better price for milk," "The New Farmer Development Project," "New Opportunities for Growing Grapes" and information on the newly formed Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation.

Todd Erling, executive director of Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp., will speak at the conference about retaining, expanding and attracting agribusinesses.

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