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For more information regarding agriculture economic and community development, visit the following resources on-line:

The Agriculture Economic and Community Development Clearinghouse

www.nyagdev.net

Cornell's Applied Economics and Management Department

www.aem.cornell.edu

Cornell's Community, Food, and Agriculture Program

www.CFAP.org

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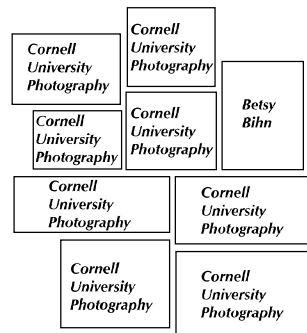
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defining *Farm & Food*

Mainstreaming Agricultural Economic Development



MAINSTREAMING AGRICULTURAL-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mainstreaming is reaching out to the larger economic development community. It can increase profit-making opportunities, increase financial and community support, and engender a positive outlook for the farm and food industry. Mainstreaming recognizes farm and food industries as fundamental, component parts of the economic development process. However, there are key words to be learned, issues to be reframed, and an altered image is required to mainstream or fully integrate agriculturally based industries into New York's current economic development agenda.

What is economic development?

Economic developers and the wider economic development community are job driven. Creating jobs, retaining jobs or attracting the businesses or people to ensure jobs is a standard measure of economic development. Heavy losses of New York manufacturing jobs have changed the conversation. While effort to attract new businesses continues, more emphasis has been placed on retaining existing businesses of all sizes and supporting what adds to their capacity to retain jobs.

Growing the farm and food sectors can create jobs, too, but more must be known about the influence of agriculturally based development on the retention of current jobs.

Economic developers have a growing appreciation for the contribution that agriculturally based industries make to the overall rural setting. Retaining jobs depends to some degree on a pleasant environment and a working landscape that benefits from the presence of active agriculture. Farmers enrich the wider community with the diversity they help create in communities.

But agriculture and food industries can spur economic development directly. Successful economic development in agriculture is exemplified by New York's value-added wine industry. About 30% of the grape crop goes to production of wine with a cash value in the \$350 mil. range. The industry achieves a higher profile because of its value as an engine for enhancing economic development, the jobs created, and contributions to attractive landscapes.

Food processing has appealing elements for economic development, especially when considering niche markets. It includes job creation and retention. Food processing uses the tools of economic development, such as loans and cooperatives. Food processing demonstrates the possibilities of value-added production. Adding value to raw farm commodities builds in the interconnectedness of agriculturally based industry and other industries.

A key factor for building success in farm and food industries is the images they create. Too often, the reference point is that farm work is hard, the industry is stagnating, and that its survival depends on preserving farmland in the rural landscape. While these facets of agriculture need continued attention, they help fuel the perception that farm and food industries should be taken off the table when any economic development strategy is formulated.

To change these perceptions, we need to change the message...

- Stress agriculture's importance but avoid repeating the unsubstantiated claim that agriculture is New York's largest industry.
- Use positive terms and less defensive terminology.
- Make sure that agriculture and food interests are at the table where economic development is discussed and planned. Look for the mutual wins.
- Come to the economic development table with a proper business plan. Today, probably less than 5% of the businesses in agriculture have a business plan.
- Present the economic development community with a broader industry focus; avoid infighting over farm size and definitions of a bona fide farmer.
- Think strategically about the critical mass that is required to support the industry and its infrastructure.

- Concentrate on a supply of "ready-to-go" projects that features a plan, cost outlines, timelines, and expected outcomes.
- Refine the open space concept to advance concepts of "working landscapes".

Agriculture needs to position its arguments with mainstream economic developers carefully and with clarity. Too often the message is confused and ambiguous. The benefits and costs of farm and food production must be spelled out honestly and clearly for a citizenry that is now often two or more generations removed from direct experience with farm and food production. Educators must rise to the occasion as well and assist in the effort to integrate food and agriculture into the economic development discussion.

