

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

USDA to fund innovative Food Hub Project in the Champlain Valley

ESSEX - The US Department of Agriculture has announced a \$95,000 grant to establish a shared-use commercial kitchen and food storage facility in Essex that will serve farmers and food entrepreneurs in the Champlain Valley region. The new venture, called The Hub on the Hill (The Hub), will offer co-packing, marketing, and business incubation services to those seeking to start or expand a food production business in the area.

The USDA funds will cover three quarters of the overall cost of the project and enable The Hub to aggregate, store, and process more than 50,000 pounds of local food into value-added products for distribution annually. Outreach efforts will engage grocery stores, food pantries, schools, and other institutions to expand market opportunities for these products.

Since 2009, the U.S. has seen a 75% growth in farmers markets nationwide and sales of local food rise to an estimated \$12 billion in 2014, much of it through sales from farms to local grocers, institutions and restaurants.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced nearly \$35 M nationally in new funding through four grant programs to support local and regional food systems, saying that strengthening local food systems is one of the four pillars of USDA's efforts to revitalize rural economies and communities. "USDA is helping to create economic opportunities for producers; increase access to fresh, healthy food for consumers; and connect rural and urban communities across the country," said Secretary Vilsack. "Each of the grants announced today targets a unique part of the growing market for local foods. We will continue supporting local and regional food systems, which are drawing young people back to agriculture, generating jobs, and improving quality of life in rural communities."

The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) applied for and was awarded the grant on behalf of The Hub owners and will work with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Essex County to create marketing relationships and help entrepreneurs seeking to develop food products for wholesale markets.

"The Hub is key to assisting the growing number of small farmers and food entrepreneurs in our region successfully create value-added food products and access wholesale markets," say co-owner Jori Wekin. "We just finished installing cold storage equipment funded by a grant from the Workforce Development Institute, and this new award will help us move forward quickly."

ANCA executive director Kate Fish said her organization is committed to increasing market opportunities for regional food producers. "The Hub will do just that, and we are proud to partner with them on this innovative project. Receiving this highly competitive federal grant demonstrates that this project is recognized as a critical piece in growing our regional food system."

According to Anita Deming, executive director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Essex County, The Hub project complements other programs linking local farmers with local and regional markets to enhance revenues and strengthen the county's agricultural economy. "We are pleased to support such an important project that will help our local farmers build their food businesses."

About ANCA: ANCA is an independent not-profit organization working to build dynamic local economies that sustain thriving communities in Northern New York. Since 1955, ANCA has leveraged the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars into the region in sectors that drive sustainable local economic development.

About Cornell Cooperative Extension: Cornell Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic vitality, ecological sustainability and social well-being and brings local experience and research-based solutions together, helping NY State families and communities thrive in our rapidly changing world.

For more information on the Hub on the Hill, contact Jori Wekin at hubonthehill@gmail.com or at [\(518\) 418-5564](tel:5184185564).

To learn more about ANCA's agriculture programs, contact program coordinator Josh Bakelaar at atjbakelaar@adirondack.org or [518-891-6200](tel:5188916200).

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