

**PRESS RELEASE: DATE**

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Note to reporters: Katherine Lang can put you in touch with local entrepreneurs for your area

**North Country Regional Foods Initiative Begins:  
Will Measure & Enhance Economic Impact of Local Products**

More and more farmers in Northern New York are selling the food they grow to local consumers. The 2007 Empire State Poll by the Cornell University Survey Research Institute showed that 78.5 percent of the New York State residents age 18 and older surveyed buy local foods (37.4 percent said they go out of their way to buy local food). But just how much revenue do the direct-marketed foods generate for the regional economy and is there room to expand the economic impact of locally-produced fresh and processed products? These are some of the questions the new North Country Regional Foods Initiative project will answer.

A team representing each of the North Country counties and Cornell University staff will assess the economic impacts of regional food production. A grant of \$60,000 in federal Economic Development Administration University Center funding is going directly to the Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations of Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties to collaborate with the Community and Rural Development Institute at Cornell University.

North Country Regional Foods Initiative Project Coordinator Katherine Lang expects the project will engage local farmers, food processors, and elected officials and community leaders who recognize the value of agriculture and farm-based food entrepreneurs. Lang says, "We will initially capture the impacts of current local food initiatives in the North Country and then offer training and provide educational materials to strengthen those efforts and extend the benefits they provide to the region. This project is meant to build on the strong agricultural base that already exists in the North Country and to add to it through increased and strategic investment in local food initiatives."

**Examples of Local Food Initiatives: Multi-County Adirondack Harvest**

The Adirondack Harvest local products initiative that began in Essex County in 2001 now has more than 174 participating farms in Essex, Clinton, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis,

St. Lawrence, and Warren counties. Adirondack Harvest promotes regional products through farm tours, farmers' markets and events, a website ([adirondackharvest.com](http://adirondackharvest.com)), newsletters and a farm-to-restaurant program. The array of local products includes apples and cider, baked goods made with locally-grown wheat, cold hardy grapes and wine, assorted condiments, dairy products, eggs, fruits and berries, herbs, honey, jams and jellies, maple syrup and confections, meats, and vegetables.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Essex County Executive Director Anita Deming, says, "One of the goals of Adirondack Harvest is to increase the opportunities to enhance profitable, sustainable agricultural production through the sale of high-quality food and farm products. Local consumers benefit from the expanded selection of fresh, locally-produced foods and from keeping local land in production. The North Country Regional Foods Initiative will measure the direct benefit to the region in terms of dollars and other economic impact factors."

**St. Lawrence County: North Country Grown Cooperative, Inc.**

Although honey producer Mark Berninghausen of Squeak Creek Honey Company, Brasher Falls (St. Lawrence County), NY, was selling to schools before the farm-to-school movement began, he says participating with Adirondack Harvest and the North Country Grown Cooperative, based in Canton, has "increased my direct market customer base to more colleges and restaurants, and has increased volume of sales. Although I like hands-on control of my product distribution, the warehousing and distribution made possible by the North Country Grown Cooperative has cost-effective advantages and I can see the regional foods marketplace getting even wider."

**Lewis County: Maple Weekend, Lowville Farmers' Market, Cream Cheese Festival**

An annual March Maple Weekend opens 14 sugarhouses in Lewis, Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties for direct sales. Maple Weekend Coordinator Barbara Zehr says the 2007 event brought an estimated 8,136 visitors to the maple producers with \$47,376 in sales reported for the sugarhouses, pancake houses and local businesses.

Zehr says, "The data from this visitor survey shows how the activity at the production sites impacts the economies of the local communities. We expect the North Country Regional Foods Initiative to broaden this type of data for Northern New York and to inspire additional local

investment in direct marketing opportunities not only for maple producers but for all types of agricultural producers and local food outreach and marketing efforts.”

Organic vegetable grower Dolores DeSalvo manages the Lowville Farmers Market that has grown from six sellers in 1988 to more than 25 vendors at the Lewis County Fairgrounds this year. DeSalvo says, “The market is growing to meet customer demand. We have seen as many as 1,000 people at the market in one day.”

DeSalvo says the gross income of the Lowville Farmers Market has steadily increased since 1997 when sales approached \$90,000. She adds that market vendors are seeing increasing use of Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program coupons by senior citizens and low-income families purchasing fresh and processed foods.

Lewis County Manager Joe Baruth says Maple Weekend, the Lowville Farmers’ Market and the recent Cream Cheese Festival are helping to increase tourism and revenues from bed and sales taxes.

“These local initiatives create opportunities for small entrepreneurs to sell their products not only to local folks, but also to visitors coming here from states away. Our chefs and restaurant owners and stay-at-home moms are looking at their choices to serve local, fresh-from-the-field and organically-grown produce,” Baruth says.

### **Jefferson County: Farmers’ Markets, CSA, Farm-to-School**

Vegetable grower Delta Keeney of Watertown, NY, participates in several farmers’ markets, a multiple grower CSA (Community Supported Agriculture, where shares of the harvest are purchased by members at the start of the season), and farm-to-school sales in Jefferson County.

“The local food initiatives in Jefferson County intertwine and have amazing support from agencies such as Cooperative Extension, the Office for the Aging, the Community Food Security Program, Public Health and Social Services agencies, and the Jefferson County Agricultural Development Program. The CSA and farm-to-school program are guaranteed sales for the growers,” Keeney says.

Keeney says that the pilot program encouraging moderate to low-income families to redeem food stamps and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons at local farmers' markets is in its third year and has increased grower sales. She says the six growers participating in the Miracles by the Acres CSA have all increased the size of their gardens to meet sales demand and that farm-to-school sales doubled for the participating growers in 2007.

At South Jefferson Central School, Food Service Director Cindy Harnas says, "We have increased our purchasing of local foods by seventy percent over the past six years. We served much more local produce during our summer feeding program this year and this fall everything on the salad bar and for vegetables in the serving line is purchased from six local farmers,"

Harnas says the South Jefferson students are accepting the local foods and willing to try new items such as the sweet peppers and lemon cucumbers, and her staff is excited to work with the local farmers who are also "our neighbors."

The funding for the North Country Regional Foods Initiative comes from the U.S. Department of Commerce through the Economic Development Administration University Center designated for New York State at Cornell University and hosted by Cornell's Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI). For more information on CaRDI, contact Rod Howe, 607-255-2170, [rlh13@cornell.edu](mailto:rlh13@cornell.edu) or visit [www.oed.cornell.edu](http://www.oed.cornell.edu).

To learn more about the North Country Regional Foods Initiative Project, contact Katherine Lang at 315-379-9192 x261. # # #