

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

### **Identified from Ulster County Survey Information**

#### **Strengths**

- Agricultural districts are helpful.
- Clean air and clean and abundant water.
- Climate conditions are still good for growing.
- Close proximity to markets, including NYC.
- Direct sales are an important part of agriculture in the County.
- Farmers enjoy being able to work outdoors.
- Farms are historically significant.
- Farms provide local food, and jobs and contribute to local economy, contribute to community character, are part of the County's cultural heritage, have environmental benefits, and require less public infrastructure and services.
- Friendly zoning laws (in some places).
- Good soil and water quality.
- Many agritourism opportunities.
- Many tourism opportunities.
- Supportive networks and organizations exist for agriculture and educational opportunities exist in County for farmers to take advantage of.
- The public values locally grown food.
- There is a diversity of crops, products, and ag-related activities in Ulster County.
- There is an appreciation of the beautiful landscape in Ulster County.
- There is good access to a consumer base seeking local organic food.
- There is much public support for agriculture.
- Ulster County has a good quality of life.
- Younger demographics have disposable income able to be spent on local ag products

#### **Weaknesses**

- Loss of economic viability and profitability of farms
  - Production costs relative to price received for agricultural products – stagnated prices for products.
  - Farm equipment and machinery repair costs are very high.
  - Difficulty finding labor (skilled or unskilled)
  - Cost of labor (skilled or unskilled) is very high.
  - Property taxes are very high.
  - Land prices are very high.
  - Lack of and cost of farmworker housing
- Access to local food may not be easy in all locations in the County.
- Availability of agriculture-related services and supplies for farms is getting more difficult.
- Changing weather patterns and weather extremes.

- Competition among some farms.
- Concerns about the future viability of farming.
- Development pressure and conversion of farmland to non-farm purposes
- Fewer people are interested in farming as a career.
- Increased pest or disease pressure.
- Lack of farm transition planning
- Lack of farmland protection programs
- Lack of full understanding of New York Agricultural Districts
- Lack of understanding about agricultural practices especially with second home or new landowners who rent land to farmers and with elected and appointed officials.
  - Legislative changes impact agriculture negatively (such as overtime rules for farmworkers).
- Loss of farmland
- Needs better access to USDA and other programs.
- Regulations, both locally, State, and Federal, adversely impact farm profitability.
- Sense of feeling abandoned by government representatives.

## **Opportunities**

- Promote locally grown food including the wide diversity of crops available in the County and agritourism opportunities and where they are available to buy.
- Highlight locally grown food's nutritional value.
- Promote locations where local food can be bought, including on-farm, independent grocery stores, chain grocery stores, and CSAs.
- Find more ways to make it easier to access and buy local food.
- Enhance farmland protection programs, including public funding for such programs, use of sale, transfer, or donation of development rights, financial support for attracting and keeping new farmers, tax-funded preservation programs, and lower taxes.
- Develop incubators, incentives, and other programs that decrease the cost of land for farming activities.
- Promote regenerative farming practices.
- Develop marketing and educational programs that promote and educate the public about Ulster County farms/farming including community gardens, educational resources, and programs to promote farming practices among residents, including home gardening, beekeeping, and raising chickens.
- Develop outreach specifically to local elected officials about agriculture, its role in their community, and the needs of agriculture. Increase dialogue between farmers and government officials. This should include recommendations for enhancing zoning and other land use regulations to be farm-friendly.
- Develop tax reductions and other incentives to help farmers stay farming.
- Increase funding for these recommended ag-related programs.

- Promote climate-resilient farming techniques and methods and offer educational programs to help farmers learn about these.
- Promote and provide information and training on the New York State Agricultural Districts Program and the NYS Ag Value Assessment program.
- CCE and SWCD should continue to evaluate and promote new crop/market opportunities and have roles in helping farmers transition to new breeds or crops and training for the next generation of farmers.
- Work with local agencies to provide farm business planning assistance.
- Incentives to help farmers invest in needed infrastructure upgrades such as new facilities (cold storage, packing), replanting orchards, sharing equipment, and other programs to reduce costs.
- Work with local assessors to ensure that farm buildings and related structures used in the farm operation are assessed as part of the farm operation, not as a commercial use.
- Develop programs and technical expertise to help farms develop transition plans.
- Increase affordable and quality housing opportunities for farmworkers.
- Increase assistance to capital financing.
- Increase aggregation and food hub opportunities.
- Provide model leases to enhance farm rental land opportunities and stability of use of those lands over time.
- Protect and enhance county and local right-to-farm laws.
- Enhance young farmer programs that attract and keep young farmers in Ulster County.
- Farming can address climate change and resiliency.

### **Threats**

- Opposition to using solar on farmlands
- Changing weather patterns
- Lack of profitability