

Sowing the Seeds for Southtowns Agribusiness

An Assessment of Farms and a Plan for the Future

March
2009

A report submitted by
the University at Buffalo Regional Institute
to the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition

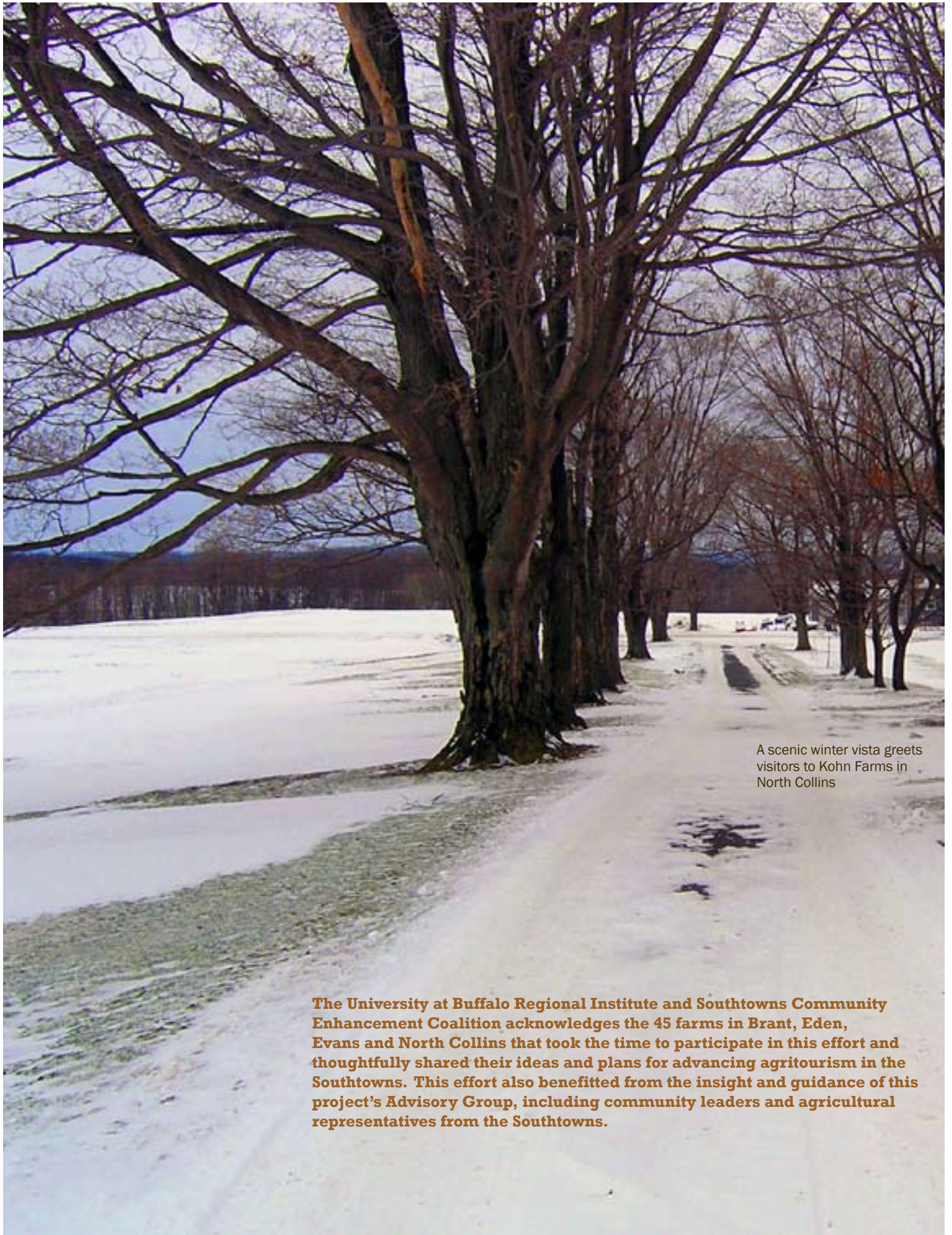


Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition

Village of Angola Town of Brant Town of Eden Town of Evans
Village of Farnham Town of North Collins Village of North Collins

UB Regional Institute
University at Buffalo *The State University of New York*





A scenic winter vista greets visitors to Kohn Farms in North Collins

The University at Buffalo Regional Institute and Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition acknowledges the 45 farms in Brant, Eden, Evans and North Collins that took the time to participate in this effort and thoughtfully shared their ideas and plans for advancing agritourism in the Southtowns. This effort also benefitted from the insight and guidance of this project's Advisory Group, including community leaders and agricultural representatives from the Southtowns.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	2
II. Scope and Methodology.....	5
III. Farm Overview.....	7
IV. Agritourism in the Southtowns - The Current Picture.....	10
V. Farm Futures - Perspectives and Plans.....	15
VI. Farms as Tourism Businesses - Assessing Capacity	19
VII. Sowing the Seeds - Opportunities for Growth.....	24
Appendices	
VIII. Appendix A - Agritourism Resource Guide.....	36
IX. Appendix B - Bibliography.....	41

A historic farmhouse welcomes visitors to Eden's Westview Farms & Greenhouses, which features an extensive greenhouse as well as cattle, fruits and vegetables

Geraniums for sale at Brockman's Greenhouse in Eden



Introduction

Awald Farms in North Collins provides u-pick berries in the summer, while fall patrons can buy giant pumpkins or tour a corn maze

A herd of buffalo graze at A&S Buffalo Ranch in Evans





Introduction

From the sloping cornfields of Eden Valley to the vineyard-covered lake plains of Brant, southern Erie County is a pastoral escape on the edge of the Buffalo Niagara region's urban core. More than 150 farms dot the four towns of Brant, Eden, Evans and North Collins, representing one of New York State's most diverse concentrations of commodities, including vegetables, fruit, dairy cattle and other livestock such as buffalo and alpaca, greenhouse goods and gardens, maple syrup and honey. For nearly two hundred years, these farms have played a central role in supplying food to the population centers of the region and across the U.S., while sustaining an important piece of the region's rural and agricultural heritage and contributing to its economic vitality.



Cornfields in Eden
Copyright Diane B. Held, American Farmland Trust.

Yet the decades-long siege on farms continues, nationally as well as regionally, with farm survival threatened by challenging economics, including rising production costs and fierce global competition, infringing development and a short supply of next-generation farmers. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of Erie County farms declined 6 percent, a rate exceeding that of New York State and most of the surrounding counties in Western New York.¹

As a result, farms are increasingly turning to alternative enterprises, one of the most promising of which is agricultural tourism, a burgeoning market drawing visitors to farms to reconnect with rural heritage and working farms. Agritourism experiences are engaging and authentic, from tasting fresh, local foods, to learning about how food is grown and harvested, to exploring and recreating in natural, rural landscapes. Approximately one-third of the U.S. population, or 63 million Americans, visited farms annually during a three-year period (2000-2003), according to a national survey.²

Growth in this market is fueled by a complementary tourism niche – culinary tourism. The Travel Industry Association of America reported in 2007 that nearly one out of five Americans participated in culinary tourism experiences such as wine trails, farmers' markets and unique dining.³ Moreover, increasing numbers of “locavores” are supporting local farms for fresh, healthful and environmentally-friendly food choices – even at a premium price. Finally, increased travel by car, demand for “one-tank” getaways and growing agritourist markets, including retiring baby boomers, point to further expansion of this industry.

Farmers engaging in agritourism are reaping tangible benefits, including diversified income and a buffer from fluctuating markets, new opportunities to engage family members and children in farm operations, and increased public appreciation of agriculture and agricultural issues. Rural communities and their surrounding regions are enjoying renewed economic vigor, preservation of farmland and sustained agricultural heritage.

¹ 2007 Agricultural Census, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service Information.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Recreation Survey.

³ Travel Industry Association of America, “Comprehensive Culinary Travel Survey Provides Insights on Food and Wine Travelers.”

Judging by the well-stocked produce stands that line Southtowns roads during peak growing seasons, and the farms tours, garden walks and agricultural festivals available to visitors, the Southtowns has already begun to tap this market. Yet developing a premier destination for agritourism is a complex undertaking involving the full range of tourism elements, from marketing and wayfinding to capital improvements on farm properties and customer service training. To take agritourism to the next level, however, Southtowns community leaders are in need of a fuller understanding of the range of offerings available and the area's capacity in essential visitor-readiness elements.

As the first step of a broader agribusiness development initiative, the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition, representing the four towns of Brant, Eden, Evans and North Collins and the encompassed villages of Angola, Farnham and North Collins,

partnered with the University at Buffalo Regional Institute to conduct a survey of farms. Administered between November 2008 and January 2009, the effort engaged 45 farms across the four-town area to collect information on the visitor services offered, farms' interest in expanding or developing new agribusinesses, and the business and tourism capacity of farms. The following analysis presents survey findings and outlines recommendations for strategic expansion of the area's agritourism market.

This analysis builds on a foundation of tourism planning in the Southtowns (**Figure 1**) and lays the foundation for the effort's next phase, which will link farms to tools for expanding or starting an enterprise, such as marketing and business planning assistance, support for farm collaboration, guidance in navigating regulatory requirements and assistance in securing financial resources.

FIGURE 1





Stephan Hay Co. in Eden

Scope and Methodology

Peter F. Gugino Farms in Brant grows wheat, rye, strawberries and grapes



Thomas Lamoreaux, owner of Eden Valley Alpacas, shows off his farm's colorful peacock



An Eden farm offers a scenic overlook of the region

Copyright Diane B. Held, American Farmland Trust

Concord Nurseries in North Collins operates an extensive wholesale enterprise, including trees, shrubs and raspberry and gooseberry plants, toured occasionally by student groups



Farm Overview



TC Horse Stables, a horse-boarding operation in Brant, has offered school tours and demonstrations of horseshoeing

Ronald Wittmeyer, Jr. Dairy Farm in North Collins raises 150 head of cattle





Farm Overview

Those farms that participated in the survey effort comprise a diverse sampling of the Southtowns' agricultural community, varying in the commodities produced, farm acreage, annual sales, the number of years in operation, ownership structure and geographic location.

Represented in the 45 farms are 13 vegetable or fruit farms, nine dairies, seven greenhouses and nurseries, four livestock operations, five multi-purpose farms, two horse stables and boarding houses, two hay farms, one egg farm, one maple sugar shack and one apiary. Together, these farms produce more than 60 different commodities. Of the 45 farms, there are 28 with existing agritourism enterprises. Another 10 farms are considering developing a tourism operation.

A century of farming traditions are represented in these farms, with 10 of the 45 founded before 1900. Farm operators are seasoned at their trade – two out of three operators have 20 or more years of experience. Not surprisingly, then, most operators are advanced in age. Seventeen owners and operators – more than one-quarter of the total – are age 60 or older; another 33 farmers are between ages 45 and 59 (**Figure 5**).⁴ With many farmers noting a lack of next-generation farmers, this trend points to a major threat to the future of farming in the Southtowns.

Farms vary widely in terms of size, though more than half have fewer than 100 acres. Farms are similarly diverse in terms of annual sales, with just as many small-scale enterprises as there are major farms. In terms of farm finances, these farms are nearly universally in the black. All but a few participating farms have positive debt-to-asset ratios and positive net incomes for the last year, although many operators noted a generally difficult economic environment for farms.

A majority of the farms are structured as sole proprietorships, the least formal business organization. Not surprisingly, then, many farms are family-operated, with farming as the proprietor's main occupation. Just 13 of the 45 farm operators surveyed do not consider farming their main occupation. Notably, operators of 10 farms turned to farming, and in some cases agritourism, after retiring from another occupation.

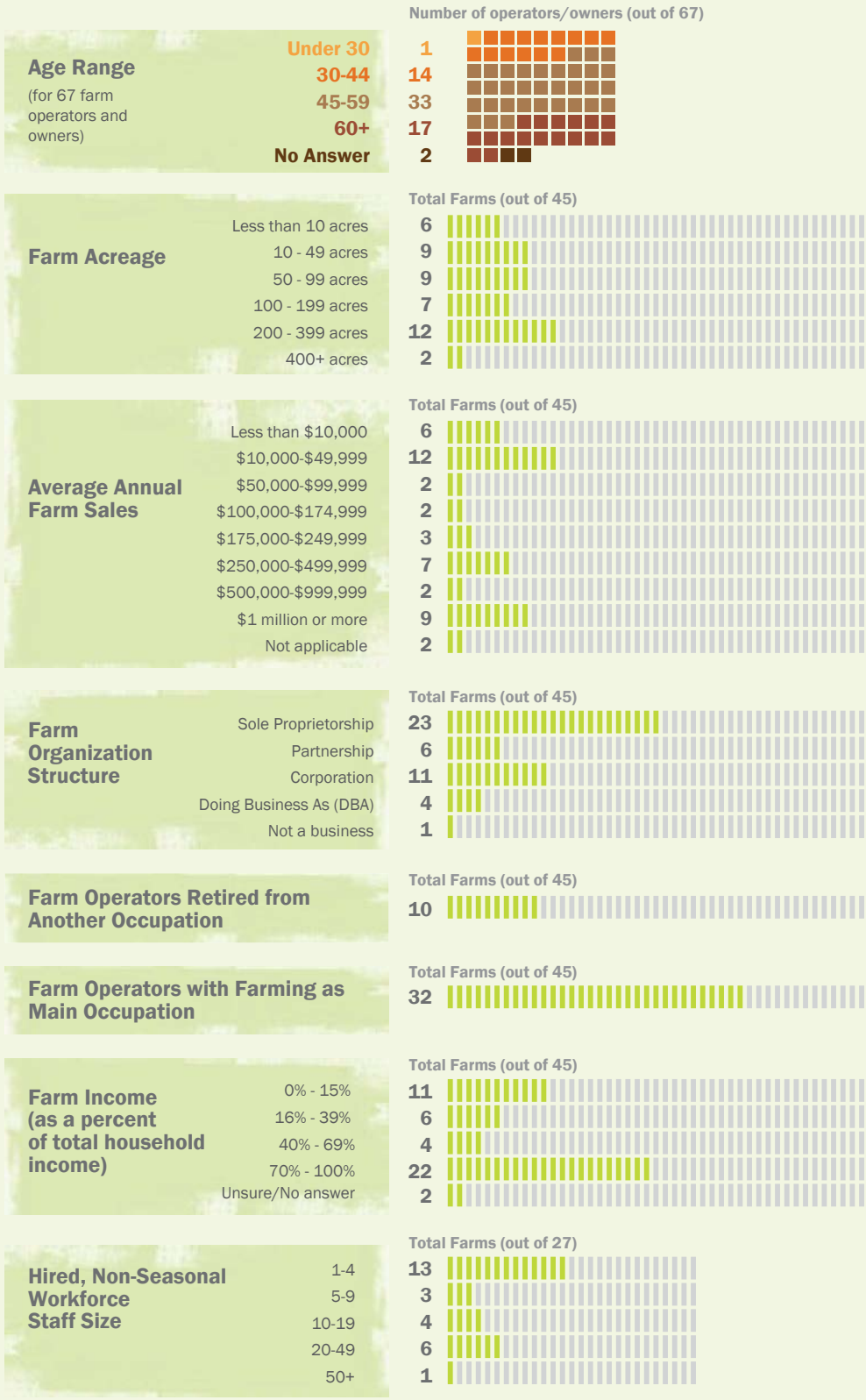
The more than 100 farm operators opting not to participate in the survey effort either did not respond to inquiries or indicated a lack of interest, lack of time, advanced age, or plans to retire or sell the farm. Many of these farms could represent a potential audience for the future once agritourism is further developed in the Southtowns and their potential role in the market becomes clearer.

Farm income is the main source of household income for nearly half of the surveyed farms, while 11 of the 45 farms bring in 15 percent or less from farm sales.

Those farms that do employ non-family labor have small workforces - nearly half support only one to four employees. Seasonal labor is a critical component of farm labor support, with 20 of the 45 farms employing such workforces.

⁴ Age data were collected for all farm operators and owners; there are 67 operators and owners affiliated with the 45 farms.

FIGURE 5
Profile of Farms in the Southtowns





Kwilos Brothers Farm sells produce, flowers and value-added products at its farm stand in Evans

Copyright Kwilos Brothers Farm

Colorful fall mums on display at Agle's Farm Market in Eden

Copyright Diane B. Held, American Farmland Trust



Agritourism in the Southtowns – The Current Picture



Norbert Gabel and his children welcome visitors to their home in North Collins to purchase freshly-tapped maple syrup

Alpacas graze at Eden Valley Alpacas, where visitors can browse the gift shop for alpaca wool clothing and yarns, tour the farm and learn about what's involved in breeding and raising alpaca



Activities and Offerings.

There is a diverse base of agritourism activity already taking place in the Southtowns. Visitors to the Southtowns can choose from nearly two dozen different activities, including farm tours, horseback riding, corn mazes, hayrides, produce stands, u-pick services, gift shops, farm method demonstrations (cow-milking, cider pressing, alpaca shearing), on-farm festivals, gardening workshops and historic farm equipment displays (**Figure 6**). See also **Case Studies: Experiencing Agriculture in the Southtowns, pp 12, 14.**

A closer look reveals farm tours are the most commonly offered activity – all but seven of the farms offer tours, including nine farms that extend tours to school groups. Most of these tours are informal, with all but one farm requiring visitors to call ahead to schedule the tour. Tours are nearly universally operator-led as opposed to self-guided.

Retail sales are also a prevalent agritourism activity in the Southtowns. Nineteen of the 28 farms offer retail services, including direct produce sales from roadside produce stands (13 farms) and u-pick operations (seven farms). U-pick services place visitors directly in the fields to select their own berries, apples, pumpkins or even fresh-cut flowers. Twelve farms offer value-added products for sale, including jams, ciders, salsa, baked goods, fudge, garden and floral crafts and handwoven fabrics. Several farms operate gift shops out of their residences, where products from syrups to fabrics to crafts are displayed for purchase, while others have designated markets. Seven farms engage in both produce sales and value-added retail.

Eleven farms offer educational activities, including gardening workshops, farm method demonstrations and other programs targeted to children. Many

**FIGURE 6
Existing Visitor Services in the Southtowns**



of these services are provided as part of farm tours and farm festivals. Demonstrations and exhibits offering an up-close-and-personal glimpse of life on a working farm include cow milking and calf feeding, gardening methods, fiber shearing, food storage and processing, cider-pressing and traditional farming methods. Among the farms' historic resources are antique tractors, a horse-drawn plow, distinctive barns and farmhouses and even an outdoor bread stove from the 19th century. Other farms use highly specialized, modern equipment for planting, harvesting and storing crops.

"Agritainment" activities, typically catering to the family market, include hayrides, corn mazes and on-farm festivals. There are a limited number of farms – just six – offering these services in the Southtowns. Farm festivals include annual fall festivals, special events for school children and farm open houses, with other one-time events. Several of these farms also offer petting zoos, hayrides and a corn maze.

Tourists looking for outdoor recreation – from hiking to cross-country skiing – in a farm setting in the Southtowns might be disappointed. Only four farms offer any of these activities. There are two farms with horseback riding, one farm offering fee fishing and another advertising wildlife observation (diverse wildlife, from waterfowl to coyote, can be observed on many farms, although some operators did not consider this a visitor attraction). The lack of recreational opportunities is despite rich natural resources on these farms – 23 farms have trails on their property, 33 have forested land, and all but three farms have creeks, streams or wetlands running through their property.

The peak seasons are summer and fall, although many operate in the spring and several are open to the public on a limited basis during the winter months for Christmas retail, value-added product sales or special-request farm tours. Hours of operation vary, with some requiring customers to set appointments before visiting and others, particularly those with farm markets or retail stands, holding more regular hours, especially during the peak season.

Enterprise Profiles. Southtowns farms have extensive experience in hosting on-farm visitors. Thirteen of the 28 existing agritourism operations have 20 or more years in the business. Looking ahead, these farms expect to grow their agritourism enterprise – operators for 16 of the 28 farms indicated at least some interest in diversifying and expanding.

Most agritourism operations in the Southtowns are limited in terms of the number of services available. Eleven of the 28 farms offer just one or two services, most commonly farm tours, farm

Experiencing Agriculture in the Southtowns

Our Family's Harvest Market

During the peak season, Our Family's Harvest Market in Brant is packed with colorful produce and flowers. Open all day every day during the height of the season, the market operates with an honor system. The farm has hosted an open house and fall festival with hayrides, a corn tepee, farm animals, and cider, produce and crafts for sale. Owners Marty and Carolyn Rosiak would like to expand the event and make it an annual affair. Our Family's Harvest Market has also participated in the Hamburg farmers' market since 1988.



Kwilos Brothers Farm

Visitors stopping at Kwilos' market in Evans can shop for annuals, browse aisles stocked with tomatoes, peppers, sweet corn, green beans, cucumbers, pickles and value-added products such as jams, honey and crafts. In season, visitors can cut their own flowers or pick pumpkins. Operator Joseph Kwilos partners with other Evans farms, swapping produce for retail, and hands out brochures for the Tomato Fest in Brant. They would like to open a second roadside stand and possibly make their own maple syrup. They are also open to a farm tour. Possibly one of the original farms in Evans, Kwilos' farmhouse dates back to the 1850s.

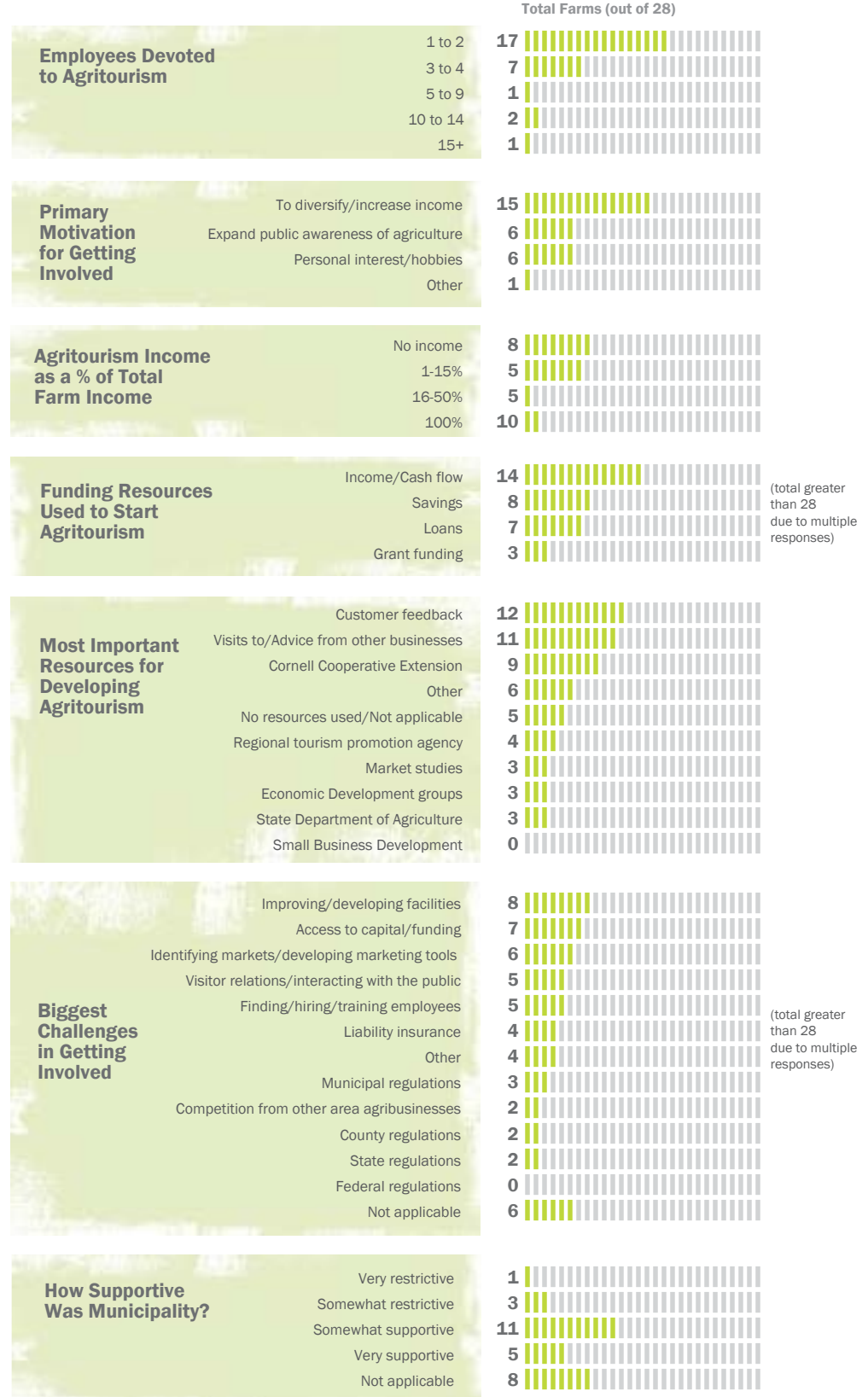
stands or u-pick activities. Agribusinesses are supported overwhelmingly by family members, and 17 of the 28 agritourism enterprises devote only one or two people to managing the operation (**Figure 7**).

A slight majority of farms identified income diversification as the primary driver in their decision to add visitor services, but non-monetary factors were equally motivating. Twelve farms selected either expanding public awareness of agriculture or developing personal hobbies or interests, an indication of how deep farming traditions run in this community. Indeed, many of those farms offering limited services are large wholesale operations or commercial enterprises that provide occasional farm tours as a public service for community, church and school groups. Others include farms whose operators are retired or fully employed off the farm and are simply pursuing hobbies. These farms comprise the bulk of those not deriving any earnings from their agritourism operations (eight farms).

For those farms that do generate agritourism income, its significance varies in terms of overall farm finances – five farms generate between 1 percent and 15 percent of overall farm revenues from agritourism, and five derive from 20 percent to 50 percent. This reflects in some cases small agritourism operations, but also the relative insignificance of the enterprise as an income source for larger farms that derive most farm income from wholesale retail. Several farms did note that agritourism efforts can be time consuming while yielding little in return.

However, agritourism is the primary enterprise for 10 operations, generating 100 percent of all farm-related earnings. Among these are full-retail enterprises as well as farms whose operators are retired or employed elsewhere but manage to

FIGURE 7
Existing Visitor Services in the Southtowns



leverage some earnings from their pursuit of hobbies or personal interests. Generally, revenues are obtained primarily through farm retail sales – only one farm charges a general admission fee, and even school tours and field trips are mostly free.

Farms tapped a variety of resources to get their agritourism operations off the ground. While six of the 28 farms needed no financial resources to get started, those that did turned most frequently to their own income or cash flow (14 farms) and savings (eight farms) or secured loans (seven farms). Just three farms obtained grant funding to support the initial stages of agritourism development.

Customers and other farm and business owners in the community were the top two resources from which agritourism operators sought advice in the beginning stages of developing their businesses. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County also played a key consulting role. Notably, several farms employed no resources at all, and very few turned to key business development tools such as market studies or small business development centers. Moreover, identifying markets and developing marketing tools were identified by farm operators as one of the top three challenges to entering the agritourism market, suggesting an important gap in this business capacity.

Other challenges encountered by farms during the start-up process include access to capital and, closely related to this, improving physical structures on the farm. Approximately two out of three farms found their respective municipality either somewhat supportive or very supportive in developing the enterprise, although several enterprises (e.g., those offering occasional informal tours) have not required municipal involvement.

Experiencing Agriculture in the Southtowns

Zittel's Country Market

Throughout its peak season, Zittel's Country Market features fresh produce, from peppers to pumpkins, flowers and a variety of value-added products, including jams, baked goods, locally-produced foods, crafts and garden décor. Every September Zittel's kicks off its fall festival, featuring a straw maze, pedal tractor pull, petting zoo, pumpkin painting, food vendors, themed exhibits and educational seminars. The market's school field trip program hosts 2,500 children a year, treating them to various activities and lessons on a range of farming methods, including vegetable harvesting and the role of bees in agriculture. The market, located in Hamburg just north of Eden, is a key component of Eden's Amos Zittel & Sons farm, a major flower and produce wholesaler.



Copyright Zittel's Country Market



The Lord's Garden

Strolling through lush perennial gardens, taking in lectures on native plants and biodiversity, and even watching historical reenactments, are among the experiences offered to visitors of The Lord's Garden in Eden. Groups can join for a formal tea in the residence and then browse the shop for antiques or garden gifts. Owners Mary Jane and Michael Bolo partner with a bed & breakfast in North Collins to share visitors, and market their services on their Web site. They are looking forward to diversifying gardens and expanding garden paths, as well as offering more lectures on birding and other gardening-related topics.



Copyright The Lord's Garden



Hilltop Dairy in Evans plans to develop a Christmas tree farm, with baked goods and holiday gifts for sale



A charming rural setting surrounds Sunshine Dried Flowers, which would like to develop an agritourism enterprise that offers flowers for sale and welcomes artists and photographers to the property

Farm Futures – Perspectives and Plans



In addition to on-site retail, Chiavetta's Potatoes & Greenhouse in Evans sells potatoes to many local restaurants

Richmond Dairy in North Collins provides farm tours and cow-milking demonstrations by request





Farm Futures – Perspectives and Plans

Operators' Outlook. Farms are looking ahead with concern for the future of agriculture. More than half of all farms (25 farms) are either concerned or very concerned about the financial outlook of their operations, with rising costs for everything from fuel to manure to crop sprays by far the chief concern (**Figure 8**). Although several farm operators indicated they will pass their farm on to their children, these were in the minority. Indeed, challenges related to labor, including the lack of farm heirs, was identified as a key threat to the sustainability of farms. In general, children are pursuing non-farm careers, and attracting employees is complicated by negative perceptions of farm work; new policies on migrant labor are also hampering farm businesses. Regulations and municipal and state taxes were also cited as major threats to farm profitability and survival. "Other" factors mentioned included the difficult dairy market, local competition, weather, insects and taxes in general.

Yet farm operators remain committed to agriculture. More than three-quarters of those surveyed (34 farms) are either satisfied or very satisfied with their farm. Indeed, a majority of farms expect to grow. Sixteen of the 28 farms offering visitor services are considering expanding their enterprises. Of those farms not currently engaged in agritourism, more than half are interested in adding visitor services and another is considering the prospect.

"There are only so many hours in a day."
- Brant farm owner on why he has not ventured more into agritourism

The 19 farms that will hold the line on their agritourism operators or stay out of the market altogether noted similar factors behind their decisions. Farm operators simply are too busy (seven farms said they lack time) or do not have enough labor (four farms). Many

operators said farm chores are time-consuming, while others are balancing farm responsibilities with off-farm employment.

There are notable differences in farms' perceptions of challenges depending on whether they have any agritourism experience. Operators of those enterprises that do not plan to grow in several

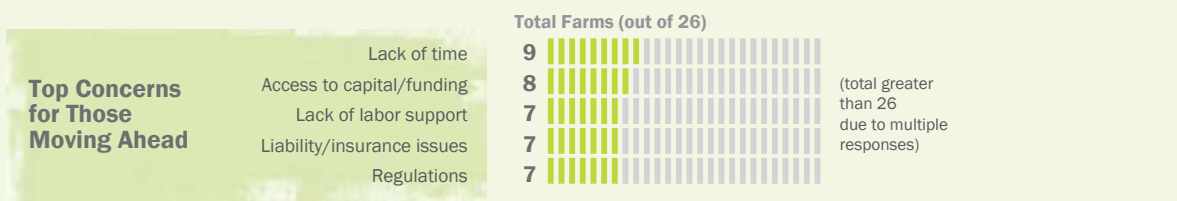
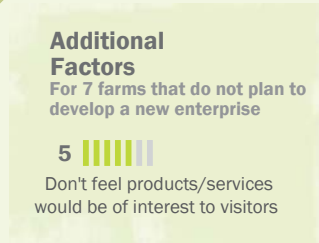
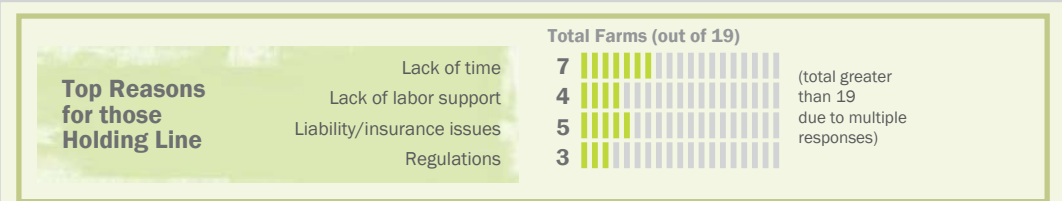
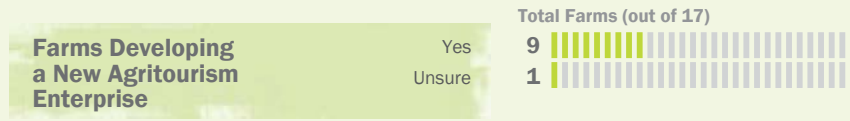
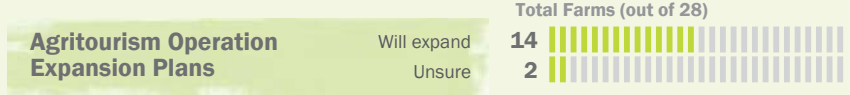
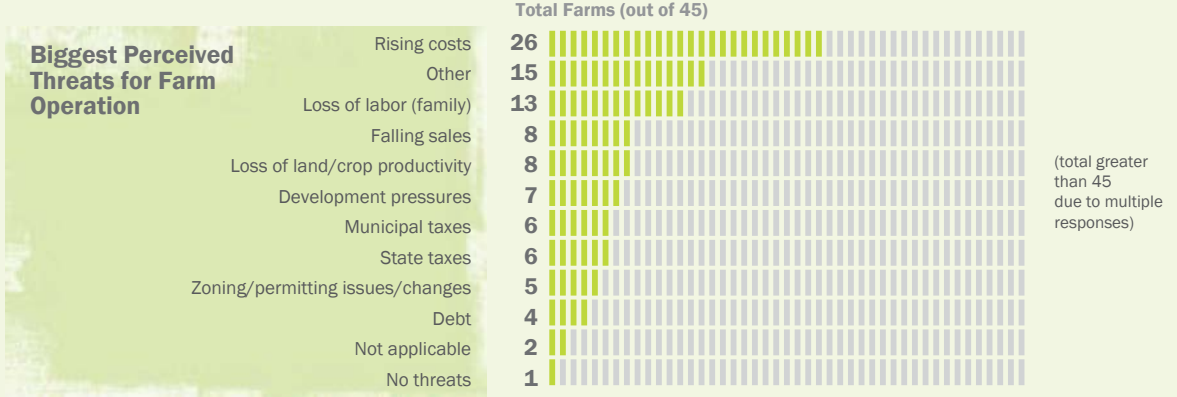
cases said they are satisfied with the way things are. They also said a lack of capital, the bad economy and conflicts with the main farm are behind their decision to stay put. Those farms that do not wish to venture into agritourism are not as concerned about capital – suggesting a potential capacity to tap – but instead feel they do not have anything to offer visitors, either because their crops are unexciting or their operation is too limited (several dairies said their commodity is not conducive to retail, while another who grows hay said he "has nothing to offer" visitors). Also, non-tourism operations are more likely than their more seasoned agritourism counterparts to worry about liability issues (comprising four of the five farms citing this factor). This discrepancy suggests such obstacles may be more a matter of perception than of reality. The operators of three farms plan to sell their farms or retire, and therefore will not grow or add a new enterprise.

Many of the same factors preventing farms from expanding or developing new agribusinesses still intimidate those that are considering moving forward. Access to time, capital and labor are the top challenges foreseen by farms planning expansions or new enterprises. Liability is also a chief concern for both types of farms, largely because planned activities are those that require

Similar to existing agritourism businesses, farms looking to enter this market are as equally motivated by income diversification (4 out of 10 farms) as they are by non-monetary factors:

- **expanding public awareness of agriculture (3 out of 10 farms)**
- **developing personal interests (2 out of 10 farms)**
- **engaging family members or children in the farm operation (1 out of 10 farms)**

FIGURE 8
Farm Operators - Perspectives on the Future



more protection. Again, regulations are more intimidating to farms that would be new to agritourism, though they are still a factor for existing enterprises. New enterprises pointed to regulations in general and more specifically federal regulations such as GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) for food quality and safety.

Farm Ideas and Plans. Many of the 26 farms considering adding to an existing enterprise or starting a new venture outlined their ideas during the survey process. Expanding farms discussed various capital plans, including:

- improving u-pick produce weighing stations
- building an indoor horse arena
- paving a gravel driveway
- developing crop walks to bring visitors closer to fields
- improving gift shops or turning barns into gift shops or visitor areas
- enhancing maple sugar shacks

They described interests in new educational attractions such as natural gardening and bird nesting workshops, an observation area for a bee hive and more regular farm tours. Several farms noted an interest in farm festivals (fall pumpkin festival, corn festival), with entertainment including corn mazes and animal petting and feeding. Retail enhancements include new produce stand locations, expanded u-pick operations, diversified crops and gardens, and the addition of meat sales and new value-added products, from syrup to cider. Plans for recreational activities were more limited, with one farm expressing some interest in hiking trails. Other farms lacked concrete ideas but are generally eager to increase farm visitation.

Farms looking to start a new agribusiness were less defined in their plans, but expressed diverse interests and openness to ideas. Five of these nine farms would offer tours of their operations with educational elements. One farm is considering recreational trails for dog sledding and other activities, while another is interested in converting the farm residence into a bed & breakfast establishment and retailing syrup, meat products and handwoven crafts. A planned Christmas tree u-pick would like to feature a holiday gift shop with baked goods and warm beverages for sale. A dairy farm operator is considering retailing dips, cheese and other

Case Study: Awald Farms Looking Ahead

Founded in 1914, Awald Farms in North Collins is known for its diverse selection of berries and giant pumpkins in the fall, all of which can be hand-selected by visitors to the farm. In the fall, visitors can wander through a corn maze. Operators Ed and Millie Awald also lead farm tours and host school groups. The farm markets through a brochure and Web site and maintains a customer mailing list to send out alerts of upcoming events and offerings. The Awalds would like to develop a new weigh station for the u-pick operation with an area for picnics, a working kitchen and small retail area where “visitors can have lunch, pick fresh fruit and enjoy the country atmosphere.” They would also like to add hiking trails around their property, which is surrounded by old oak trees and a creek.



value-added dairy products at area farmers' markets. A flower gardener would welcome photographers and painters to her property and would like to tap opportunities for expanding dried flower sales, which currently are limited to farmers' markets.

What is clear, however, is that these farms are eager to get started. Ten farms would like to expand either as soon as possible or within the next year or two. Four farms had a five-year time frame, and several were unsure or have plans to expand gradually.



During warmer months, horses can be seen in the arena at Ebersole Paint and Quarter Horses in Evans



The grounds of Turnbull Nursery & Garden Center in North Collins are pristine, with modern buildings, an asphalt parking lot, landscaped garden paths and professional signage at the front of the property

Farms as Tourism Businesses – Assessing Capacity

Flowers are a pleasant adornment to a farm sign for Mammoser Farms in Eden

Copyright Diane B. Held, American Farmland Trust



VI.

Farms as Tourism Businesses – Assessing Capacity

Good ideas are just the beginning, however. Agritourism is ultimately a business venture that brings with it significant financial risks. Farms should have a solid business plan and model, developed with professional legal and financial consultation. Not only does the farm operator need to offer a compelling, distinctive product or service, but he or she needs to ensure the property is welcoming, facilities are in good repair, staff members are customer-friendly, and the enterprise is visitor-ready, with parking, signage and restrooms. Once the product and property are developed, marketing tools are needed to spread word that there is something worth seeing in the Southtowns. While many of these elements are important at the system level – for instance, a uniform signage system or marketing tools that brand the Southtowns area as an agritourism destination – many capacities are required at the level of the individual farm. This effort collected information to

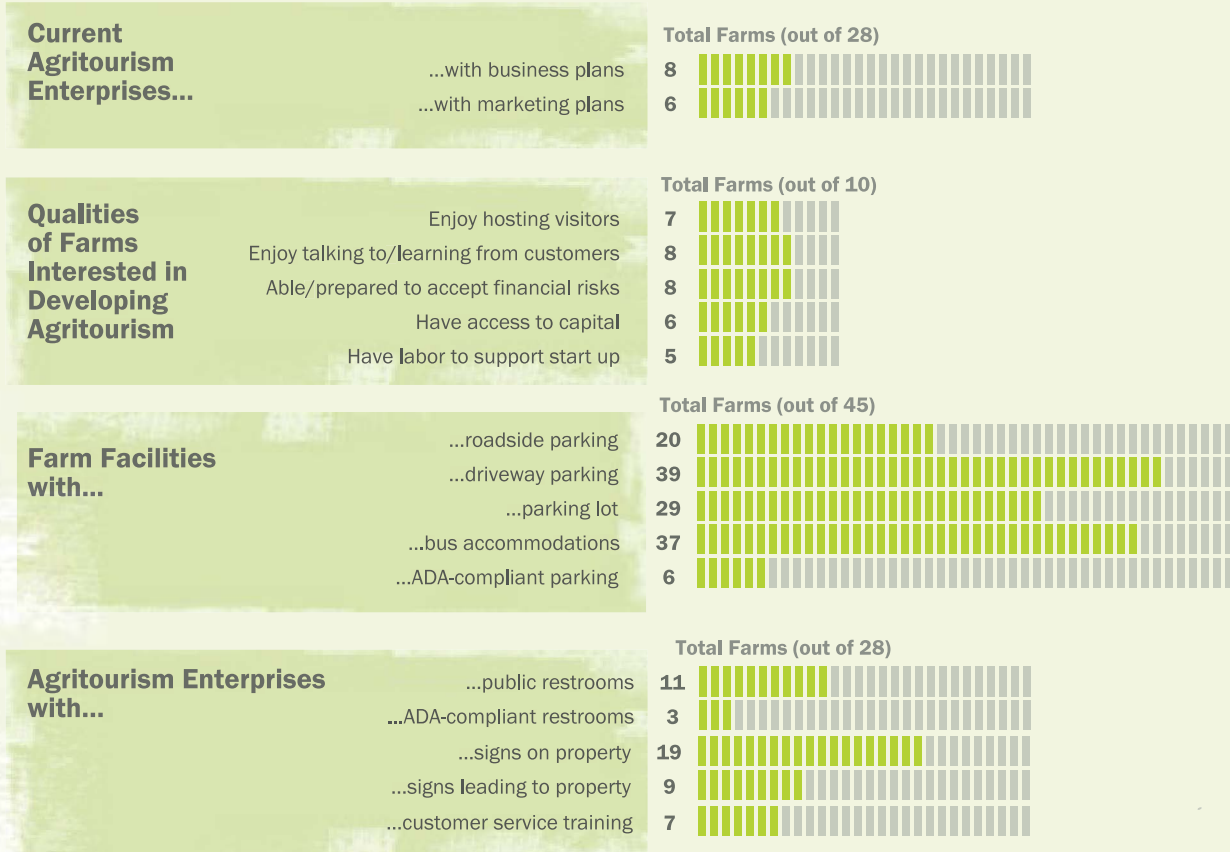
assess the current picture of these elements as a critical foundation for diversifying or developing agritourism.

There is a significant gap in business planning capacity within those farms already engaged in agritourism, with only eight of these 28 farms equipped with a business plan and just six with a marketing plan (**Figure 9**).

Most farm operators say their operation has adequate liability coverage, and many believe they have all the necessary permits and licenses.

In that most farm agritourism operations were not in operation during the time of survey administration, assessments of retail areas, customer interaction and other facilities and services for the public were limited.

FIGURE 9
Assessing Farm Business Capacities



Across the board, however, farms in the Southtowns have access to legal and financial counsel, with just three of the 45 farms lacking one or both of these sources of advice.

Those operators interested in getting involved in agritourism tend to have the right personalities – they like hosting visitors on their farm, talking to customers and experimenting with new ideas, and also consider themselves self-starters and ready to accept financial risks. Yet, as suggested by other survey findings, relatively fewer farms have access to the capital or labor needed to support their start-up. A significant majority of the prospective agritourism operations would engage family members in running the business (eight of 10 farms), taking advantage of resources ranging from baking and bookkeeping expertise to people skills and helpful, curious children.

Farm amenities and the condition of facilities are key elements of the visitor readiness picture. Accessible and adequate parking is particularly important for hosting large events or accommodating group tours. Twenty-nine of the 45 farms provide parking lots, while 39 feature driveway parking; roadside parking is offered by 20 farms, but never without additional spots in a driveway or parking lot. Parking capacity is on average generous, with 17 farms having room for 20 or more cars, and 15 farms indicating room for multiple buses, some up to six.⁵ However, only six operators indicated their parking is ADA-compliant.

Farm visitors are also increasingly coming to expect public restrooms. Of the 28 existing operations, only 11 provide this amenity, with just three operators noting their facilities are in compliance with ADA regulations. Visitors from outside the local area may have difficulty navigating around unfamiliar territory, making signage critical to inviting visitors to the farm property. Though farm signage varies throughout the Southtowns with respect to quality and functionality, there is room for improvement in this area. Just 19 of the 28 farms offering visitor services place business signs on the farm property, and just nine have signs along roadways leading to the property, though signs along local highways require special permits in two of the towns and are prohibited in the other two. Signs should also state hours of operation or indicate whether the farm is open to the public, information not frequently provided by Southtowns agritourism farms, according to this assessment.⁶

Signs are also part of a critical package of first-impression elements contributing to a positive tourism experience. Attractive or creative signage can convey a welcoming feel or draw in passersby. Many farms post signs only seasonally, so the appearance and quality of signs could not be assessed in many cases. From what information could be gathered, on-farm signage is typically of higher quality and more appealing in design compared with roadway signs.

The condition of farm grounds and public facilities is an important part of the visitor experience. According to this assessment, farm residences, barns, greenhouses and other buildings were generally in “good” condition, well-maintained and often with historic charm. In many cases, however, old, rusty farm equipment or other “junk” was strewn in public areas, which detracts from the appearance of the property while also posing a safety hazard. Numerous barns are in disrepair, a common challenge in the area due to the age of the structures.

Overall, farm operators interviewed for this effort were overwhelmingly friendly and accommodating, but customer service training is rarely provided to farm employees – seven of the 28 farms that host visitors in the Southtowns provide this employee service.

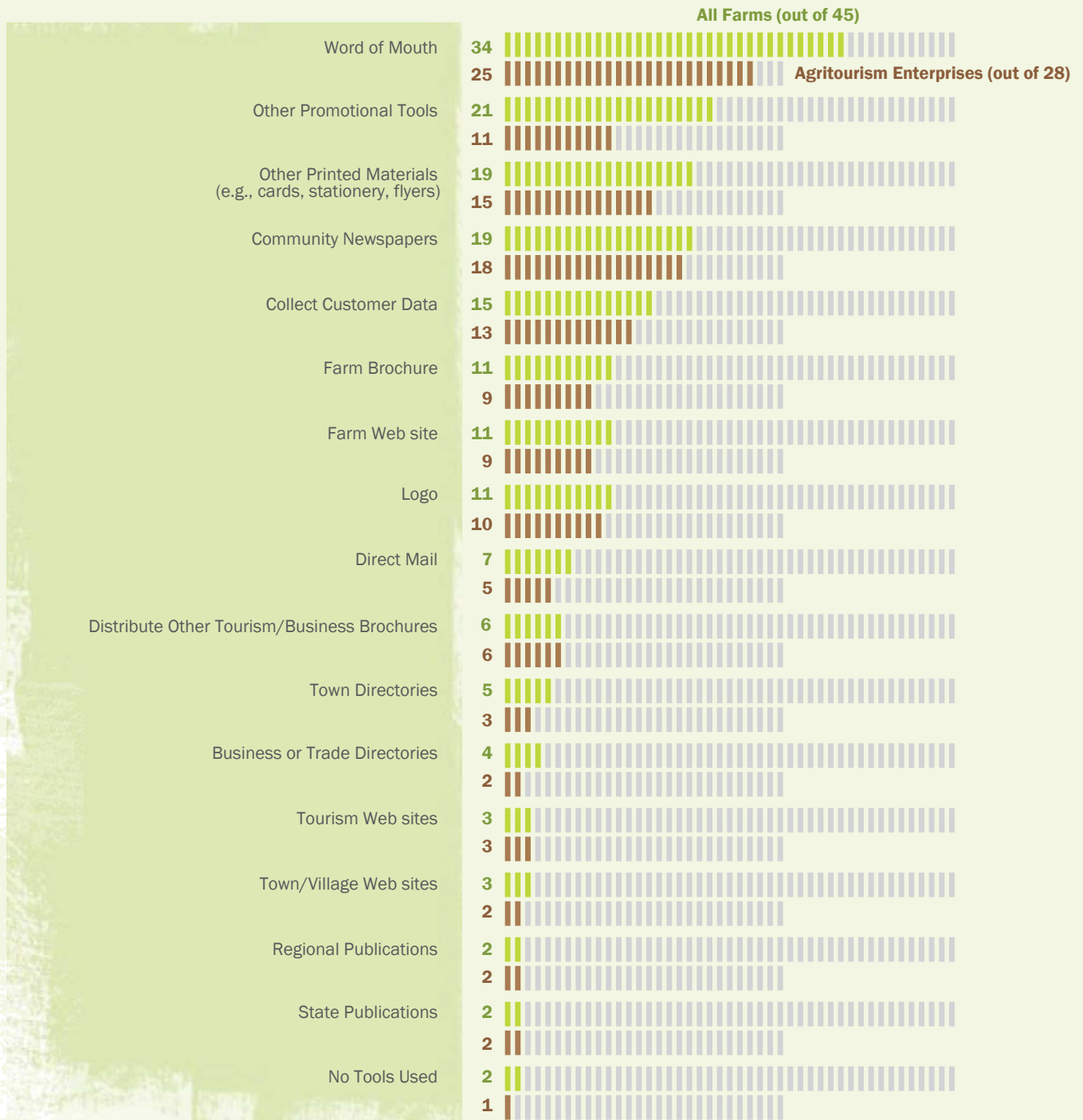
Farms in the Southtowns employ several marketing tools to draw customers to their operation (**Figure 10**). Word-of-mouth, the most affordable and often the most effective tool, is employed most frequently – by 34 of all farms. Print brochures and Web sites are used by 11 farms, with nearly all of these agritourism enterprises. Farms make good use of affordable advertising rates in community newspapers or are included in town directories, but rarely take advantage of largely free regional or state tourism publications. “Other” promotional tools, including Eden Valley Growers and other farm cooperatives, trade shows and trade publications connect farms to wholesale markets. A distinctive logo can be a useful tool to brand a farm business, as well as promote word-of-mouth advertising when visitors take home products or gifts marked with that logo. Just 10 farms brand their products or promotional materials with a logo (nine of these farms have agritourism operations).

Southtowns farms are for the most part not taking the steps necessary to understand their markets. As discussed, they lack marketing plans and did not employ market studies during the start-up process, but they are also not collecting data on their existing customers. Although farm operators have anecdotal information on where their visitors come from (for example, immediate area, surrounding towns in Erie County and Cattaraugus County, some out-of-state), very few farms collect any customer information at all, and those that do limit it to basic contact information for mailing lists as opposed to demographic profiles that can provide insights on target markets. Only 13 agritourism operations request any data at all, with just one farm collecting demographic information. Data are collected primarily by adding customers to mailing lists or through informal conversation.

⁵ These numbers do not reflect all farms with parking facilities, as several farms could not estimate parking capacity.

⁶ For several farms, signage was not able to be assessed, as many farms remove signage, including on-property signs, during the off-season.

FIGURE 10
Farm Promotional Tools and Strategies



Collaboration with other farms or businesses in the community represent networks for consultation and business development as well as civic capital, an important measure of tourism capacity. By and large, Southtowns farmers are active community members, engaging in local affairs through Chambers of Commerce, the Erie County Farm Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Many sit on local government boards and special committees. More than two out of three farms in the Southtowns partner with other businesses, though levels vary by town (**Figure 11**). Farms partner most frequently with other farms (e.g., rotating land with neighbors, sharing farm equipment, offering customer referrals). Farms also partner with schools or churches, either through educational programs or product donations. Less common partners are other visitor services or attractions in the area, although six of the 28 agritourism enterprises distribute brochures for other farm or tourism resources in the area.

Perhaps more important, however, is that farms are eager to take greater advantage of community partnerships (**Figure 12**). Forty of the 45 farms are willing to explore partnerships to develop visitor products or services, with 35 interested in marketing collaboration. Thirty-four farms would participate in an area-wide farm tour (see also p. 27, Develop a Southtowns farm trail). Collaboration with other visitor amenities in the area is also a possibility, as 30 farms would participate in a tourism package that includes other types of tourism attractions.

FIGURE 11
Farm Partnerships in the Southtowns

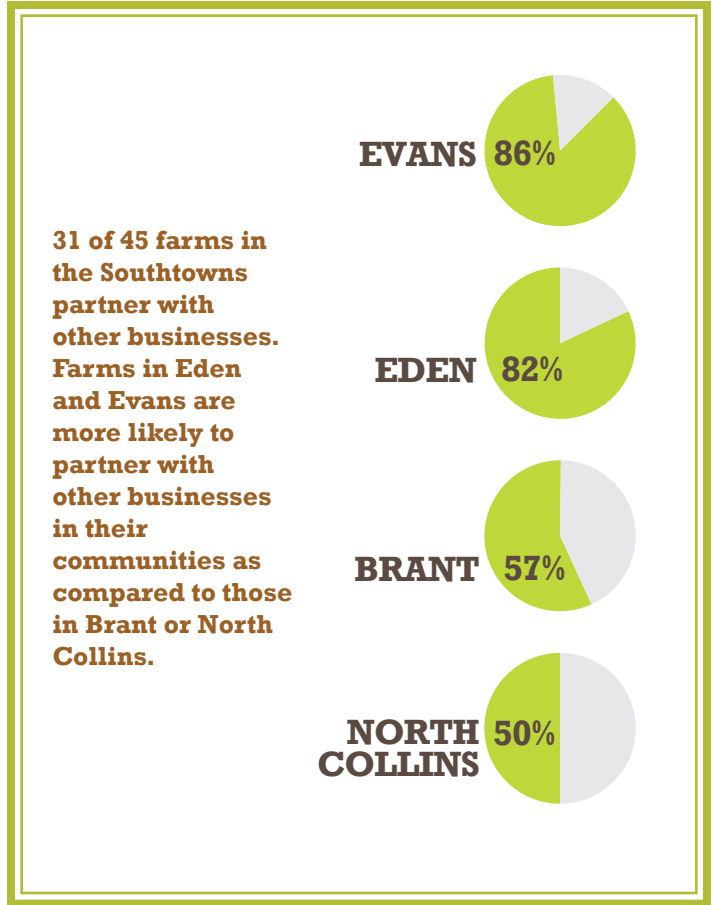
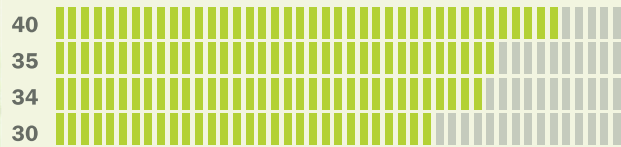


FIGURE 12
Potential Farm Partnerships

Farms willing to partner to...

- ...develop products or services
- ...market products or services
- ...participate in an area farm tour
- ...participate in a tourism package

Total Farms (out of 45)





A goat greets visitors to Nudd Farms in Brant; the owner is interested in developing an agritourism enterprise



A vineyard is nestled behind William Friend's operation in Brant; he is considering adding several visitor services

Sowing the Seeds - Opportunities for Growth



Colorful signage greets visitors to Stonehill Orchard in North Collins



Opportunities for off-season activities abound; here, wreaths are for sale at Agle's Farm Market in Eden

VII Sowing the Seeds – Opportunities for Growth

The Southtowns has a strong foundation of agricultural assets and agritourism expertise to build on, and farms in the community are eager to tap the momentum and energy of tourism efforts. The following presents a strategic action plan to guide farms and community leaders in the Southtowns in “sowing the seeds” for agritourism development. Recommendations identify proposals, partners and resources for developing products and services, building agribusiness capacity and targeting agritourism markets.

Step 1: Enhance Visitor Readiness

Farms in the Southtowns are already offering a tremendous variety of fodder for the hungry agritourist, but can create a richer, more diverse experience with just a few small steps. Farms should focus first on putting the finishing touches on their services and products, and develop key visitor-readiness elements such as signage, parking and restrooms (**Figure 13**).

Spruce up farm properties. A visitor’s first impression of your farm sets the stage for the remaining experience. Visitors are looking for authentic, rustic experiences, but not at the extreme. Remove odds and ends or clutter in public areas. Add special touches to the property to draw visual attention to the farm – plant a garden at the head of the driveway, at the base of the farm sign, or along stopping points on the farm tour. Display historic farm equipment that is currently stowed away. Add seasonal decorations to public areas, such as scarecrows, fall flowers, corn stalks or holiday wreaths. Make sure restrooms are clean and parking areas and walkways are accessible.

Evaluate farm signage. Farm signs should be easy to read and attractive, but do not necessarily need to be professionally designed - most importantly, signs should reflect the character of the farm. Creativity in the shape and coloring and even material of the sign can help draw attention to the operation. Signs should also relate important information, including the farm’s hours of operation. Messages about what makes the farm unique – heirloom tomatoes or wooded horse trails, for example – can also help convince the potential visitor to make the stop. Once the visitor has arrived, additional signs can provide details about specific services or products. Use signs to direct customers to parking areas, public restrooms or gift shops; provide informational signs for farm tours or demonstrations, or use signs to identify crops or gardens. Farm operators should review their town code for specific guidelines or restrictions on sign design and placement. Signs leading up to the property are valuable for directing visitors to the farm. However all four towns prohibit such signs – often called “billboards” – although some towns allow exceptions for temporary signs.

A system-wide signage system is also an important element to advancing the Southtowns as a top destination for agritourism. The Coalition should pursue a region-wide, attractive signage program that points the way to existing visitor-friendly establishments. Many farmers, even those well-known for their visitor services, report that new and potential customers have only a vague idea of their locations. (See also p. 27, Develop a Southtowns farm trail) for more information on a potential starting point).

Plan for capital improvements. Certain capital improvements are reasonably affordable and easy to accomplish - for instance, putting a fresh coat of paint on a barn, repairing a broken door or adding picnic tables or seating areas. However, several farms identified major capital improvements as central components of their expansion plans. Their ideas range from adding public restrooms to improving a gravel driveway to building gift shops to installing walkways over crops. Other farms are in need of improved parking and restrooms and enhanced accessibility. Improvements to physical structures can be costly and may require long-term investments. Several resources are available to support these plans, including Erie County’s Community Development Block Grant Program funds, which support improvements to residential and non-residential structures and improvements to streets and infrastructure. New York State provides funding for renovating historic barns (see also **Appendix A** for other funding resources).

Step 2: Build agribusiness capacity

Farms are ultimately business operations, but operating as a tourism enterprise brings with it new challenges, chief among them financial risk. It will be important for farm operators and community leaders to work together in strengthening farm capacity in the areas of business planning, including capital and labor needs and strategies to develop markets. Lenders are increasingly requiring this of farms, yet a clear

FIGURE 13 Helpful Amenities for Agritourism Farms

Visitors to New York State farms indicate the most important factors in selecting a site to visit are staff friendliness, scenic appearance of the farm and having diverse activities.

Other factors enhancing the visitor experience include:

Restrooms

Gift shops

Snack bars, picnic tables

Accessible parking

Hilchey, Duncan and Diane Kuehn. “Agritourism in New York: A Market Analysis.”

majority of farms in the Southtowns lack these tools. Such plans are critical not only for farms looking to take on new ventures in agritourism - those farms considering expanding the enterprise and taking on new risks also need a roadmap for the future.

Develop a business plan. The business plan is an important tool for structuring the agribusiness and choosing a venture that matches the farm's capacity and resources with operator goals and expectations for financial return. The planning process also helps determine the market for a product, and then estimate costs and resource needs. The following summarizes the key steps in a business planning process:

- Identify business goals: what business structure is appropriate, how much time does the operator have to devote to the business, what are the financial objectives and how does this fit with personal goals
- Assess market for product or service: who are competitors, what are the target markets, how much will customers pay, what makes the product unique, and how will it be marketed
- Evaluate product development needs: how will the service or product be developed, what physical, land and human resources are needed to develop the product
- Determine financial resources and potential sources: what will the venture cost, what are potential sources of funding, how will costs be managed over time

There are several existing business planning resources available to farms in the Southtowns. The Small Business Development Center at Buffalo State College provides individual business consultation at no cost, addressing all components of the process, including securing credit, developing a marketing plan and training employees. The center is also able to develop specialized workshops. Also, NY FarmNet provides a variety of resources and services for agribusiness management, including workshops and guidebooks on marketing and business planning.

Review regulations, permitting and insurance. Insurance and regulatory requirements are clearly a top concern among farms in the Southtowns, particularly those considering developing a new agritourism enterprise. Liability insurance is a likely requirement for any activity that involve charging the public to visit the farm. The type of activities provided, such as food sales, activities involving animals and recreational services, further determines liability coverage requirements. New York State recently added a definition of "agritourism" to its right to farm laws,

which promotes agritourism as an accepted farming practice and provides farmers with some protections against nuisance suits (see also **Figure 14**).

FIGURE 14

Checklist for Limiting Liability:

- Inspect property
- Eliminate dangerous conditions
- Provide warnings
- Educate and train employees
- Secure adequate liability coverage

Agritourism enterprises are also affected by a range of other regulatory requirements at the local, state and federal levels. Considerations include zoning requirements (municipal and county level; permission for commercial activity, compatibility with surrounding land uses, signage, lighting) and health codes (county and state level; health permits, temporary food establishment application, food storage equipment, animal exhibits and retail inspections).

It is recommended that the Coalition consult with farm insurers, local government entities and other agricultural consultants to develop an agritourism regulatory resource guide outlining agritourism-related codes and policies. The guide should identify local policies for the four towns and their respective villages, as well as applicable county, state and federal regulations. The guide should be made readily available to farms, including online through town and village Web sites.

Develop human resources. Farms cited inadequate capacity in farm labor as a major obstacle to taking the next step in agritourism development. With expanded services and the need to hold more regular hours, access to labor is a critical need. The Coalition should consider developing a volunteer docent training program that recruits Southtowns community members, including senior citizens, to lead tours or staff gift shops and market stands, at least during weekend hours in the peak season. The program should offer training in customer service as well as build awareness of the area's agricultural heritage and other tourism offerings.

Indeed, having friendly employees that are helpful, engaging and informed of farm offerings and other tourism attractions and services in the area is another ingredient of the visitor experience. While most operators surveyed for this effort fit this description, some expressed concerns about a lack of people skills among themselves and their employees. Others are not fully aware of the range of tourism offerings in the Southtowns area and beyond. The Coalition should consider coordinating a customer service training program that provides basic tips on dealing with farm visitors as well as information about visitor services and amenities in the area. The Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, which provides this type of service, should be consulted as a partner. Also, a Town of Evans program to train town employees could serve as a foundational model.

Step 3. Develop Products and Services

Based on the expansion plans and concepts for new enterprises outlined by farm operators, as well as emerging opportunities in the agritourism market, several proposals for product and service development are offered. Consideration has been given to agritourism offerings across the Western New York region, as well as national and international agritourism best practices, to help the Southtowns offer a distinctive, competitive product (see also **Figure 15**).

Diversify farm tours. With farm tours already the most commonly offered agritourism activity in the Southtowns, and six farms hoping to offer additional tours, there is a need to diversify and distinguish these services. At the same time, basic farm tours may be a good fit for those farm operators who still work off the farm and are limited in the time and resources they can devote to the enterprise.

Farm operators offering tours by special request or appointment should determine if they would like to advertise this service or provide it more regularly. Informal tours have the advantage of not requiring regular resources, yet tours that are enhanced and marketed more aggressively could turn into revenue-generating activities. A fuller tour experience, even without a charge, can still serve to draw visitors to the farm, where they can make other retail purchases.

“Customer service...is huge in agritourism: You simply can’t do it if you don’t naturally like people.”

-- Barbara Berst Adams,
The New Agritourism

Several farm operators expressed an interest in adding educational or recreational elements to their agritourism experience. The following suggestions could help operators develop a more unique tour product:

- Offer lectures on farm history, local heritage and demonstrations of traditional farming or gardening methods (see **Case Study: Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm**)
- Enrich the u-pick experience with a more involved harvesting activity, demonstrations or commentary on farming methods; incorporate harvesting and even processing activities (press your own cider, make your own preserves, create your own flower arrangement)

- Provide a lunch after the tour featuring farm produce, value-added products or prepared dishes using farm produce
- Extend the tour into natural resource areas of the farm, wending along creeks or streams and concluding with a scenic vista
- Develop special themed tours for targeted audiences (e.g., local chefs tour with lessons on cooking with local food, nature lover’s tour with natural gardening seminar, hiking and nature or wildlife photography, children’s tour with educational workshops and storytelling)

Develop a Southtowns farm trail.

Given the diversity of activities already offered in the Southtowns, a farm tour that links these experiences could create a more involved experience that draws visitors in greater numbers and benefits all farms, as well as surrounding businesses. Thirty-four farms have already expressed interest in participating in such an area-wide tour. A Southtowns farm trail could be a self-guided driving tour with stops along the way highlighted on a foldout map or brochure. A special cyclist route would take advantage of growing numbers of recreational tourists, which also enjoy culinary experiences. There are several agriculturally-themed tours offered in the region, including wine trails in Niagara and Chautauqua Counties as well as a farm trail in Niagara County. It is recommended that the farm tour include only the most visitor-ready agritourism enterprises initially, to ensure a high-quality, distinctive visitor experience. For several years an Erie County farm tour was organized by the county office of the Cornell University Cooperative Extension. The Coalition should consult tour organizers as it develops a Southtowns farm trail.⁷

FIGURE 15

Agritourism Tips for Southtowns Farms

Start out slow and small – perhaps with a one-time event – let the enterprise develop organically

Arrange of tour of agritourism destinations in Western New York – learn from those who have gone through the process already

Choose activities based on your hobbies, passions or skills

Focus on developing fewer quality experiences that attract paying customers, rather than endless hours of activity at no charge

Practice ideas on family and friends

Develop pricing by assessing similar services in the region

⁷ The Annual Erie County Family, Food and Farm Tour, held from 1995-2003, brought hundreds of regional residents to select farms for a day of farm tours, harvests and food. The tour charged \$15 for a family, with participants guided along the tour by bus. Vendors and local foods were showcased at the tour’s central staging area at the Hamburg Fairgrounds. Farms did it more for “good will” than profit, according to tour organizer Diane B. Held (now New York Field Representative for the American Farmland Trust).

CASE STUDY

Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm Keota, OK

www.kerrcenter.com/overstreet

This 106-year-old house and farm is open for public tours, field trips, workshops, educational events and festivals. It showcases rural Oklahoma life around the turn of the 20th Century while preserving knowledge, artifacts and rare breeds of livestock and poultry. There are displays of antique farm equipment and an orchard of heirloom varieties of fruit. Weekend tours are available to the public, and school and youth groups are accepted by reservation.



Copyright Overstreet-Kerr Historical Farm

The biggest event on the farm is the annual Fall Farmfest, held in October. Volunteers demonstrate activities and crafts such as blacksmithing, herb crafts, soap making, Dutch oven cookery, rifle-making, quilting and sorghum cooking.

Kaw Valley Farm Tour Kaw Valley, KS

www.kawvalleyfarmtour.org

Every October, the Kaw Valley Agri-Tourism Council sponsors an annual farm tour through this agricultural region of Kansas. Participating farms (15 in 2008) grow nuts, fruits, wines, flowers, pumpkins and wool products, and feature guided tours, educational programs, retail, hayrides and petting zoos. The tour kicks off with a picnic at a local park, featuring local foods and live music. A \$10 pass allows carloads access to all participating farms for the weekend and includes a guidebook, maps and profiles of each farm. The tour also has its own Web site, with a downloadable map and participant profiles and contact information. The 2008 tour featured a grand dinner on Saturday night at a Christmas tree farm, featuring gourmet foods and local wine and beer for \$50 a plate. On Sunday morning, there was a country style breakfast at Pendleton's Country market for \$8 a plate. The tour and meals are put on by the Agri-Tourism Council with the help of several private sponsors. The event is also advertised by the state agritourism advisory council and the City of Lawrence.



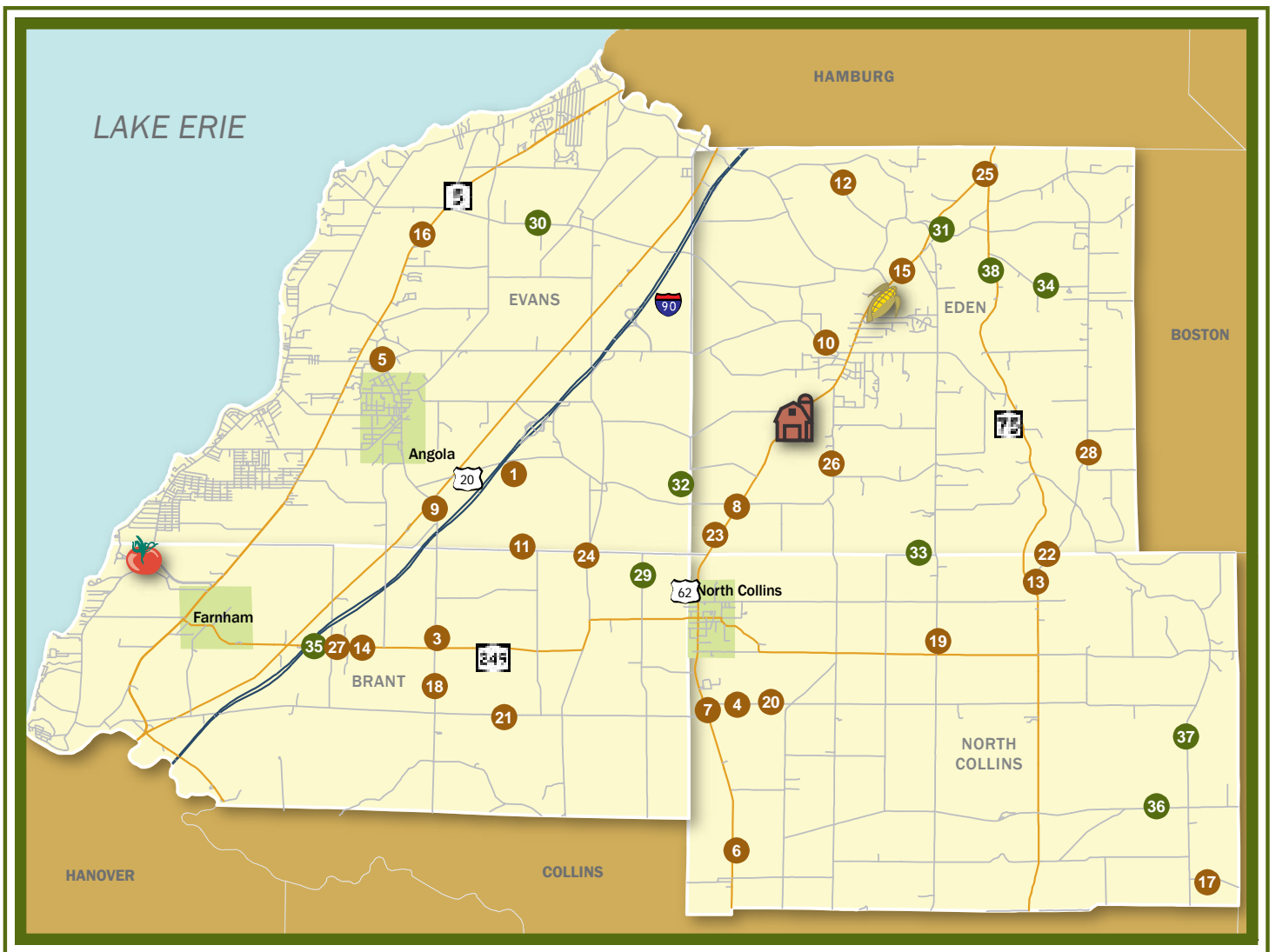
Copyright www.kawvalleyfarmtour.org

The Southtowns tour could be offered regularly, limiting farm participants to only those with set hours of operation. Another alternative could promote the tour as a special event for attendees of the Eden Corn Festival or Tomato Fest in Brant, which would facilitate logistics for charging for the tour (see **Case Study: Kaw Valley Farm Tour**). A more regular tour could be promoted via a designated Web site, with a downloadable map and brochure, detailed farm profiles and links to related attractions. The regional farm museum, slated to open in 2012 in the Town of Eden, is an ideal tour starting point and information center for visitors (see **Figure 16**). Both print and online promotion of the tour will be critical (other Western New York trail programs employ both Web and print marketing and informational pieces). A uniform signage system would help guide tour participants, build recognition for the tour as well as brand the Southtowns as an agritourism destination. In addition to farms, the Southtowns should engage Eden Valley Growers, a wholesale cooperative representing some of Eden's largest produce farms. The association's facility and warehouse features high-tech produce cooling and storage equipment, and processes and distributes more than 500,000 boxes of produce to retailers along the entire eastern seaboard. Managers of Eden Valley Growers, interviewed for this effort, expressed an interest in participating in such a tour, though consideration would need to be given to safety hazards and interference with the site's busy operations. Additionally, a farm trail lends itself well to cross-promotion and packaging with other area tourism amenities, including restaurants, bed & breakfasts, the Lake Erie beaches in Evans and Brant, and cultural and historic sites. The Southtowns trail might also be a first step to a broader, county-wide trail.

Leverage special events. There are two major agricultural festivals in the Southtowns, presenting a variety of opportunities for advancing agritourism. Farm vendors, agricultural history exhibits, educational activities and even distributing brochures or materials to market agritourism in the area are obvious avenues to pursue. Festival operators have expressed interest in learning more about partnering prospects. Beyond these events, however, individual farms may wish to look into on-farm festivals as a potential starting point for launching or expanding agritourism operations. Several farms are considering fall-, pumpkin- or corn-themed festivals. Other ideas include hosting planting or harvesting festivals that directly engage visitors, with themed foods and feasts, Mother's Day or Father's Day events (invite a local spa to the farm, host teas, promote outdoor recreation), events that engage local musicians or artists, and holiday festivals.

With several pumpkin and fall farm festivals already taking place in Western New York, Southtowns farms should carefully review how competitors approach these festivals and then design their festival

FIGURE 16 - Farm Trail Map



Agritourism in the Southtowns

Current Enterprises

- 1 A & S Buffalo Ranch
- 2 Amos Zittel & Sons
- 3 Andolina Farms
- 4 Awald Farms
- 5 Bella Terra
- 6 Blueberry Ridge
- 7 Bowman Farms, Inc.
- 8 Brockman's Greenhouse
- 9 Chiavetta's Potatoes & Greenhouse
- 10 Church Street Farms, LLC
- 11 Ebersole Paint and Quarter Horses
- 12 Eden Valley Alpacas
- 13 Gary's Bee Haven
- 14 George Castle Farms

- 15 Henry W. Agle & Sons, Inc.
- 16 Kwilos Brothers Farm
- 17 Norbert and Lynn Gabel
- 18 Our Family's Harvest Market
- 19 Richmond Dairy Farms, LLC
- 20 Stonehill Orchard
- 21 TC Horse Stables
- 22 The Lord's Garden
- 23 Thomas Family Farms
- 24 Turnbull Nursery & Garden Center
- 25 W.D. Henry & Sons, Inc.
- 26 Westview Farms & Greenhouses
- 27 William Friend
- 28 Wittmeyer Dairy Farms

Potential New Enterprises

- 29 Concord Nurseries, Inc.
- 30 Coyote Crossing Farm
- 31 D & J Brawdy Farms, Inc.
- 32 Hilltop Dairy
- 33 Kaczanowski Dairy Farm
- 34 Mammoser Farms, Inc.
- 35 Nudd Farms
- 36 Ronald Wittmeyer, Jr. Dairy Farm
- 37 Schmitz Dairy Farm
- 38 Sunshine Dried Flowers

Attractions and Festivals

-  Tomato Fest
-  Eden Corn Festival
-  Proposed Eden Farm Museum

with distinctive elements. Southtowns farms could venture more into agricultural education, heritage and recreation, or add a twist to typical festival activities – for instance, a petting zoo with workshops on the animal sciences or the healing aspects of animals. Farms as venues for special events, from weddings and family reunions to youth camps and religious gatherings, are also becoming increasingly common and can be a sizable source of income. Farms considering special events should plan carefully for event staffing, pricing and other logistics.

Tap the local food movement. According to a recent survey of New York consumers by Cornell University’s Community, Food and Agriculture Program, nearly 36 percent of respondents said purchasing locally-produced food is important enough for them to go out of their way for it. Regionally, the movement is catching on. Edible Buffalo is a colorful quarterly publication dedicated to promoting Western New York’s local food shed, including farms, food artisans, chefs, farmers’ markets and other food experiences. Local chefs are increasingly turning to local farms and farmers’ markets for fresh produce as the ingredients for gourmet dishes. And Slow Food Buffalo, a chapter of the Slow Food USA network, promotes the pleasures of sustainably produced food. The increasingly sophisticated culinary tourist seeks an authentic, local, healthful and enriching culinary experience. These trends present a wide range of opportunities for agritourism operations in the Southtowns. Among these are developing value-added products from local foods, creating culinary experiences, and providing educational programs on the origins, history and traditions of local foods. These opportunities are outlined below:

- **Form CSAs.** Currently there are no farms in the Southtowns providing Community Supported Agriculture, a cooperative farm model in which individual customers purchase a share of the season’s harvest. Not only is this an additional source of revenue, but CSA customers represent another market for agricultural tourism experiences. CSA customers also help in encouraging the farm to respond to emerging demand for new crop varieties. CSAs are increasing in number across Western New York, with many using this market to develop agricultural education initiatives (see **Case Study: Native Offerings**).
- **Explore a Southtowns farmers’ market.** Six of the surveyed farms already participate in farmers’ markets, including the Hamburg market and Buffalo’s Clinton-Bailey market, but there is also strong interest in developing a new market for the Southtowns area. Eighteen of the 45 surveyed farms said they would consider participating in a Southtowns farmers’ market.

To distinguish this farmers’ market from others in the region, the Southtowns should consider creating a unique market experience with fresh produce and value-added product sales, as well as events, culinary experiences and educational workshops. Community leaders should consult with the managers of farmers’ markets in surrounding communities (there are 12 markets in Erie County). It is important to remember that 50 percent of farmers’ markets fail within the first five years, making it critical to have adequate resources, farm participation and product diversity, as well as a strong leadership and management structure. The Coalition should consider that large farms tend to avoid farmers’ markets due to low returns compared to time invested, and small farms have difficulty staffing markets due to on-farm retail commitments. A potential trial market could be arranged for the Eden Corn Festival and Brant’s Tomato Fest to gauge interest and assess consumer demand.

- **Leverage farm-to-plate programs.** The Southtowns should take advantage of Western New York’s Field & Fork Network, which seeks to link local food producers, including farmers and food artisans, with food buyers such as chefs, retailers and distributors through outreach and education. The group is developing a

CASE STUDY

Native Offerings Farm Little Valley, NY

www.nativeofferings.com

Begun in 1997 and certified naturally grown since 2005, Native Offerings was the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) cooperative in Erie County. The family farm encourages community members to buy shares of the harvest on a seasonal or annual basis.



Copyright Native Offerings

Shareholders can pick up their produce at the farm or at one of several drop-off points serviced by the farm. Offerings are varied according to customer preference; for example, a meat share can be purchased for an added cost. Some shareholders work on the farm for one day per week, earning their shares and gaining a better perspective on the agricultural lifestyle. The Web site offers detailed information on share options, the types of produce grown each season, a bulletin board and blog for members, and an overview of CSAs and the local farming community.

local food sourcing guide to inform consumers, chefs and others of local food sources. The network also hosts an annual Farmer-Chef conference to educate food growers, producers and artisans about distribution and market opportunities (e.g., how to sell livestock cuts to grocers and restaurants or how to tap markets for winter vegetables). The Coalition or individual farms should partner with Field & Fork to determine how farms can be represented in the local sourcing guide or become more involved in related efforts. Some farms in the Southtowns already connect with local restaurants, including Chiavetta's Potatoes & Greenhouse in Evans; this experience should be mined to explore how the Southtowns can work collaboratively to link farms to plates. Nationally and locally, there are many models to learn from (see **Case Study: Quillisascut Cheese Company** and **Tower Farms**).

- **Develop new value-added products.** One of the key strategies for enhancing the sustainability of small farms in New York State is the development and marketing of unique, healthful produce and value-added products, according to Cornell University's Small Farm Program. The market for organic, natural and grass-fed meats, dairy and poultry is rapidly growing, as is demand for value-added products, particularly dairy (cheeses, yogurt and ice cream). Other niches identified by this program are:
 - Ethnic food markets
 - Heirloom produce (Southtowns farms do not produce or market heirloom varieties; see **Figure 17** on Slow Food USA's Ark of Taste for opportunities in this area)
 - Hops
 - Small direct marketing meat farms
 - "Pharming," or farm products for health, medicine and even spiritual revitalization (see **Case Study: Pelindaba Lavender**)

This is an area with growth potential for Southtowns farms; indeed, several farms indicated an interest in producing products such as syrups, honey and cider. One Southtowns dairy farm is interested in producing cheeses and yogurt, although other surveyed dairies had trouble envisioning their place in agritourism retail, which suggests a need to build awareness of these opportunities within that community. According to a local micro-enterprise consultant, farms in Western New York "need to get beyond the four-week crop" and start thinking about value-added revenues, far more efficient in revenue generation than wholesaling, especially for small farms. Farms should take a small portion of their land – 10 percent, for instance – and experiment with new crops. Those farms interested in cultivating direct meat sales also might find more of a market by producing organic or grass-fed meats and poultry. One farm interviewed for this effort produces organic eggs, but otherwise organic methods are scarce in the area. Funding resources are available for organic farm development (see **Appendix A**). Value-added production also lends itself to educational elements,

FIGURE 17



Slow Food USA's Ark of Taste

US Ark of Taste is a catalog of over 200 delicious foods in danger of extinction – just a few examples are listed below:

- Hand Crafted Root Beer Shrub
- Greenthread tea
- Tuscarora White Corn
- Black Turkey
- Bronx Grapes
- American Heirloom Pears

CASE STUDY

Tower Farms Youngstown, NY

Grower Tom Tower produces fruits and vegetables that he sells at his own market. He also advocates for local, seasonal eating. He educates his customers on what is available each season, participates in experimental agriculture programs with Cornell University and hosts school tours. Among his customers are the chefs of local restaurants and winery owners in Medina who pay him to grow varieties of grapes for them. He was profiled in the Fall 2008 issue of *Edible Buffalo*.

Quillisascut Cheese Company Rice, WA

<http://quillisascut.com/>

A 36-acre, family-owned goat farm specializing in cheese making, Quillisascut produces several kinds of specialty cheeses sold throughout the Pacific Northwest. Of greater interest, however, are the owners' other promotional activities. The Mysterly family in 2002 started the Farm School of the Domestic Arts, which offers participatory education in weeklong retreats for participants who lodge at an on-farm bunkhouse. Classes include Farm Culinary 101, Intro to Farming, and Hearth Breads. Most of the classes cost \$595 to \$695, including room and board.



Copyright Quillisascut Cheese Co.

Lora Lee Mysterly of Quillisascut also co-authored a book called *Chefs on the Farm: Recipes and Inspiration* describing life on the farm and at the school, including 65 recipes. Copies are available on the farm's Web site.

including processing demonstrations, food heritage and food-related festivals (see **Case Study: Valley Shepherd Creamery**). In Western New York, a group of farms, food artisans and business consultants is exploring the feasibility of a production facility and distribution service in the Buffalo area to efficiently link food sources with value-added production resources as well as local markets (currently, many food artisans must travel across the state to process produce into value-added products). Other opportunities include leveraging a farm cooperative to link the area's farms with food production, distribution and marketing opportunities.

Develop farm recreation. Another burgeoning, yet untapped agritourism niche for the Southtowns is on-farm recreation. As discussed, only four farms provide any of these activities, despite the abundance of natural resources surrounding these farms, including Eighteen Mile Creek, wooded areas, streams, wetlands, scenic vistas and diverse wildlife. Twenty-three farms indicated they have trails on their farm property, but none of these farms provides hiking for visitors. The many farm tours and garden walks available already are a start. Two farms expressed interest in developing amenities of this nature, but more should consider this, especially as very few opportunities for farm-based recreation exist in Western New York. Winter recreation is another prime opportunity for the Southtowns farms, especially as a revenue source in the off-season.

Farms with existing trail systems or properties that lend themselves to trail development should consider adding hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing or snowmobiling (there are already 70 miles of snowmobile trails in the Southtowns, large stretches of which abut farm properties). Sledding, ice skating, as well as fee hunting and fishing are options to consider. Snowmobile and mountain biking associations in the area could be valuable partners in pursuing trail development and navigating liability and permitting issues. Although liability issues may impact the feasibility of these endeavors, there are many successful models of farm-based recreation across the U.S. (see **Case Studies: Crescent Bay Farm Bed & Breakfast** and **Swanson Farms**).

Explore Farm lodging. One of the key challenges facing the Southtowns tourism market is the lack of lodging amenities – a particular obstacle to leveraging increased economic returns from visitors' overnight stays. Farm lodging, including bed & breakfasts and camping, represents an opportunity to fill this gap. Though in recent years new bed & breakfast establishments have popped up in the Southtowns (with some farms already partnering with these), there is room for growth. Farms are an ideal fit with the bed & breakfast experience – rustic but charming, authentic and unique. The lodging experience can focus on rural charm and relaxation or present visitors with an opportunity to engage and interact closely with life on a working farm by helping with farm chores, working a harvest or hiking and

CASE STUDY

Pelindaba Lavender Friday Harbor, WA

<http://www.pelindabalavender.com/index.html>

The operators of this farm on San Juan Island off the coast of Washington State cultivate more than 25,000 lavender plants and produce 240 handmade products from them, which are sold at four signature stores in the Seattle area, at the farm's Web site, and at gift shops, spas, hotels



Copyright Pelindaba Lavender

and gourmet food stores nationwide. Products include such luxury items as lavender lip balm and lavender foot soak. Tours of the farm are available from May through September and there is a store on-site. In July, the farm hosts an annual Lavender Festival. Pelindaba Lavender products gross about \$1 million in annual sales.

Valley Shepherd Creamery Long Valley, NJ

www.valleyshepherd.com

The proprietors of this dairy built their farm up from a small mutton enterprise into a unique, European-style creamery. They make sheep cheese through ancient practices while utilizing modern equipment and allowing public access to all farm activities. They attempt to educate the public about life on a sheep dairy by hosting tours and festivals throughout the year. Among the offerings are milking and cheese-making demonstrations, a spring lambing tour, a shearing festival and farm parties. Popular cheese-making classes are available, as well. The farm is home to the Sheep Shoppe, where cheeses, yogurt, wool products, home furnishings and craft items can be purchased. These goods are also sold online.



Copyright Valley Shepherd Creamery

CASE STUDY

Crescent Bay Farm Bed & Breakfast South Hero, VT

www.crescentbaybb.com

A working farm that raises beef cattle, llamas and maple trees, the operators of Crescent Bay have capitalized on their location on Lake Champlain to expand into the accommodation business. The bedrooms at the bed and breakfast overlook the lake, and many recreational activities like windsurfing and fishing are offered. There are abundant wildlife viewing, biking and hiking opportunities, as well. Weekend reservations are booked well in advance for rooms at the lodge.



Copyright Crescent Bay Farm Bed & Breakfast

Swanson Farms Elmore, KS

www.swansonfarms.com

This farm has been completely given over to hunting; milo, millet, and native grasses that are ideal for habitat are the only crops currently grown. The Swanson Family has been hosting hunting parties for about a decade and now has at least four hundred hunters visit each year. Packages include half day hunts, full day hunts, weekends and extended stays. Hunts can be guided or self-guided. Accommodations include a lodge, a kitchen for optional home-cooked meals, a public restaurant, a heated bird cleaning station and a fishing cabin at nearby Bourbon State Fishing Lake. The Swansons offer hunter safety courses and clay pigeon target shooting. They also raise awareness of their farm by hosting an annual "Trifecta," a hunting, fishing and golf competition. The farm is not yet the sole source of the family's income, but it has grown more profitable each year.



Copyright Swanson Farms

recreating on the property. Bed & breakfasts are not the only option – camping and even wall tents during warmer months are attractive to the adventurous guests (see **Case Study: MaryJanesFarm**). One farm surveyed for this effort expressed an interest in a bed & breakfast, although additional farms are well suited for this. Prospective overnight hosts will need to consider the investment of time in developing and maintaining such an enterprise, including making capital improvements to the home and adhering to various zoning and permitting requirements. Of course, hosts must be particularly sociable and friendly, and comfortable welcoming strangers into their home.

Step 4: Spread the Word

Visitor readiness comes first, but once the product is polished and ready to market, where should the Southtowns begin? It will be imperative to address agritourism marketing at both the level of the individual farm and the Southtowns area as a whole. The Southtowns clearly has a unique product to sell, but agritourism attractions are increasingly available across the Western New York region; marketing efforts will need to focus on developing a distinctive brand for agritourism in the Southtowns.

Another important first step will be to obtain a better understanding of the existing and potential tourism market for the Southtowns. A visitor assessment was not conducted as part of this survey effort, and should be one of the top priorities for next steps. Farms and tourism leaders in the area need to understand their market better – where are visitors coming from, how much are they spending, and what other activities are they interested in?

With word-of-mouth the prevalent marketing tool for farms in the Southtowns – a good place to start – there are opportunities to enhance the area's marketing portfolio. Beyond farm-specific tools, such as logos, Web sites and brochures, more cost-effective approaches include collaborative marketing efforts and exposure through the many free publications available within the region and beyond.

Build a brand. A key recommendation of the Southtowns tourism strategic plan, the analysis that spawned this effort, was to develop a distinctive destination brand for the Southtowns. The area's overall brand should support and complement efforts to designate the Southtowns as an agritourism destination. In fact, the overall brand could build on the area's rural charm and agricultural heritage as one of its most distinctive attributes. The Southtowns should also look beyond the borders of the seven municipalities in developing a marketing brand, launching promotion efforts and building marketing tools. Given Erie County officials and other regional leaders' recent push to develop agribusiness as a critical piece of a regional economic development strategy, a tourism partnership at this level may be appropriate and effective in leveraging resources to support marketing and even product

development. For instance, although the farm trail may start out at the Southtowns level, it could gradually expand into a county-wide trail that includes an even broader range of attractions and further sets the area apart as an agritourism destination.

Brand-building is also essential for farm-specific marketing, an element that would be addressed within a business and marketing plan.

Components of a farm brand would include the farm name, logo and other design elements that convey to the visitor a set of expectations of the level of quality and type of experience to expect.

Markets to tap. Although market studies for the Southtowns visitor have not been conducted, other analyses of agritourists and related markets shed some light on audiences to target. A recent study of agritourists in New York State found that this type of visitor is typically local, travels with family or friends, fits within a range of age groups, is frequently a repeat customer, and likes to include recreational activities, cultural attractions and antiques shopping in their visit. Specific markets to tap include cyclists, “locavores,” families, the recreational vehicle market, naturalists and gardeners.

Data to collect. The Coalition should coordinate a one-time assessment of farm visitors, while also helping farms to implement a regular, systematic program for collecting customer data. The visitor data already monitored by farms include customer addresses. The

The Gardener’s Corner

The Southtowns has a distinct regional niche in gardens, greenhouses and nurseries, some of which already provide garden walks, lectures and tours; others are interested in expanding. Among the assets are a greenhouse owner known for her homemade soil and a nursery specializing in bare root plantings. The Southtowns should highlight these amenities in marketing efforts, as well as consider specific opportunities for services or products that build on this asset.

Coalition should collect farms’ existing data and determine overall trends in the geographic origins of Southtowns farm visitors. Additional data to collect include demographics (age, income and education levels), length of stay in the area, accommodations used, purpose of trip, size of travel group, mode of transportation, how they learned of the venue, and other activities included in their itinerary.

Tools to use. The lack of an online presence of Southtowns farms on the whole is a key gap in marketing capacity, particularly for

CASE STUDY

MaryJanesFarm Moscow, ID

<http://www.maryjanesfarm.org/bb/>

MaryJanesFarm has earned a national reputation for its distinctive working farm visitor experience, while also producing a full line of value added products and offering various educational programs. Visitors to the farm can lodge overnight in its boutique-like wall tents, lend a hand with farm chores, or walk, hike and bike in the scenic back roads and trails surrounding the farm. The operation also runs an Historic Flour Mill, Historic Schoolhouse and a Pay Dirt Farm School, while also providing resources for women farmers through its Farmgirl program.



Copyright MaryJanesFarm

Blackman Homestead Farm Lockport, NY

www.blackmanhomesteadfarm.com

A 150-year-old family-owned fruit farm, Blackman’s features u-pick apples, specialty products, including fruit butters and pie fillings, beef cattle, turkeys, tree sales and gift boxes. The farm Web site allows visitors to register for an e-newsletter, and offers online retail, recipes, picking schedules and links to regional tourism resources. To get the farm’s value-added component off the ground, operator Julie Blackman tested fruit butters in her kitchen and secured grants to support the initial production stages. Family members with graphic design expertise helped design the farm logo and a color palette for marketing materials, including a product list and an farm informational card. Their key to success? “We focused on what makes us unique, and stuck with that.”



Copyright Blackman Homestead Farm

those offering direct farm retail or visitor services. Web sites have become a business necessity, and an expectation of the consumer. Online marketing represents a fairly cost-effective approach to providing customers and area visitors with timely information about activities and products available on the farm, from a harvesting

Understanding the Sell

“People pay more to look a farmer in the eye.”

- Farm operator in Evans

Though some farm operators have more marketing savvy than others, Southtowns farms are generally too modest when it comes to selling their product and celebrating what makes them unique. Visitors from non-rural settings, or even rural residents unfamiliar with farms, will find thrilling many aspects of farm life that are mundane to the operator. Moreover, marketing tools such as packaging, logos and product names go a long way in adding appeal and value to a product and experience.

schedule to hours of operation to pricing schedules. Innovative features such as blogs, photo journals, an e-newsletter, maps and links to area visitor attractions help make the site a more interactive and educational. Developing an attractive farm logo is also an effective, low-cost tool to build awareness of the operation. Logos should be used consistently in all print and online materials. In terms of print marketing, farms may find it more cost-effective to invest in a high-quality piece with information that does not need to be frequently updated (see **Case Study: Blackman Farms** and “**Understanding the Sell**”).

There are several collaborative possibilities for marketing agritourism in the Southtowns. As discussed, a brochure, map and Web site for a Southtowns farm trail serves to market the area as an agritourism destination in general, while also exposing individual farms. The farm trail could then be promoted by regional tourism agencies and publications catering to the culinary and local foods market.

While cost prohibitive at the individual level, a paid advertisement in one of the region’s larger publications is easily attainable if a group of farms partners on a listing. Southtowns farms, either individually or collectively as a farm trail, should cross-promote with related attractions, including beaches, historic sites, antique shops, restaurants and lodging amenities. Specific marketing packages that incorporate these assets should be developed, and farms should be encouraged to inform visitors of other attractions and distribute attraction brochures (with other attractions reciprocating for farms).

There is a wide range of existing marketing publications for farms to leverage as a first step to building awareness. These include:

- Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau Web site and annual visitor guide

- Seaway Trail brochure, map and Web site, which lists cultural and heritage sites along the trail (Zittel’s Country Market is listed here)
- Edible Buffalo’s Web site, which features articles, blogs and a calendar of events
- Field & Fork Network’s local food source guide (in development)
- Pride of New York’s annual agritourism destination guide (compiled by New York State Department of Agricultural & Markets)
- Materials for the New York State Maple Producers Association’s Maple Weekend in March. Producers across the state open their doors to sell syrup and demonstrate the production process; marketing tools include an event Web site and print materials
- The Web site <http://LocalHarvest.Org>, which features farms across the country dedicated to sustainable growing practices

Step 5: Make It Happen

It is essential that the Coalition take the lead in forging strategic partnerships within and across the agricultural community to carry this effort forward. Clearly there is already a strong foundation for this, both in the Coalition’s intermunicipal collaboration and in the farms’ history of partnerships. Farm operators are eager to make stronger connections in their communities to develop better products and reach broader markets.

To tap this momentum, it is recommended that the Coalition make permanent and expand this effort’s Advisory Group to lead the implementation effort. A wide range of funding sources are available for marketing, product development and even farmer-to-farmer collaboration (see **Appendix A**). Other partners to engage include Erie County, which has identified agriculture as a key component of a regional economic development strategy and is developing a county-wide farmland protection plan, tourism promotion experts in the region, agricultural advocacy and extension representatives, partners in the private sector and representatives of related tourism attractions in the Southtowns. Collaboration will foster success at all levels, from developing products to planning a signage program to marketing the region.

While farms are in the midst of some of the most difficult economic circumstances, it is also a time for optimism. By going back to the region’s agricultural roots, and by celebrating rural heritage and the integral role farms still play in the region’s food shed, it is possible to invest in our farms, sustain them for the future and grow our communities.

Marketing Resources

Agricultural Marketing & Management Program Work Team

<http://marketingpwt.aem.cornell.edu/>

This division of Cornell University has the stated mission of giving New York food and agricultural-related businesses a competitive advantage over the rest of the world by significantly improving their operators' knowledge of marketing as well as improving general management capacities and skills. The Web site's "Smart Marketing" section is full of useful resources, articles and links.

Community Food Security Coalition

<http://farmtocollege.org>

The goal of this non-profit organization is build community food security, and sustaining local farms is paramount to the success of this endeavor. The group supports the farm-to-college program, which encourages colleges to serve local produce at their cafeterias. Once established, the group helps maintain the arrangement. The group also supports farm-to-school programs.

Farm-to-School Programs

<http://www.farmtoschool.org/>

These locally-based, nationally coordinated programs connect schools with local farms. Their objectives are to provide healthy meals in school cafeterias, to improve student nutrition, to offer health and nutrition education opportunities that will last a lifetime, and to support local small farmers. The comprehensive Web site has an interactive map for finding local programs and links to forums, newsletters and information packets. In New York State, the program is maintained by Cornell University.

Farmers' Market Federation of New York

<http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/index.htm>

Grassroots, membership organization of farmers' market managers, market sponsors, farmers and market supporters. Provides a range of services to communities to increase the number and capacity of farmers' markets, support professional market management and improve market quality. Its Web site provides support materials, resource guides, publications and assessment tools. The group also maintains a practical, comprehensive resource guide for communities interested in establishing a farmers' market.

Local Legacies

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/roots/>

A program that celebrates community roots by providing a snapshot of American culture as it was expressed in a participatory survey in the spring of 2000. Of interest to farmers is the Web site's state-by-state list of heritage festivals, many of which have food-related themes and rely on local produce.

New York Marketmaker

<http://ny.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>

An interactive mapping system that locates businesses and markets of agricultural products, providing a link between producers and consumers. Marketmaker has a search engine that enables users to explore market demographics, local producers and businesses in the food supply chain. The site also features case studies, links to fact sheets and publications and updated agricultural news. See also New Crop Opportunities Center, www.uky.edu/Ag/NewCrops/, which production and marketing information on new crops and value-added versions of current crops.

New York State Farmers' Direct Marketing Association

<http://www.nysfdma.com/>

The FDMA represents farmers who sell their produce directly to the consumer and has the goal of helping farmers improve their direct marketing skills through education and networking. To that end, it hosts a yearly convention of direct marketers. The organization also publishes a farmers' market directory and promotes a Fresh 'N' Local campaign.

NY Farms!

<http://www.nyfarms.info/>

A broad based statewide coalition of organizations, individuals, businesses, agencies and institutions committed to the future of New York's farms. The coalition works to strengthen the state's agriculture and food system, create public awareness of agriculture and foster consumer loyalty to New York farm products. NY Farms! helps its members to market themselves while keeping them informed of current agriculture and business news and trends. It also provides leadership in efforts such as the Farm-to-School program.

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association

<http://nafdma.com/>

A trade association dedicated to nurturing the farm direct marketing industry. The group also bills itself as "your networking association for farm direct marketing and agritourism." NAFDMA holds an annual conference in which members have the opportunity to see new markets and hear new marketing ideas in a professional, noncompetitive environment. The conventions include a trade show, a three day bus tour and numerous workshops. The Web site has links to classified advertisements and other resources.

Northeast Livestock Processing Service Co.

The NELPSC offers processing facilitation and marketing assistance to producers of livestock, poultry and other species. It assists family farmers with the quality processing and marketing of their animals while enhancing the capacity of meat processors. The local processing coordinator advocates on the farmer's behalf for the best quality processing, discounts, scheduling, cutting instructions and technical assistance.

Pride of New York

http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/ap/prideofny/pride_index.html

The Pride of New York Program was developed to promote and support the sale of agricultural and food products grown and processed within New York State. Farmers, retailers, restaurateurs and support associations are among the program's members. Pride of New York produce is advertised on the air, in print materials and on billboards across the state. The organization also produces and markets gift baskets featuring its members' commodities. There is a one-time fee of \$25 for membership.

Funding Resources

2008 Farm Bill

The American Farmland Trust analyzes the 2008 Farm Bill at www.farmland.org/programs/farm-bill/analysis/localfoodpolicy.asp and celebrates its new policies and provisions that support local food. Highlights include the Farmer Marketing Assistance Program to help establish and promote farmers' markets; the Community Food Projects Program to connect low-income people with fresh foods direct from the local community; the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program for local schools; the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program providing vouchers to low-income seniors to purchase local fresh fruits and vegetables; and Value-added Agricultural Market Development Program Grants to assist farmers and ranchers in developing and distributing new products. A Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center will provide funding and technical assistance for the development of programs that distribute local and healthy food to underserved communities. Other components include prioritized financing for locally produced agriculture (Rural Business and Industries Loan and Loan Guarantee program) and new policies to help state meat or poultry facilities ship across state lines and broaden their market reach.

Debt for Nature Program

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

Available to landowners with USDA Farm Service Agency loans that were secured by real estate, this program reduces a borrower's debt in exchange for a conservation contract with a term of 10, 30 or 50 years.

Farmer-to-Farmer Discussion Group Mini-Grant Program

Cornell University's Pro-Dairy and the New York Center for Dairy Excellence recently initiated a farmer-to-farmer discussion group program designed to help farmers share ideas about farm practices and build collaborative networks. The program offers \$800 stipends to cover costs associated with group activities, such as field trips, workshops or hosting guest speakers. Also provided is a "Farmer to Farmer Discussion Groups" guide. More information is available from

Kathy Barrett at kfb@cornell.edu or www.nyfvi.org, New York Center for Dairy Excellence.

Grow New York's Enterprise Program

www.agmkt.state.ny.us/GNYRFP.html

This program dedicates \$3 million annually to increasing the demand for and expanding the use of New York's agriculture and forest products. The primary objective of the program is to provide funds to assist qualifying businesses that undertake activities resulting in the creation of job opportunities for low- and moderate-income persons. Generally, cities, towns and villages with populations under 50,000 are eligible to participate in the program. Emerging or expanding businesses focused on producing, processing, marketing or expanding New York's agricultural products are eligible to receive funds from the participating municipalities, provided that they can create jobs for low- and moderate-income persons.

Historic Barns Restoration

The New York State Barns Restoration and Preservation Program provides funding for capital repairs on agricultural buildings that are at least 50 years old and are in need of substantial repair. Funded repairs must be compatible with the historic nature of the building. Applicants must provide a matching share in the form of cash, in-kind services or labor. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has more information.

Local Foundations

The Coalition should explore grant opportunities with local foundations, including the Western New York Foundation and Eden Community Foundation; many foundations are eager to support the region's small farms.

New York Beginning Farmer Loan Program

www.nysefc.org

The New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation, in partnership with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, is administering a Beginning Farmer Loan Program for farmers looking to start a new business or facilitate inter-generational transfer of the farm business.

New York Farm Viability Institute

www.nyfarmviability.org/

A farmer-led non-profit organization that provides grant funding to help farms increase profits and develop models for other farms. The institute grants millions of dollars annually to farms of various sizes and locations across the state for projects that result in farm-level increases in profit, reductions in cost, job growth, farmland retention and adoption of technology. Funded projects range from value-added dairy product

development to manure management. Farmers can apply for grants via the Institute's website. Grant writing workshops are offered and the organization's staff can answer applicants' questions.

New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets Programs

Organic Farming Information Center

www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/Organic/reimbursement.html

Farmers who are interested in converting to organic farming can apply for certification fee reimbursement.

Agritourism Projects Grant Program

Broad eligibility including individuals, businesses, educational institutions and municipalities. Activities supported include farm stands, farmers' markets, u-pick, education, entertainment and lodging and dining. Program currently suspended.

Farm, Apple and Cuisine Trail Designation Program

New program to designate and fund farm, apple and cuisine trails across the state. Trails must include farm or food businesses proximate to one another, cooperatively market farm products, and use a map or highway signs to direct patrons to the operations. Trails must not exceed 25 miles and cannot conflict with scenic byways or existing trails.

Farmers' Market Grant Program

Funds construction, reconstruction, improvement, expansion or rehabilitation of farmers' markets across the state. Feasibility studies or other research will not be funded. Start-up grants can be made but only with strong evidence of market's potential success.

New York State Farmland Protection Program

Provides grants for towns and counties to purchase development rights on farmland. Purchase of development rights places a deed restriction, known as a conservation easement, on enrolled property. Grants can also be used to develop community farmland protection plans.

Northeast SARE

<http://nesare.org/get/>

The organization for Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education offers grant money to farmers who are actively involved in sustainable farming. The grants are for commercial producers who have an innovative idea they want to test using a field trial, on-farm demonstration or other technique. Application deadlines are in December for awards the following March. SARE also offers workshop and conference support.

Pride of New York "Buy Local" Cooperative Advertising Program

<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/RFPS.html>

A new grant program offered by Pride of New York and the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets providing up to \$5,000 to advertise and promote locally produced specialty crop food and agricultural products.

Small Business Administration

www.sba.gov

Provides information on the Guaranty Loan Program online and in classroom sessions. The SBA is a source of legal and financial information and is also available for counseling and training. Its MicroLoan program is administered by the Erie County Industrial Development Agency and Erie County.

USDA Rural Development, Value-Added Producer Grants

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm>

This agency offers grants to producers of value-added commodities. Grants may be used for planning activities and for working capital for marketing value-added agricultural products and for farm-based renewable energy. Eligible applicants are independent producers, farmer and rancher cooperatives, agricultural producer groups and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures.

Business and Financial Planning Resources

Buffalo State College Small Business Development Center

<http://www.buffalostate.edu/sbdc/>

Serving small businesses throughout Erie and Wyoming Counties, the center provides one-to-one counseling free of charge to small businesses, with training and instructional programs. Specific areas of assistance include business plan development, locating funding sources, preparing for e-commerce, developing marketing plans and complying with licensing and regulations.

Cornell University Program on Agriculture and Small Business Finance

<http://agfinance.aem.cornell.edu/Current%20Projects.html>

The program's Web site contains information on research projects involving agriculture finance and management. Topics include renewable energy sources, farm savings accounts, crop insurance, relevant financial institutions, the structural changes in the dairy industry and tax information. Courses, seminars, and meetings are also offered.

NY FarmNet

<http://nyfarmnet.org>

Non-profit program that provides free, neutral, third party solutions to business and family problems that farmers encounter. FarmNet consultants can help with financial analysis, business planning, retirement planning, family issues and many other topics. The program Web site also has links to useful articles and documents. The program is affiliated with NY FarmLink, which provides educational resources, consulting and opportunities that enable more farms to be transferred and joint ventures to be developed for the economic enhancement of NYS agriculture.

SCORE: Counselors to America's Small Business

www.score.org

Offers free and confidential advice to small business entrepreneurs. The volunteer counselors are working or retired business owners who offer advice and training. The group's Web site features sections that deal specifically with tax issues and the challenges facing female entrepreneurs.

Product Development Assistance

Cornell Maple Program

<http://www.cals.cornell.edu/cals/public/impact/maple-program.cfm>

Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences can help farmers take advantage of their maple trees and begin producing maple syrup. The Cornell Maple Program has developed new tapping methods and value-added products for producers. The program's educators sponsor training sessions, conferences and workshops for new and experienced producers.

Cornell University Department of Food Science

www.foodscience.cornell.edu/

A large interdisciplinary team of scientists at Cornell who work to improve the wholesomeness and availability of food for the world's population. The department has an extension program that seeks to develop an educational network to facilitate knowledge sharing within a broad constituency comprised of food producers, processors, distributors, retailers, commercial and institutional food service establishments, consumers, and research scientists.

New Farm

www.newfarm.org

New Farm is resource guide for new and established organic growers. The venture is supported by the Rodale Institute, an organization that supports nutrition and famine prevention and fights global warming. The site contains articles, news, price reports, research papers, and a resource directory database.

New York State Agricultural Innovation Center

<http://www.nyfarmviability.org/aic/index.htm>

Helps agricultural producers add value to their products through branding, product quality enhancement, marketing and distribution strategies. Business planning services also provided through network of outreach specialists from Cornell University and SUNY institutions.

New York State Farmstead & Artisanal Cheese Makers Guild

www.nyfarmcheese.org/index.asp

The guild's website lists locations and descriptions of dozens of cheese makers from across the state. There are instructions for getting a small farmstead dairy operation licensed in New York, a calendar of events and a news section. The site also has an extensive list of resources for cheese makers.

Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship

<http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/necfe/>

University-based regional center created by Cornell University and the University of Vermont. The center supports the growth of specialty food production through the formation of start-up businesses, diversification of existing businesses, and by providing technical support, marketing assistance and guidance for regulatory compliance.

Slow Food USA

<http://www.slowfoodusa.org/>

Slow Food USA has national programs that work to educate through school and campus-based initiatives, promote local and regional foods, safeguard biodiversity, and connect people with their food and the farmers who grow it. The group supports farm-to-school and farm-to-college programs. There is a Buffalo chapter of Slow Food that can be accessed at www.slowfoodbuffalo.org/.

Resources for Small and Start-Up Farms

Beginning Farmers Resource Center

<http://beginningfarmers.cce.cornell.edu/>

Administered by the Cornell Cooperative Extension, this program provides numerous resources for aspiring farmers. Its Web site has lessons, a forum, factsheets, planning assistance and other essential information for new farmers.

Cornell University Small Farms Program

<http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu>

With the mission of enhancing the sustainability of small farms, the program provides online resources and grants for innovative small farm education, programs for small dairies, professional development services, and marketing and business management resource development. There are also services for aspiring small farmers such as the Guide to Farming in New York State: What Every Ag Entrepreneur Needs to Know.

Small Scale Food Processors Association of New York

www.nyssfpa.com/

The mission of SSFPA is to reverse the decline of the family farm in New York State. The association supports the creation of value added products on small farms. Members of SSFPA work together to conduct joint marketing, access regulatory information, provide mentoring to new producers, purchase cooperatively and access food processing and small business technical assistance.

General Resources

American Farmland Trust

www.farmland.org/

With a mission to “save the land that sustains us,” the AFT is a valuable resource for farmers and communities, lobbying for and disseminating information about farmland protection issues. The AFT organizes and supports programs that protect land, improve agricultural efficiency, promote sustainable practices and market local food. The Web site also serves as an information clearinghouse.

Cornell Cooperative Extension – Erie County

<http://cce.cornell.edu>

Erie County’s extension office is part of Cornell University’s public outreach mission to apply research to farms and rural families to sustain and grow communities. Its nationwide network of programs serve urban, suburban, town and rural areas by offering programs in five broad areas: Agriculture & Food Systems; Children, Youth, & Families; Community & Economic Vitality; Environment & Natural Resources; and Nutrition & Health. Local extension educators provide access to community-university partnerships with the Cornell campus. Erie County’s extension office plays an important role both as educational resource and as a strategic partner on community initiatives.

Erie County Farm Bureau

<http://www.nyfb.org/erie>

An advocacy organization supporting the county’s rural way of life, the bureau is active in the political system on issues ranging from taxation to conservation, and has been instrumental in passing Right-to-Farm laws in municipalities across the county.

Forest Land Programs

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/309.html>

Tax exemptions are available to owners of woodlands who are in possession of at least 50 acres of contiguous forest, commit the land to forest crop production, and follow qualified forest management plans.

Natural Resource Conservation

www.nrcs.usda.gov/

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service provides conservation easements for wetland preservation and protection, and financial incentives are provided for development and maintenance of fish and wildlife habitat.

The New Agritourism

www.newagritourism.com

The Web site is the homepage for the book *The New Agritourism: Hosting Community and Tourists on your Farm*. The book, which contains a wealth of information on how to make farms visitor-ready, can be ordered from the site. The page also has links to an e-magazine devoted to agritourism and micro eco-farming.

Replanted or Expanded Orchards and Vineyards

Partial exemptions for these lands exist for up to four successive years. Exempted land cannot exceed 20 percent of orchard or vineyard’s total acreage. Contact the local assessor or the New York State Office of Real Property Services, Agricultural Unit, for more information.

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Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition

Village of Angola Town of Brant Town of Eden Town of Evans
Village of Farnham Town of North Collins Village of North Collins

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