



# Rural Futures



**NYS** Legislative Commission on Rural Resources **FALL 2011 ISSUE**

## HURRICANE AND FLOOD VICTIM ASSISTANCE CONTINUES

The devastation that occurred during Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee last summer is immeasurable. While monetary figures reflect the calculable costs, the damage to lives and personal property does not translate to a balance sheet. Clean-up efforts continue in the wake of these natural disasters, as do important programs to assist victims, their neighbors and their communities.



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FALL 2011

## Rural Futures News of Interest About Rural New York State

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Commission on Rural Resources

The NYS Legislative Commission on  
Rural Resources is a joint bi-partisan  
office of the State Legislature.



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## 2012 at the Commission

The Commission on Rural Resources, in looking toward the 2012 Legislative Session, has been actively involved with industry leaders across the State in relation to two critical issues – biomass and telemedicine.

At an August meeting with members of the New York State Biomass Alliance, Commission members talked about the development of biomass, not only as an alternative fuel source, but also as an economic development engine. Leaders in the development of biomass – organic matter such as trees, plants, grasses or even certain types of waste that can be used to generate renewable energy, including biofuels or electricity – stated that promoting the development of biomass energy projects has the potential of creating thousands of new jobs across upstate New York, while helping generate renewed economic growth.

Advocates explained that bureaucratic red tape is holding back the development of an industry that could help reduce New Yorkers' reliance on foreign oil and put into use vast stretches of New York's abundant agriculture and timber lands. State laws that favor renewable energy sources like wind and solar are written to specifically exclude wood, grasses and other biomass sources.

The Commission has also been speaking with members of the health care community, with the mission of examining the State's telemedicine needs and existing framework in order to develop legislation that will establish a Statewide telemedicine network.

Working primarily with the Home Care Association and the Western New York Area Health Education Center providers, which has an established and successful telemedicine network, the Commission is reaching out to other providers across New York State to survey the needs and individual systems under which each area operates.

Rather than a telemedicine network that connects areas of the State with the goal of linking rural communities to larger hospitals and educational centers, regions operate largely independently from one another. One of the issues driving rural areas in their efforts to advance telemedicine is the incredibly high cost of transportation. While individuals seeking medical attention are often transported – at high cost – to larger hospitals to be cared for, much of this work can be done via a telemedicine network.

The Commission is currently in the process of planning a roundtable in January 2012 to address the needs of patients, providers and institutions – with the goal of developing legislation that will expand programs like the successful WNY AHEC model into other areas of the State.

**Please feel free to reach out to Commission staff regarding either of these issues. Your comments and ideas are important as we enter into 2012.**

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## HURRICANE AND FLOOD VICTIM ASSISTANCE CONTINUES

### *NY Works: Neighborhood Rebuilding Corps*

NY Works: Neighborhood Rebuilding Corps was also launched in September to provide temporary rebuilding and reconstruction work to unemployed New Yorkers for a three month period. The Neighborhood Rebuilding Corps program is funded by up to a \$16 million emergency grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and provides temporary employment that will enable individuals to reenter the workforce by doing disaster recovery work. Temporary workers will be trained to perform demolition, cleaning, repair, renovation, and reconstruction of damaged and destroyed public structures, facilities, and property that are located within designated disaster areas. New York will hire part-time workers for approximately 20 weeks at an average wage of \$15 per hour. Most workers will be employed by the State Labor Department and some will be employed by the affected counties.



### *Agriculture Disaster Program*

Farmers who lost equipment or other infrastructure due to this year's tropical storms may be eligible for reimbursement through a \$5 million fund administered by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

Farmers in the counties identified by the State as storm-damaged will be eligible and will have to prove their losses were the result of the storms. The fund will provide money for replacing electric and natural gas systems and equipment for milk processing, cooling, heating and other farm systems.

Applications are available at NYSERDA's website and will be processed on a first-come, first served basis until December 15 or until funding runs out. The maximum assistance will be \$100,000 per farm: <http://nyserda.ny.gov/agriculture-disaster-program>.

### *State Documents Fee Waived*

Certain fees or payments required for the replacement of state documents will be waived to allow victims of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee to replace lost or damaged state documents at no cost.

According to the Governor's office, the following agencies will waive certain replacement document fees:

- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Department of State
- Department of Health
- Department of Taxation and Finance
- State Liquor Authority
- State Education Department

Please check the individual agency websites or local office for additional information on these waivers.

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## HURRICANE AND FLOOD VICTIM ASSISTANCE CONTINUES

Another program, the Hurricane Emergency Loan Program (HELP) is designed for local governments to help finance immediate repairs to wastewater and drinking water treatment facilities in communities damaged by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee.

According to the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), HELP will provide up to \$1 million in no-interest loans for critical assessment and repair to damaged drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities. Repairs to pump stations, electrical equipment, treatment facilities and other critical equipment are eligible along with temporary emergency services such as vacuum truck hauling, bypass pumping and disinfection, and related engineering and other professional services.

EFC created the HELP loans in cooperation with the State Department of Health (DOH), the State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the State Emergency Management Office and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EFC and DOH jointly administer the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, while DEC and EFC administers the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

For additional information or for assistance with a HELP loan, local governments in FEMA-designated counties may contact James Levine, EFC Senior Vice President and General Counsel, at 1-800-882-9721 or via email at [irenerecovery@efc.ny.gov](mailto:irenerecovery@efc.ny.gov).

### ***Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)***

The federal Livestock Indemnity Program is administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), and provides benefits to livestock producers who lost livestock as the result of adverse weather conditions between January 1, 2008 and October 1, 2011.

According to FSA, to be eligible for LIP, an owner's livestock must:

- Have died as a direct result of an eligible adverse weather event occurring:
  - on or after Jan. 1, 2008, and before Oct. 1, 2011; and
  - no later than 60 calendar days from the ending date of the applicable adverse weather event; and
  - in the calendar year for which benefits are requested.

Also,

- the livestock must have been maintained for commercial use as part of a farming operation on the day they died; and
- not have been produced for reasons other than commercial use as part of a farming operation. Excluded livestock includes wild free roaming animals, pets or animals used for recreational purposes, such as hunting, roping or for show.



**More information is available at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>  
In addition, county Cooperative Extension offices are good resources for a number of questions related to health and safety regarding the continuing clean-up. Please contact your county office or [www.cce.cornell.edu](http://www.cce.cornell.edu).**

## GREATER ROCHESTER SCORE IN ACTION

*The following article is a sponsored activity by the Upstate New York Rural Initiative, a private not-for-profit corporation which provides for and funds delivery of services for the rural small business sector by SCORE counselors. Richard V. Hannis - CEO - William Rittner - President.*

Early in 2008, Gail Bedell, then-CEO of Reliant Community Credit Union (Reliant) of Sodus, and Peg Churchill, Executive Director of the Wayne County Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), were discussing ways to improve the economic conditions of Wayne County. They decided to approach John Marino, at the time manager of the SBA in Rochester, to discuss increasing the role of SCORE in Wayne County. SCORE, a resource partner of the SBA, is a national volunteer organization of experienced business professionals who offer free, confidential mentoring and low cost educational programs to assist new and existing small business owners. By mid 2008, a series of meetings to move the process along were held with WEDC, Reliant, SCORE and a fourth organization with similar interests, the Wayne County Business Council (WCBC). This would become the "Team" that would move the program forward.

With the help of Dave Richards/Deputy Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer of WEDC, Kevin Groff/Reliant and Warren Halladay/WCBC, plans were developed to recruit local SCORE mentors, acquire several mentoring/counseling locations in Wayne County, develop public relations pieces and sponsor a business EXPO to help introduce SCORE to interested parties in the Wayne County community.

By early 2009, three local SCORE mentors were fully trained and functioning, a very successful EXPO was held at the Reliant office in Macedon and public relations articles announcing SCORE's increased presence in Wayne County were published. Additionally, three fully furnished mentoring/counseling locations were in place at the WEDC office in Lyons, the public safety building in Macedon and the Sodus Public Library.

The number of SCORE members dedicated to serving Wayne County has now increased to five. While their mentoring duties are conducted in Wayne County, they are fully integrated in the Greater Rochester SCORE

Chapter. They attend monthly Chapter meetings, and serve on various committees performing duties that are vital to improving the Chapter's overall ability to serve the business community. By the same token, SCORE members from the Rochester area frequently travel to Wayne County to assist with marketing, workshops, mentoring and training. There are no geographical or philosophical barriers in the Greater Rochester SCORE Chapter – the Chapter functions as a team.

From late 2009 to present, Wayne County SCORE has had a steady and increasing stream of clients to mentor, and has conducted three successful EXPOs. They have produced five workshops, each filled to capacity. They note that the importance of having alliance partners to assist when expanding into new geography cannot be stressed enough.

Of particular note is the success of three Wayne County SCORE clients in the last several months. Three new businesses working with SCORE mentors opened – Growlers Pub and Grill and Kelley's Barbershop in Lyons, and Hometown Meats and Deli in Clyde. SCORE mentors also assisted them with securing funding. Growlers Pub and Grill and Hometown Meats and Deli have added to their staff since opening, making a positive impact on employment in their communities.

Wayne County SCORE members are actively creating partnerships with organizations to enhance economic conditions in their area. One of these partners, The Lyons Main St. Program, played a major role in assisting Growlers Pub and Kelley's Barbershop with their smooth and successful openings.

Greater Rochester SCORE will now use the experience of Wayne County as a blueprint for expansion into other underserved counties in its geographical area. Greater Rochester SCORE has also learned that there is little difference between serving small businesses in urban and rural areas. All have essentially the same business needs that SCORE has addressed for many decades.

The Greater Rochester SCORE office serves the counties of Monroe, Wayne, Ontario, Livingston and Yates. The branch partners with a number of key organizations to help rural communities and entrepreneurs achieve their dreams.

## Reduce Rollover Injuries and Fatalities with ROPS

As winter approaches and field farm equipment is cleaned, winterized, and stored, so too will the risk of injury or death due to mobile equipment operation be put on a shelf. In accidents involving heavy machinery and equipment operation, farms experience the most fatalities. One in seven farmers is permanently disabled due to tractor accidents, many of which could be prevented by installation of rollover protection bars (ROPS).

Mobile equipment-related injuries and deaths do not only affect farmers or farm workers, however. While farming communities have raised awareness about the necessity of ROPS for farming equipment, other mobile equipment operators experience the same risks. Yet, there has not been a centralized or coordinated effort to address the issue among these populations. The result is a lack of awareness among operators who are at risk for related injury or death year-round, whether it be in operation of an ATV, a forklift on a road repair project or plowing a city sidewalk in a snowstorm. Western New York municipal equipment operator, Charles Hitchcock, Jr., of Knapp Creek, lost his life in July 2007 when the rolling compactor he was operating overturned. In the wake of Charlie's death, his wife has been advocating to raise awareness about these tragic incidents and the simple measures that can be taken to prevent them.

Research and studies on the use of ROPS clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of ROPS for reducing injury and preventing fatalities. Highlighted by OSHA's strong support, a variety of ROPS are being developed to fit different machine models based on their function, weight and the terrain on which they operate. ROPS are engineered to ensure that there is no interference with normal equipment function and to ensure that they do not obstruct the operator's view. Installation is simple, and while it is recommended that a ROPS professional install the structure, many can be self-installed.

While New York State ROPS rebate programs are available only to farms, advocates like Charlie's wife continue to spread the word about ROPS – and help to save lives.

## ROPS Help Save Lives

- The fatality rate for farmers is 800% higher than all American workers.
- Farmers in the Northeast experience the highest rates of overturn death.
- The tractor is the leading cause of death on a farm, and 80% of deaths caused by rollovers happen to experienced farmers.
- ROPS are 99% effective in preventing injury or death in the event of an overturn when used with a seatbelt.

These alarming statistics clearly illustrate the need for agriculture workers to protect themselves in the event of a rollover. The ROPS (Rollover Protective Structure) Rebate Program was designed to address these safety issues for farmers. ROPS will rebate 70% of the purchase and installation costs of a rollover protective structure – up to a \$765 maximum rebate. This includes the cost of the ROPS rollbar, ROPS cab or ROPS with awning.

ROPS program staff is available to research the type of equipment farmers need, estimate costs and sources for purchasing ROPS. One tractor per farm can be rebated during a program year.

To learn more about the NYS ROPS for farmers program, interested individuals should contact the hotline by calling 1-877-ROPS-R4U.



## Agricultural Assessment Program Extended to Land Used for Corn and Hay Bale Mazes



A new measure that extends the state's agriculture assessment program to portions of farm land used for amusements, such as corn and hay bale mazes, was signed into law this year.

Sponsored by Senator Catharine Young, the new law combines agriculture and tourism, our two top industries in the state, with the purpose of bringing more business and opportunities to our communities.

With 38,000 farms on 7.8 million acres of cropland, pasture and woodlands statewide, more farmers today are turning to agri-tourism and agricultural amusements to boost their operations and the economy. This new law expands the program to include land used for agricultural amusements that are made from crops grown or produced on the farm and later harvested - like "corn mazes" or "hay bale mazes."

Established in the 1970s, the agricultural assessment program is designed to encourage the preservation of farmland in New York State. Through the program, eligible farmers are able to receive a reduced tax assessment rate on land based on its agricultural value, rather than its non-farm market value.

## Boosting New York State's Wine Industry

*New law reduces regulatory burdens on New York State farm wineries*

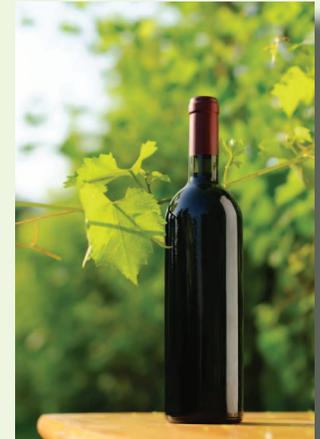
To help farm wineries continue to thrive as key agricultural, tourism and economic engines for New York State, a new law was signed in 2011 to help reduce the regulatory burdens placed on those wineries.

The Fine Winery Bill addresses the following:

- *Branch Store Capability*—gives farm wineries the ability to operate up to five branch stores as extensions of the farm winery, not as separate entities;
- *Custom Crush Capability*—clarifies the ability of farm wineries to provide and/or utilize custom crush services for purchasers of New York grapes;
- *Report Maintenance*—requires New York wineries to now maintain reports on-site and provide them to SLA only upon request;
- *Uniform Licenses*—eliminates the requirement that wineries which manufacture less than 1,500 gallons of wine annually apply for a separate micro-winery license – all farm wineries will have the same license, with micro-winery licenses continuing to cost \$50 annually; and
- *Charitable Events Filing Efficiencies*—lifts the five event per year restriction on New York wineries seeking to participate in charitable events.

Farm wineries are a growing, profitable sector in our state's agricultural industry, with the production of wine and grapes grown on nearly 1,400 vineyards statewide providing a substantial \$4.76 billion economic impact.

Since 1976, the number of New York's farm wineries has grown from fewer than 20 to nearly 306 today.



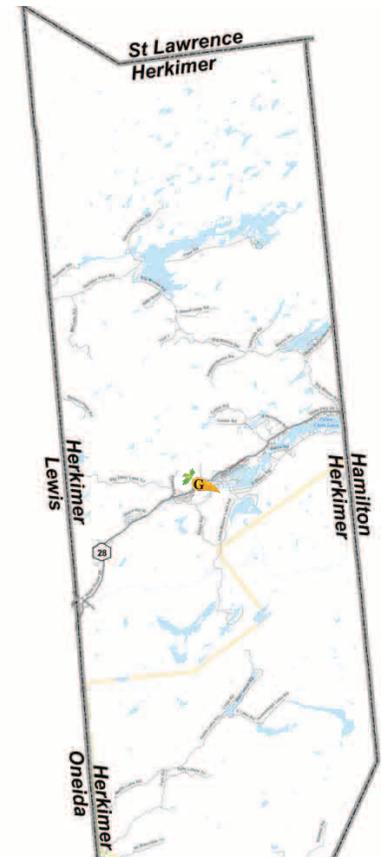
## Herkimer County HealthNet & Cornell Cooperative Extension Produce New Local Foods Map



As part of a campaign to create healthy places to live, work and play in Herkimer County, Herkimer County HealthNet and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County designed and printed the “Herkimer County Local Foods Map.” Sponsored in part by the New York State Department of Health, the Foods Map lists foods that are produced and available for sale by local producers in Herkimer County.

The Foods Map lists farmers, their contact information, foods they produce and their location on the map. In addition, a harvest calendar which lists the seasons for specific foods, as well as information about Herkimer County farmers’ markets is included. The maps have been distributed to local businesses and organizations throughout Herkimer County and the Mohawk Valley.

Along with other State agencies, Herkimer County HealthNet, Inc. administers the Creating Healthy Places to Live, Work & Play grant with the goals of preventing obesity and Type 2 diabetes by focusing on increased physical activity and healthy eating. To promote healthy eating practices and increase the use of farmers’ markets, HealthNet partnered with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Herkimer County.



		May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
<b>Fruits</b>	Apples				█	█	█	█
	Blueberries				█	█	█	
	Melons				█	█	█	
	Cherries			█	█	█		
	Grapes				█	█	█	
	Peaches			█	█	█		
	Pears				█	█	█	
	Plums, Prunes				█	█	█	
	Raspberries			█	█	█		
	Strawberries		█	█				
<b>Vegetables</b>	Asparagus		█					
	Beans			█	█	█	█	
	Beets			█	█	█	█	
	Broccoli & Cabbage			█	█	█	█	
	Carrots			█	█	█	█	
	Cauliflower			█	█	█	█	
	Celery			█	█	█	█	
	Corn			█	█	█	█	
	Cucumbers			█	█	█	█	
	Lettuce			█	█	█	█	
	Onions			█	█	█	█	
	Peas		█	█				
	Peppers & Eggplant			█	█	█	█	
	Potatoes			█	█	█	█	
	Pumpkins			█	█	█	█	
	Radishes		█	█	█	█	█	
	Rhubarb		█	█	█	█	█	
Spinach		█	█	█	█	█		
Squash			█	█	█	█		
Tomatoes			█	█	█	█		

To find out where maps can be picked up, individuals can call Herkimer County HealthNet at (315) 867-1499 or Cornell Cooperative Extension (315) 866-7920.

To view the online version of this map, please visit:  
<http://farmmarket.herkimerhealthnet.com>.



### ***US Army Creates Renewable Energy Task Force***

In August, Secretary of the Army John McHugh announced creation of the Energy Initiatives Office (EIO) Task Force, with the goal of increasing the Army's integration of renewable energy solutions. The EIO Task Force will work within the Army to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels by working with the private sector to create renewable energy solutions and large-scale renewable and alternative energy projects on Army installations. To meet the 25 percent by goal 2025 – 25 percent energy consumption coming from renewable sources – the Army anticipates it will need \$7.1 billion in investments. The EIO Task Force is designed to be the conduit through which private-sector investment will be fostered.



### ***New York FreshConnect Farmers' Markets***

The *New York FreshConnect Farmers' Markets* (FreshConnect) program, designed to assist New York farmers by increasing the sale of locally-grown food and provide access to high-quality fruits and vegetables, was established in August. With one goal of assisting persons with low incomes to find healthy, fresh foods, the program offers up to \$15,000 to new farmers' markets and helps with marketing and other administrative costs. Through FreshConnect, the State will help each new market that redeems food stamps and other nutrition incentives – like Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition coupons, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Fruit & Vegetable Checks and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons – by providing \$2 rebate checks for every \$5 in food stamps spent at their market.

### ***Dog Licensing Changes in 2011***

As of January 1, 2011, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets no longer provides dog tags, issues license renewals or maintains dog licensing data as a service to municipalities, with such municipalities assuming the dog licensing function. To assist with the transition, the Department established the Municipal Dog Licensing Toolkit - <http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/AI/Doglic.html> - which is periodically updated as information becomes available. In addition, all municipal clerks, mayors and supervisors, dog control officers and contract animal shelters should have received written guidance of the law changes and how they affect dog licensing, animal shelters and the Animal Population Control Fund.



### ***State on Alert as EEE Cases Rise***

Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), while rare, is one of the most serious mosquito-borne diseases. Approximately 1/3 of people infected with the virus die, with most survivors suffering significant brain damage. There is no specific treatment for EEE, nor is there a human vaccine.

Public health officials say people can reduce their risk of being infected by using insect repellent, wearing protective clothing and staying inside.

### ***Relief Available for New York Dairy Farmers***

Dairy farmers who were forced to dump milk and thus suffered staggering losses due to hurricane Irene, will receive payments at the market value for the milk they had to dump. The U.S. Department of Agriculture will issue checks to these farmers as if they had sold their spoiled milk at the market. While many farmers are facing huge bills to repair damaged infrastructure and replace livestock, these payments provide a key source of relief as dairy farmers rebuild and recover from the hurricane. To apply for the relief, farmers, ranchers, producers, landowners and rural communities can contact their local USDA Farm Service Agency Service Center to report damages to crops or livestock loss.



### ***Broadband Plan Submitted to FCC***

A proposal has been submitted to the FCC to speed broadband deployment to more than four million Americans living in rural areas. Six of the nation's leading broadband providers have worked on this effort, called "America's Broadband Connectivity Plan." These providers – Verizon, AT&T, CenturyLink, FairPoint, Windstream and Frontier – have joined with three organizations that represent small carriers. Western Telecommunications Alliance, National Telecommunications Cooperative Association and Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies. Among other goals, they plan to virtually connect all Americans within the next five years and target support to broadband deployment in areas where there is little or no service and to high cost areas.

### ***Making of a Scientist***

For the past 13 years, the city of Albany and Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences have offered a chance for young people to work as scientists. Through the city's Summer Youth Employment Program, college faculty work with Albany High School students to conduct scientific research. In addition to attending lectures, students tour science and biotechnology facilities, including Albany Molecular Research and Regeneron, to learn about the types of careers available to them. The program runs six weeks through July and August and students work six hours a day, Monday through Friday. Students from other municipalities, including Troy, have also joined in. At the end of the week, students present the results of their research, appearing before college faculty and staff to answer questions related to their findings and methodologies.

### ***Khapra Beetle Found in US***

The Khapra beetle, one of the world's most feared pests, was discovered by customs officials in August in a 10-pound bag of rice that came from India. In a press release, Customs and Border Protection described the bug as "one of the world's most tenacious and destructive stored-produce pests because of its ability to damage grain." The beetles originated in South Asia but have invaded parts of northern Africa, the Middle East, and even Europe, Asia and South Africa.

The Khapra beetle first invaded California in 1953, where the infestation was not eradicated until 1966, at a cost of \$15 million. So far, the Khapra beetle has not made it into the American grain supply.

### ***Clifton-Fine Hospital Rebuilding***

Several local groups have banded together to provide financial help to Clifton-Fine Hospital, which is working to rebuild its primary care clinic building that was damaged beyond use in an October 2008 fire. The Star Lake facility is a 20-bed critical access hospital, which provides services for acute and long-term care, a 24-hour emergency department and laboratory, radiology and physical therapy services. The project includes loan financing from the Greater Massena Economic Development Fund, the Development Authority of the North Country and the North Country Alliance, each of which provided loans of \$150,000. In addition, Clifton-Fine received local private lending assistance and a Rural Health Access Grant. The Greater Massena Economic Development Fund was created by the New York Power Authority to induce business enterprises to establish, maintain or expand plants, facilities or operations in the Town of Massena and St. Lawrence County.

### ***Long Island Wine a Winner***

Martha Clara Vineyards on Long Island won the prestigious Governor's Cup at the 2011 New York Wine & Food Classic at Watkins Glen, showcasing an estate-grown semi-sweet 2010 Riesling, which edged out the Riesling-rich Finger Lakes for the top honor. The Riesling, which also took best of show at the Atlantic Seaboard Wine Association competition earlier in the summer, beat out 740 other entrants from 105 wineries statewide. Conducted by the New York Wine and Grape Foundation, the Wine & Food Classic is open only to New York wines. Other winners included: Lamoureux Landing, Bedell Cellars, Corey Creek Vineyards, Keuka Lake Vineyards, Leonard Oakes Estate Winery, Oweria Vineyards and Earle Estates.



### ***U of Minnesota Researchers Discover Natural Food Preservative***

University of Minnesota researchers have discovered and received a patent for a naturally occurring lantibiotic — a peptide produced by a harmless bacteria — that could be added to food to kill harmful bacteria like salmonella, E. coli and listeria. The U of M lantibiotic is the first natural preservative found to kill gram-negative bacteria, typically the harmful kind. The lantibiotic could be used to prevent harmful bacteria in meats, processed cheeses, egg and dairy products, canned foods, seafood, salad dressing, fermented beverages and many other foods. In addition to food safety benefits, lantibiotics are easy to digest, nontoxic, do not induce allergies and are difficult for dangerous bacteria to develop resistance against. Salmonella and E. coli, both gram-negative bacteria, account for more than half of all food recalls in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, salmonella contributes to an estimated 28 percent of more than 3,000 deaths related to foodborne illness each year. For more information, contact John Merritt, Office of the VP for Research, [merri205@umn.edu](mailto:merri205@umn.edu), (612) 624-2609 or Jeff Falk, University News Service, [jfalk@umn.edu](mailto:jfalk@umn.edu), (612) 626-1720.



### ***New Report Finds Health Insurance Labels Help Consumers Evaluate Plans***

One provision of the Affordable Care Act is for all health insurance plans to begin using a new disclosure form beginning in 2012. The form will include a new label feature to make it easier for consumers to compare health plan options and have a clearer understanding of what costs they would be responsible for under each plan. A report published by Consumers Union summarizes findings from consumer interviews and user-testing on the label's effectiveness, as well as recommendations for improvement. The report can be found here: [http://www.nyshealthfoundation.org/userfiles/CU\\_CFL\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nyshealthfoundation.org/userfiles/CU_CFL_Report_FINAL.pdf).



### ***Smaller Corn Crop Confirmed***

The USDA's October 2011 *Crop Production* report confirmed expectations of a smaller U.S. corn crop than forecast in September. If realized, this will be the fourth largest production total on record for the United States. Based on conditions as of October 1, yields are expected to average 148.1 bushels per acre, unchanged from the September forecast but down 4.7 bushels from 2010. If realized, this will be the lowest average yield since 2005.

### ***Population Declines in Rural Schools***

John Sipple, Director of the NYS Center for Rural Schools and a professor at Cornell University, reported in August that rural schools are experiencing declining enrollments not because students are moving away after graduating, but because rural areas are having a difficult time attracting residents. U.S. Census data shows that upstate New York's median out-migration rate (the percentage of people leaving the area) of 13.4 percent is roughly equivalent to the national median of 13.3 percent. Upstate New York's in-migration rate (the percentage of people moving into the area) of 9.3 percent, however, was well below the national median of 17.1 percent. Declining population is a major problem for rural New York schools, leading to falling school enrollments, and sometimes forced consolidations. Combined with flat or declining property values and heightened state academic standards, this has created a climate of increased fiscal stress for rural communities and school districts across New York State. Extensive data is available on the Center for Rural School's website ([www.ny ruralschools.org](http://www.ny ruralschools.org)) and includes community demographics, school enrollment trends and projections, district financial and administrative data, student performance measures, and local property tax revenues and rates, among other measures of fiscal stress.

### ***Northeast Ag Production Costs Have Spiked 10%***

Farm Credit East reported in August that northeast farm production costs over the past 12 months have increased on average by 10.3%, but many farm operations' costs are substantially higher. Certain cost areas have experienced year-over-year increases of more than one-third: purchased feed has risen 34%; fertilizer is up 34%; and fuels are up 36%.

Since 2000, the Northeast's farm production cost index has spiked close to 80 points from the 100-point base. Most other production costs have increased at, or slightly above, the rate of inflation, but one continuing issue is ensuring an adequate labor force. Immigration enforcement efforts continue to create challenges, and farm businesses find it increasingly difficult to use guest worker programs. For some businesses, this is creating major challenges and additional costs, and discouraging some farms from expanding their operations.

### ***USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program***

Through funds from the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program, beginning women farmers in NY will learn more about whole farm planning in a program developed specifically for women and running through June 2012. The program, administered by Central New York Resource Conservation and Development, Inc., includes: one-on-one mentorships; on-farm field visits; financial planning and training; and networking with women farmers. Up to 270 women farmers in six Northeast states will be trained and mentored from local beginning farmer centers and farms located in CT, MA, ME, NH, NY and VT. Women farmers will be drawn from these states as well as DE, NJ and PA. Additionally, 10 farmers will be trained as mentor-trainers for the ongoing effort to build capacity in this holistic whole farm planning training program.

### ***Herkimer County HealthNet Presents Grant Awards***

In August of this year, Herkimer County HealthNet presented checks to five municipalities and organizations in Herkimer County for playground, park, and trail development and enhancement projects. The grants were funded by the New York State Department of Health's *Creating Healthy Places to Live, Work and Play* grant. The awards are as follows.

- Village of Frankfort – Operation Playground Safe Move-Hilltop Park - \$6,500
- Herkimer Area Resource Center – Having Accessible Recreation in the Community - \$6,000
- Village of Ilion – Safe Playgrounds - \$5,064
- Town of Russia – Get Fit Program - \$4,304
- Village of Dolgeville – Salisbury-Dolgeville Greenway (Main Street to Spencer Street) - \$11,950

Herkimer County HealthNet is offering municipalities and 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations playground surface material that was purchased early this spring to improve their playgrounds. The material is on a first come, first serve basis, and organizations will only have to pay for the shipping and handling costs. Those organizations interested are encouraged to contact Herkimer County HealthNet at (315) 867-1499.

### ***NY Big Game Hunting Changes***

New York has made some changes in the big game hunting laws for this fall, but the bills were signed into law in August – too late to be included in hunting manuals usually provided when licenses are purchased. The changes include allowing rifles to be used for big game in Cortland County. Crossbows may be used only during the muzzle-loading gun season, a slice of the fall hunting season. In Delaware, Sullivan and Ulster counties, hunters are now prohibited from killing spikehorn deer; they must have at least one antler with three points. More information is available online through the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

### ***Real Property Tax Cap Webpage Launched***

The State Comptroller's office launched a new web page in September, "Real Property Tax Cap," to guide localities as they begin to develop their budgets. Under a new law passed in 2011, municipalities will be able to report their property tax data electronically. New York's new property tax cap law restricts tax levy increases for local governments, most school districts and other smaller independent entities, such as library, fire or water districts, to no more than two percent, or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower. For local governments with fiscal years that begin on January 1, 2012, the cap will be two percent. The website is: <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/realprop/index.htm>



### ***Bridge Safety in Rural New York***

Even before the damage inflicted by Hurricane Irene, 14 percent of New York's rural bridges were rated as deficient, according to a report released in August by TRIP (The Road Information Project), a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit transportation research group. While New York's economic growth depends on an efficient, reliable transportation system, much of the state's 113,000-mile road network is in terrible shape. According to the TRIP report: 46% of major roads are rated either "poor" or "mediocre;" 12% of bridges are structurally deficient, while another 25 % are functionally obsolete; and 45% of urban highways are congested. In addition, TRIP reported that New York's 1,382 structurally deficient bridges have significant deterioration to the bridge deck, supports or other major components. That often limits the weight of trucks, fire engines, ambulances and other large vehicles that can use them.

## Cornell Food Safety Program Receives \$1.15 Million

This year for the first time, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is developing national food safety standards for fruit and vegetable farmers. A new National Good Agricultural Practices Program at Cornell's New York Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva will help farmers navigate the new regulations with a \$1.15 million grant over three years. In the past decade, disease outbreaks caused by fresh fruits and vegetables have triggered consumer mistrust and cost the United States more than \$152 billion annually in health care and lost productivity. The FDA's new standards will help ensure that producers have methods to grow, pack and market fruits and vegetables safely. The FDA is establishing the Produce Safety Alliance in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the new Cornell program.



## New York Expands Database for Job Listings

A new website sponsored by the New York State Department of Labor will let users search for job openings in all regions of the State. "Jobs Express"- [www.labor.ny.gov/jobs/regional.shtm](http://www.labor.ny.gov/jobs/regional.shtm) - lists 42,370 job openings across New York. The State has had a Jobs Bank website, but "Jobs Express" classifies positions by region and job type, making it easier to target particular positions in specific areas.

Employers are encouraged to post their job openings on the site, which will be updated by the Labor Department on a daily basis.

In addition to the website, the Labor Department also has 88 public offices, called "One-Stop Career Centers," where job seekers can receive free services. More information is available at [www.labor.ny.gov](http://www.labor.ny.gov).

## Northeast SARE Grants



Is a SARE grant right for you? Grants of up to \$15,000 for farm business owners or managers in the Northeast SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) region are available to allow commercial producers to explore new ideas in production and marketing. While deadlines for Partnership Grants and Sustainable Community Grants have passed, details for Farmer Grants are provided below or by contacting NY SARE Coordinator Violet Stone at 607-255-9227 or [vws7@cornell.edu](mailto:vws7@cornell.edu).

### Farmer Grants

Farmer Grants Reviewers look for innovation, potential for improved sustainability and results that will be useful to other farmers. Projects should be technically sound and explore ways to boost profits, improve farm stewardship or have a positive impact on the environment or the farm community.

To qualify, you must be a farm business owner or manager in the Northeast SARE region. It is not necessary that you farm full time, but the primary activity of your farm must be to produce and sell agricultural products. There is a limit of one application per farm per year.

Grant funds can be used to pay for your time and time that your employees work directly on the project, materials specific to the project, project-related services like testing and consulting, project-related travel, outreach expenses, equipment rental and other direct costs.

The deadline to apply is December 1, 2011. For more information, visit: <http://nesare.org/get/farmers/>

## **SAVE THE DATES!**

### **The New York State American Camp Association Conference**

**January 27-29, 2012**

Sheraton Syracuse University Hotel  
and Conference Center  
Syracuse, New York

[http://www.acaupstatenewyork.org/  
2011\\_Conference\\_Exhibitor\\_Forms.pdf](http://www.acaupstatenewyork.org/2011_Conference_Exhibitor_Forms.pdf)

### **The Rural Health Policy Institute**

**January 30-February 1, 2012**

Capital Hilton  
Washington, D.C.

<http://www.ruralhealthweb.org/pi>

### **Heating the Northeast With Renewable Biomass Conference Saratoga Springs, NY**

**March 22-23, 2012**

[www.newyorkbiomass.org](http://www.newyorkbiomass.org)

### **American Wind Energy Association Wind Finance & Investment Seminar New York, NY**

**April 12 - 13, 2012**

<http://www.awea.org/events/>

