



HUDSON VALLEY FARM TO SCHOOL



Moving Forward

A SUMMARY REPORT OF THE 2014 HUDSON VALLEY FARM TO INSTITUTION SUMMIT

The Hudson Valley is home to a diverse farm community, with fertile soils and a robust local foods movement. Interest among colleges, schools, and other institutions in sourcing from local farms is on the rise and new farm to institution efforts are cropping up across the region.

On October 16th, 2014, Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS), a partnership led by American Farmland Trust (AFT), along with regional leaders hosted the first-ever Hudson Valley Farm to Institution Summit. The event brought over 140 stakeholders together at the SUNY New Paltz campus for a day of learning, networking, and discussions on scaling up the farm to institution movement in the Hudson Valley.

The Summit Steering Committee contributed time and perspectives in the program's design and content. Steering committee members included:

- American Farmland Trust
- Poughkeepsie City School District
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- SUNY New Paltz Office of Sustainability
- SUNY New Paltz Dining Services/Sodexo
- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
- Hudson Valley Farm to School
- Hudson Valley Seed
- Local Economies Project of the New World Foundation
- Omega Institute
- Rondout Valley Growers Association
- Vassar College

“TOP NOTCH—so much knowledge and expertise in one place.”

**—CORINNE BORDEN,
BARD COLLEGE**

“I was impressed by the number and diversity of people—the many stakeholders who are directly or indirectly engaged on this issue in a practical sense, and who engaged with each other (testament to the space you created).”

**—DEBORAH DEWAN, RONDOUT
VALLEY GROWERS ASSOCIATION**



“Whether you’re in kindergarten or you’re out to dinner with a friend... there [can be] local food that reflects the seasons, that reflects the geography and that reflects the culture that we grow up in. I think, frankly, it is very real and very possible and just a matter of rebuilding the relationships between the growers, institutions and restaurants. We have enough food grown in the state and enough people that care about that; we just have to connect the dots.”

— RICHARD BALL,
NYS COMMISSIONER OF
AGRICULTURE

Diverse Participation and High-Level Engagement

Summit attendees represented a broad range of interests across the Hudson Valley, including:

- Food service buyers, faculty, and board members from K–12 schools, colleges, universities, food banks, and hospitals;
- Farmers, farmer associations, farmer-aggregators, food service management companies, distributors, and processors;
- Foundations and community-based non-profit organizations;
- Cornell Cooperative Extension, the United States Department of Agriculture, New York State Departments of Health, Education, Agriculture and Markets, and the Office of General Services.

In-Depth Learning Opportunities and Discussions

The Summit opened with a plenary of local and state leaders, moderated by AFT’s New York State Director David Haight. Speakers included:

- Bob Dandrew, Director of the Local Economies Project
- United States Senator Kirsten Gillibrand via recorded Welcome
- Don Christian, President of SUNY New Paltz

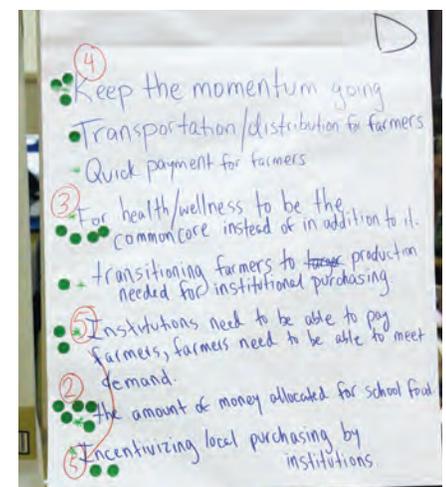
- Richard Ball, New York State Commissioner of Agriculture
- Sergio Paneque, Chief Procurement Officer for the New York State Office of General Services
- Samantha Brittain, Green Teen

Following the plenary, workshops featuring 25 leaders from across the Hudson Valley and beyond shared their expert knowledge, best practices and strategies to creatively deal with challenges. Topics included:

- Local Food Procurement for K–12 Schools
- Local Food Procurement for Colleges and Other Institutions
- Measuring Farm to Institution Success
- Building Buy-In and Engaging Diverse Stakeholders
- Inspiring and Educating Youth
- State and Federal Policies Impacting Farm to Institution
- Creative Funding Strategies
- Sourcing Local Food

Moving Farm to Institution Forward in the Hudson Valley

To build on the thinking stimulated by the morning sessions, small-group discussions in the afternoon focused on identifying critical issues for



ABOVE LEFT: Samantha Brittain describes how getting involved as a Green Teen with gardening and food changed her life. ABOVE RIGHT: Drilling down and prioritizing all the great ideas!



Stiles Najac was one of the Cooperative Extension educators who helped facilitate the afternoon discussion.

scaling up the Hudson Valley's Farm to Institution movement. Facilitated by Cornell Cooperative Extension staff, attendees engaged in animated, in-depth conversations reflecting on the region's core needs, opportunities and challenges.

By the end of the day, the group had drilled down to a set of key issues for moving forward in the Hudson Valley.

Growing and Ensuring Integrity in Farm to Institution Markets

Participants underscored the need for increased opportunities and support in connecting institutional buyers (including food service management companies and self-operated institutional cafeterias) and sellers (including farmers, processors and distributors).

Suggestions included:

- facilitation of a marketplace for buyers and sellers and an annual Farm to Institution conference with an expo;
- greater standardization of product specifications to facilitate increased purchasing arrangements between buyers and sellers;
- increased technical assistance for farmers in selling to institutions;
- improved transparency to document farm sources of products sold by distributors, such as identifying farms on order forms, packing slips and invoices.

Educating the Public

Ongoing education of the public and specific groups of stakeholders was identified as being of high importance. Specific suggested activities included:

- Educating populations served by institutions—such as school children, college students, seniors and others;
- Promoting the positive economic, public health and other impacts of farm to institution programs, particularly in schools;
- Offering training and resources for food service managers, directors, and management companies on ways to purchase local food in the Hudson Valley, such as a region-specific toolkit.

Facilitating Connections

Practitioners want more opportunities for networking, information-sharing, and peer-to-peer learning. Suggestions included:

- Hosting an annual farm to institution conference;
- Expanding social media venues to share information and facilitate connections, such as a Facebook page.

“I will meet with our Wellness Committee to discuss these issues and how important they are. We can have the best of the best of food products but it is of no value if the students do not understand and have no knowledge of what healthy food is and why it is important.”

—ALEXIS KOUDOUNAS,
FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR,
CORNWALL CENTRAL
SCHOOL DISTRICT



“The afternoon sessions were lively and well attended. I think it gave people a great opportunity to brainstorm and really think about their roles, what they want to contribute, and what the next steps should be.”

—SANDY MCELVEY, HUDSON
VALLEY FARM TO SCHOOL

Enhancing Government Support and Funding

Participants identified more effort towards increasing local, state and federal government support as a critical need. Specific suggestions included:

- Coordinating efforts to engage elected officials about current challenges and future opportunities in farm to school and other institutions;
- Educating elected officials about the benefits of local purchasing and farm to institution efforts;
- Creating a New York State policy agenda to share with Governor Cuomo, State Legislators and other state leaders, such as Commissioner Ball.

Looking to the Future

The Hudson Valley Farm to Institution Summit has energized networks throughout the region, including leaders in Farm to College, Farm to School, philanthropy, and growers. Specific actions that have occurred as a result of the Summit include:

- Use of the registration list for follow-up consultations, program development and business prospecting;
- Sustainability Directors at Bard, SUNY New Paltz, Vassar, Skidmore,

American Farmland Trust and our partners in Farm to Institution New York State would like to thank the Hudson Valley Farm to Institution Summit Steering Committee and the New World Foundation's Local Economies Project, the Joyce and Irving Goldman Family Foundation and the SUNY New Paltz Campus Auxiliary Service's "A Better Tomorrow" Fund for their contributions that made the Summit such a success.

and Marist are discussing criteria and tracking systems each campus uses to measure progress with sustainable food purchasing;

- Hudson Valley Farm to School set up a new Facebook page to facilitate regional networking;
- Attendees returned to their school community to share lessons learned and move forward with their food distributor, school wellness committee, or local farms.

"The afternoon workgroups were, for me, the highlight of the day. While the integrity and expertise of the larger presentations paved the way for the tone of the day, it was the smaller groups that confirmed, for me, how powerful we really are."

—JULIA VANLOON,
JGVL ASSOCIATES

"The Higher Education people in the Hudson Valley are having a phone call today that is directly related to following up from the summit deliverables. Very exciting!"

—SUMMIT ATTENDEE

For more information about FINYS and the Hudson Valley Farm to Institution Summit, visit www.finys.org

