Delaware County and CUCE-NYC
Catskill-NYC Watershed/Food Shed: Connecting Delaware County Farmers with NYC Consumers

The Challenge and Opportunity
This project focuses on assisting Delaware County’s farmers to expand their sales and market reach to downstate consumers. CCE Delaware County is collaborating as rural partners with CUCE-NYC to advance a concept of a Catskill Food Shed that connects local producers with urban consumers.

Two New York City watershed reservoirs are situated in Delaware County and contribute clean water for nine million New York City residents. Environmental regulations govern county land use and economic activity while Delaware County’s closeness to New York City markets supports agricultural expansion by farmers to urban consumers.

Student Research
During summer 2016, Cornell University faculty and two teams of students will research and assess/analyze the barriers, challenges, and opportunities presented by this Catskill-NYC Watershed/Food Shed concept. Working with both CCE offices and partners, the multidisciplinary faculty and students teams will identify steps to make this local food procurement system an economic reality.

Students will analyze:
- opportunities for and barriers to defining a local food shed in the New York City watershed region;
- concerns that demand from downstate customers could out-compete other local markets;
- strategies for balancing the need and interest for and pricing of local food for limited-income urban households with New York City food shed costs to expand and deliver farm foods;
- opportunities for New York City to make positive impacts in the Catskill region economy through city agency purchases of foods;
- foods that could be grown or produced by farmers for New York City consumers with plans and strategies to increase production and procurement of these foods in the New York City watershed.

Benefits
New York City regulations favor local foods procurement by city agencies that serve low-income and limited-resource populations because of these benefits:
- Full implementation of local foods policies would add local healthy foods to meals served by city agencies such as schools and senior centers.
- Economic connections of a steady market supply/demand would grow and be strengthened.
- Stronger collaborations between CCE and university faculty would shape future research projects.
• Cornell students would gain meaningful life experiences and engaged learning outcomes that shape their careers and studies.

Assessment
Students will:
• create assessment tools, using language that is clearly understood by rural and urban partners;
• gauge the feasibility of a Catskill food shed procurement system that addresses barriers and opportunities within food processing systems and policy initiatives;
• contribute to identifying next steps, language, and policy to facilitate Delaware County farmers selling to New York City agencies and their consumers.

Expertise and Partnerships
CCE Delaware leads in providing Cornell research and resources to county farmers. CCE Delaware has a strong track record of vital inter-agency partnerships, in the areas of agricultural watershed issues, with Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC), Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship (CADE), and Farm Catskills.

CCE Delaware and CUCE-NYC are collaborating with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), whose funding supports and guides WAC while protecting quality of city water.

CUCE-NYC and CCE Delaware reach and educate low-income and limited-resource households on menu planning and cooking healthy meals using produce from local farmers’ markets; engage youth and families in learning about healthy eating and active living through nutrition education in the EFNEP program; and partner with policymakers, schools, and youth development programs to implement cutting edge nutrition and STEM education programs.

CUCE-NYC’s network of partnerships within the city offers multiple policy, program, and community linkages that will be of benefit to this project. CUCE-NYC’s links with Weill Cornell Medicine, Cornell Tech, and other Cornell New York City–based programs likewise will be assets to students and faculty involved in this project. Building on all these partnerships is critical for the Catskill food shed project’s success.

Student Interactions
Students will meet with CCE Delaware and CUCE-NYC partners and be supervised weekly by both offices. Students will meet selected Delaware County farmers to identify their needs to meet the New York City demand and to establish regional branding recognition, while overcoming challenges of weather, economic, and environmental issues. They will also meet with selected city agencies to learn the government foods procurement policy and regulations, such as packaging, storage, and delivery. With input from the CCE offices, partners, farmers, and agencies, students will translate these regulations into straightforward language and clearly written checklists that are easy for farmers to follow.

Outcomes
Students will present their findings as exhibits, handouts, videos, and PowerPoint presentations to CCE Delaware, CUCE-NYC, Engaged Cornell, partners, and farmers.
Opportunities to present include the fall 2016 student intern presentation event and Delaware County Fair, and optimally at the January 2017 Regional Agricultural Conference.

Students’ research will inform both CCE Delaware’s and CUCE-NYC’s plans of work, contracts between local producers and urban consumers, and future collaborations involving Cornell faculty and students from multiple disciplines.

**Cornell’s Participation**

This Engaged Cornell project connects faculty and students with county-level issues that are relevant to the extensions offices’ partners and community residents. This project, Catskill-NYC Watershed/Food Shed: Connecting Delaware County Farmers with NYC Consumers, is an example of CCE offices and partners working collaboratively to link Cornell faculty research and teaching with students’ community engagement activities. These real-life experiences will tap students’ creativity and potentially shape their careers.

The strengthened linkages with campus resources and research will assist CCE Delaware and CUCE-NYC to be more responsive to communities in addressing emerging complex issues of sustainable agriculture and nutrition. Students provide additional insight and energy — a fresh look that strengthens the extension offices’ annual and five-year work plans, and provides for other meaningful collaborations.

This move away from Ivory Tower boundaries creates a more cohesive system, joining the local ability to identify real issues and the campus capacity for analysis and research, resulting in effective action in our communities.

This project complements existing agriculture and food systems collaborations with the College of Human Ecology and College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and is likely to interest faculty in fields such as community nutrition, agricultural economics, and natural resources. It is likely to spark interest in fields such as policy analysis and management, regional planning, and environmental analysis, and will link closely with the interests of faculty involved in the new Cornell Institute for Health Futures. We anticipate working in partnership with the Small Farms Program.

This project addresses the learning outcomes Engaged Cornell seeks to promote. We anticipate that students would develop intermediate levels of achievement in:

- civic engagement by learning to develop and use tools that allow them to connect and extend academic knowledge to civic life, politics, and government;
- intercultural competence to identify and explain more deeply others’ assumptions, feelings, modes of communication and world views, and demonstrate and apply intercultural skills and knowledge within diverse communities — including rural and urban communities;
- integrative learning to incorporate diverse methodologies by comparing community-engaged experiences with academic knowledge and to infer differences as well as similarities that acknowledge perspectives and experiences between rural food producers and urban consumers within governmental food procurement regulations and policy;
• critical reflection through activities that involve writing, asking questions, observing, analyzing, listening, and engaging with others in a positive discourse that supports the validity and reality of a local foods chain to benefit the wellbeing of low income and limited resources urban populations;
• ethical practice that results in identifying fair pricing for farmers for their products and for consumers who struggle with food deserts and/or food insecurity to support their capacity to access and purchase local healthy food.

Through this project, students will explore both ethical and practical elements of developing a food shed linking Delaware County farmers with New York City consumers.

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