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Farm to City Expo: Connecting Farmers to NYC's Wholesale Food System

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A networking event for farmers and buyers is being hosted by the New York City Council, Tuesday March 6th, 2012 at the Javits Center in New York City. The purpose is to facilitate linkages between NY's upstate producers and its downstate markets, and in doing so, support a better food system for the peoples of NYC.

The New York City Council has long recognized the importance of sourcing food for its population. A new document, *FoodWorks, A Vision to Improve NYC's Food System*, was released a little over a year ago. The document traces the city's food system and lays out a mission to provide healthy, affordable food for all New Yorkers, while supporting a local and regional economy and mitigating environmental impacts. This document also provides an insight into the goals of the networking forum mentioned above that is being hosted by City Council. You may access the full report at: http://council.nyc.gov/html/food/files/foodworks_fullreport_11_22_10.pdf.

The event may one of the best opportunities for anyone who is interested in finding and developing customers in the NYC metropolitan area. The benefits of being close to a large market with millions of consumers are sometimes cited without being well substantiated. But advantages may translate into customers and sales. Buyers are interested in connecting with local suppliers. Northeast distributors and wholesalers of perishable products were surveyed in 2006 in a Cornell study.¹ Respondents reported factors they feel make New York-grown products more competitive than those produced elsewhere. When the comments were summarized, "proximity to market" was the leading category and cited as an advantage by 31.0% of respondents. In particular, "proximity to market" includes comments such as "overnight availability", "overnight service", "ship today, arrive tomorrow", and "closer proximity to our customers' base".

¹ Angela Gloy, Henahan, Brian, and Park, Kristen. "Distributing New York's Perishable Products: Issues and Concerns." Extension Bulletin. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. (in review)

Other factors, “freight” and “product quality & freshness”, were mentioned by 25.2% and 18.1% of wholesalers respectively and can often be correlated to proximity to market. In addition, “local economy and demand” was mentioned along with comments like “local interest”, “money spent stays in local economy”, and “consumers like to buy local”.

City Council is taking steps to facilitate local business-to-business trade, seeing advantages to having producers located in proximity and to engaging them as important partners. The event will bring together New York farmers and people from various wholesale channels, such as retailers, large food buyers, distributors, manufacturers, and city purchasers. It is being held in conjunction with the International Restaurant and Foodservice Show at the Javits Center. It is an afternoon session, 2-5pm, which will describe the NYC wholesale food system, and describe how New York State farmers can access the markets. Speakers include farmers, distributors, retailers, large-scale buyers and more. Immediately following the panel discussion there will be a networking session that will enable growers and buyers to connect. Attendees will need to RSVP at events@council.nyc.gov. This will gain them entrance to the whole show.

“Smart Marketing” is a marketing newsletter for extension publication in local newsletters and for placement in local media. It reviews elements critical to successful marketing in the food and agricultural industry. *Please cite or acknowledge when using this material.* Past articles are available at <http://marketingpwt.aem.cornell.edu/publications.html>.