



Cooperative Extension

Tompkins County

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RE: STARS Innovation Credit Verification Letter

From: Kenneth Schlather
Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County

Cornell Cooperative Extension in Tompkins County is pleased that we are being recognized for our innovative work in responding to needs identified by the farming community. The Finger Lakes Land Link initiative that has been nominated for this recognition was created in response to an increasing number of beginning farmers seeking land where they can start their farming operation. The initiative was modeled after land link programs in other parts of NY and New England.

The project is a collaborative effort between Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County, led by Monika Roth, Agriculture Program Leader, along the Groundswell Center for Local Food & Farming focused on new farmer training, and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Ian Bailey, PhD student in Rural Sociology, received an Extension Fellowship award to help facilitate this program. He has been providing the staff support for website development and management. The initial funding for the launch of the project came from a Park Foundation Grant. The project will be sustained by the CCE Tompkins Agriculture Program with additional funding for the next 3 years provided through a USDA NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher grant awarded to Groundswell.

The FL Land Link initiative was created as an online resource where land owners can post land available for lease and land seekers can describe their farming operation needs. The site [<http://fingerlakeslandlink.org/>] has been operating since March 2014 and currently has 15 land owners and 34 land seekers. To date we have successfully created two matches. In addition to the website, the staff are actively providing educational resources and programming to support the matching process.

Networking meetings (3 held so far) have introduced Land Link and provided guidance on constructing leases. One to one counseling, including land assessments, has been provided to land owners and land seekers. In addition, the website includes resources on constructing leases, as well as links to other programs and services.

This initiative demonstrates the ways in which extension brings resources to bear to address community needs and by engaging partners we are able to launch innovative programming that can have long term impacts.

The Finger Lakes Land Link Initiative is a tool in the preservation of farmland by linking beginning and established farmers with land they need for their farming enterprises.

Additionally, it helps to solve a greater problem of farm transition planning especially when there is no family member to take over farmland or farming operations. By keeping land in farming, the rural and agrarian landscape is maintained and farms continue to contribute economic activity and jobs in rural communities.

The partnership between Cornell Cooperative Extension, the local CCE association, Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming and the Park Foundation has been key to launching and supporting this new initiative that is already demonstrating its value as a resource to promote farming activities.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions. Thank you for recognizing this worthwhile initiative.