

What's farming's future here?

Written by DEBBY MAYER

Friday, 17 February 2012 09:10 -

Conference at Taconic Hills looks at food, farms and more

CRARYVILLE--The conference is aimed at farmers, educators, managers of farmers markets, students, providers of goods and services, consumers and all who care about the future of agriculture in the region. It's called Farming Our Future: Growing Food, Farms, and Community takes place Saturday, February 25, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Taconic Hills School, County Route 11A.

The day will be filled with workshops, community conversations, and a keynote presentation. The \$20 (online advance) / \$25 (day of) / \$10 (students with ID) entry fee includes lunch and refreshments.

Agriculturally based programming is available for children ages 5 to 14 at \$10 per child. This includes a hands-on cooking demonstration, recycled paper projects, building a gnome house, lunch and swimming in the TH pool.

Exhibitors and sponsors are welcome. Exhibitors' tables are \$50, which includes two entry tickets. Tables for nonprofits are free, but entry tickets must be purchased. For details, visit farmingourfuture.org

All proceeds support the Taconic Hills Parent Teacher Organization and the Taconic Hills HARVEST Club (Healthy Agricultural Resources by Volunteers & Educators in Science & Technology), a program that engages youth in the process of growing healthy fruits, flowers and vegetables in a school-based garden.

The conference grew out of last year's town hall meetings regarding the Farmland Protection Plan. Karen DiPeri, who co-chairs the Copake Economic Advisory Board, attended the meeting held in Copake. "The room was packed with all kinds of people, who had experience in many different areas, from farms to markets, inside and outside of Columbia County," she recalls. "We wanted to keep talking, but the meeting ended."

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Ms. DiPeri, who is not a farmer but an “events person,” has children at Taconic Hills. She says she realized that a conference was needed as “a continuation of what people wanted to discuss.” There ensued almost a year's worth of organizational meetings leading up to the February 25 conference.

Workshops include:

*Revitalizing Our Communities through Food and Agriculture, with Karyn Novakowski, Cornell Cooperative Extension; Sally Baker, Philmont Beautification; Fiona Lally, president of the Lebanon Valley Business Association; Roberta Roll, founder of the Copake Farmers Market

*The Right Fit: Matching Food and Farm to Market, with Amy Cotler, Farm to Table advocate and food writer

*Farmland Accessibility Challenges and Opportunities, with Marissa Codey, conservation and agricultural programs manager, Columbia Land Conservancy

*Farmland Protection Plan--Where Are We Now? with Mary Ann Johnson Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corp.

*Lender's Panel: Learning about Accessing Credit, with Benneth Phelps, program coordinator of the Carrot Project; Peter Elmer of Farm Service Agency; Emili Ponte of Farm Credit East.

*Youth Workshop---Building Tomorrow's Leaders, with Vanessa Merrill, TH agriculture teacher, and Kim Carlo, HARVEST Club advisor.

*Sharing Resources--The Cooperative Way, with Bruce Davenport, fourth-generation farmer, Davenport Farms, Stone Ridge

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*Steffen Schneider, director of farm operations at Hawthorne Valley Farm, offers his thoughts on the past, present, and future of agriculture, locally and globally, in a keynote talk: "Agri-culture 3.0: An Agricultural Narrative for the Future."

Mr. Schneider joined the Hawthorne Valley Association in 1989 as manager of the farm's dairy herd; in 1994 he became farm manager and in 2008 general manager of the farm branch. He was a key member of the team that brought the farm back from near insolvency (caused by a failed wholesale distribution venture) to its present state. He is also adjunct faculty at the Pfeiffer Center in Spring Valley, where he teaches livestock management and other biodynamic courses.

"Agriculture has the potential to provide real solutions to many of the challenges we face as a society and as individuals," says Mr. Schneider.

These solutions, he told *The Columbia Paper*, range from the broad--ecologically, helping to save the ecological systems of the planet, and economically, addressing the widening wealth gap between rich and poor--to the more private, including the personal and spiritual disconnect often found today.

"What I've experienced on the farm is that agriculture provides a reconnection to the planet, to nature, and to oneself," says Mr. Schneider.

"Farms in the Hudson Valley already are, and can become even greater, pioneers of this future," he adds. "Columbia County still has so much opportunity, in its open land and remaining agriculture, to show the huge number of human beings that live nearby how the land use and human interaction of the future could work better than it does now."

For example, he says, Hawthorne Valley and other farm schools offer a place-based education, in which young people as well as adults participate in the daily life and rhythm of the farm.

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“Can we develop a narrative that will inspire and drive such a development?” asks Mr. Schneider.

Following his talk he will moderate a Q&A and panel discussion. On the panel are Ms. Cotler, Mr. Davenport, Ellen Poggi of Hand Hollow Farm in New Lebanon and Ian Perry, a ninth-grade student and president of the HARVEST Club at Taconic Hills.

The day winds up with a World Café discussion, “in which we can all practice our inherent capacities to really listen to one another,” says Mr. Schneider. The subjects and format of the World Café will reflect the workshops and panels.

All are invited to join the conversation. To register or for more information visit farmingourfuture.org or call Karen DiPeri, 518 329-0890.

Organizers of Farming Our Future are Karen DiPeri, NY Agri-Women, Copake EAB; Anna Duhon, Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program; Todd M. Erling, Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation; Sandra Gardner, THCSD; Stephen E. Hadcock, Cornell Cooperative Extension; John Langdon, Langdonhurst Farms, LLC, Copake; Rachel Schneider, Hawthorne Valley Farm Learning Center; Ben Shute, Hearty Roots Community Farm, Tivoli.

Sponsors at press time are Hawthorne Valley Association, Hearty Roots Community Farm, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Taconic Hills Central School District and Hudson Valley Agribusiness

'Farming Our Future' schedule

8 a.m. Doors open; registration, continental breakfast; exhibitors, poster presenters; networking

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9 a.m. Keynote address--Steffen Schneider, Hawthorne Valley Farm

10:30 a.m. Panel discussion and Q&A moderated by Mr. Schneider

12 p.m. Lunch

1:15 p.m. Workshops

3:15 p.m. World Café, a community dialogue

4:30 p.m. Program closes