

Wayne County Agribusiness Micro-Enterprise Program Seeds New Farm Market

Williamson, NY - Strengthening existing farm operations, encouraging new agricultural enterprises, and helping families transition farm businesses to the next generation are the main purposes of the Wayne County Agribusiness Micro-Enterprise Program. The program accomplishes these goals by providing business planning assistance and loans to qualified agribusinesses. The latest success story seeded by the Wayne County Agribusiness Micro-Enterprise Program is the Lagoner family's new farm market project in Williamson.

This farm market project strengthens a farming operation that has been in place since current owner Mark Lagoner's great grandfather bought 50 acres for a family subsistence farm in 1909. Over the years fruit has become the focus of the operation, and produce has been supplied to several fresh packers and fruit processors, including Sun Orchards packers and the Cadbury-Schwepp's processing plant just a half-mile away from the farm.

Mark and his wife Diana gradually bought adjacent land and purchased the home farm in 1987. About eighty percent of their 150 acres is planted as apple orchards. They also grow Bartlett and Bosc pears, sour and sweet cherries, peaches, nectarines, strawberries, and prunes.

"We had thought about adding a farm market to the operation for a long time, but felt we did not have the personnel to run one. Now that our children are interested in working on the farm, the decision to expand was easier to make with thoughts of possibly one day transitioning the farm to the next generation," Mark explains.

"The Agribusiness program helped tilt our decision to go ahead with a farm market," Mark adds. "It helped us look at a multitude of considerations, most importantly financing, and the business planning assistance from the FarmNet advisors gave us an independent perspective without emotion regarding our plans."

The business planning process of the Micro-Enterprise Program helps farm owners identify their goals, strengths, and opportunities, says Wayne County Ag Development Specialist Ora Rothfuss III. "Opening a retail market is a natural expansion of the Lagoner's farm, which has adapted its operation over the past 94 years to meet family and consumer needs."

The Lagoners are currently constructing a 54' x 72" farm market at their 6895 Lake Avenue (Route 21) farm. A loan from the Micro-Enterprise Program will help purchase equipment and inventory. The Lagoners will sell the apples and other fruits they grow and additional produce purchased from neighboring farms. A special craft area will offer visitors the opportunity to try a pottery wheel and other types of crafts. Handicapped-accessible restrooms will be installed in preparation to welcome tours as part of the Lagoner's long-range business plan.

Combined, Mark and Diana, their son Jacob, daughter Valerie, and son-in-law Jeremy

Dysinger have degrees in business, accounting, communications, and fine arts. The family's horticulture knowledge has passed down from three previous generations.

"We envision a fun and attractive place where visitors can learn about farming, enjoy crafts, and buy fresh fruits and value-added products," says Diana, who will use her artistic skills to create attractive product displays and signage. "We'd like to eventually tie in our activities with regional events that draw people to the lakeshore and we're looking forward to offering field-to-table educational tours."

Wayne County Tourism Motorcoach Tour Coordinator Joan Delaro says, "Lagoner's Farm Market is located right in the middle of the Locks to Lake travel corridor, heading north to Lake Ontario and the Seaway Trail. The market will be conveniently located to add to Wayne County's rural countryside tourism experience and to our wonderful variety of farm markets, each offering a unique farm adventure."

A target date for opening the new farm market is mid-May.

"We expect to work a lot of hours, but we see the potential to have a lot of fun. We all like interacting with people and will enjoy that aspect of operating a farm market," says Mark.

The Wayne County Agribusiness Micro-Enterprise Program is made possible in part by a grant from the New York State Governor's Office for Small Cities Community Development Block Grants Program. The program is administered cooperatively by the Wayne County Industrial Development Agency and Wayne County Planning with assistance from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Wayne County, NY FarmNet and Farm Credit of Western New York. Loans may be used for business startup, equipment purchase, leasehold improvements, owner-occupied real estate, and working capital.

For more information on the Wayne County Agribusiness Micro-Enterprise Program, contact Ora Rothfuss at Wayne County Planning, 315-946-5919, or the Wayne County Industrial Development Agency, 315-946-5917.

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Quick Facts About Lagoner's Farm Market

Farm began with purchase of 50 acres by Anthony Lagoner in 1900.

The Lagoner Farm now consists of 150 acres, 80% growing apples.

Fruits currently grown on the Lagoner Farm include apples, cherries (sweet and sour), Bartlett and Bosc pears, peaches, nectarines, strawberries, prunes.

The Lagoner Farm, to be home to a new farm market in Spring 2003, is located 25 miles east of Rochester, one mile north of Route 104, 2 miles south of the Seaway Trail, a heavily-traveled tourist route that is designated as one of America's Byways.

Lagoner's Farm Market will measure 54' x 72' with a 12' covered porch.

A self-serve roadside stand selling cherries and strawberries has been on the Lagoner Farm for the past 10 years.

A \$40,000 Wayne County Agribusiness Micro-Enterprise Program loan will help purchase equipment and inventory for the Lagoner's farm market.

A unique feature of the Lagoner's Farm Market will be its "crafts corner" where visitors can have a hands-on experience with a pottery wheel and other craft media.

Lagoner's Farm Market is expected to be open daily through Labor Day, and with seasonal hours through Christmas.

For more information on Lagoner's Farm Market, contact Mark or Diana Lagoner, 315-589-9534, mlagoner@rochester.rr.com

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