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Foodlink Partners with Senator Clinton to Help Local Farmers Come to Market

Senator Clinton, Foodlink and others launch major initiative to expand markets for New York's farmers and growers

Rochester, NY, July 11, 2005 – U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton today joined Foodlink - the foodbank of the Genesee Valley and Finger Lakes region - to launch the Farm-to-Fork Fulfillment Center partnership to facilitate the distribution of locally grown produce from at least 10 counties in the Greater Rochester and Finger Lakes region to markets in the state's regional centers and beyond. The partnership is a result of Senator Clinton's Farm to Fork initiative in conjunction with Foodlink and others.

At a press conference at Foodlink's headquarters in Rochester, Senator Clinton and Foodlink spoke of how, by utilizing their regional food bank assets, Foodlink will act as a facilitator to help local farmers ship quality fresh produce from their farms to a central location in the City of Rochester. Growers can then sell their quality produce in local upstate markets or, with the help of distributors coordinated by Foodlink, take it to retailers, restaurants and more, in New York City and beyond.

"It is not good stewardship to put together millions of dollars worth of assets to just do charity," asserts Foodlink's Executive Director Tom Ferraro. "As the regional food bank for 30 years, we have been combating the symptoms of hunger, while an opportunity exists to use our existing infrastructure to impact the systemic causes of poverty by supporting Upstate economic development, job creation, and ensuring New York State dollars stay in our communities."

"Some of the biggest challenges to staying economically viable that farmers cite are the lack of local markets and the poor distribution system for their farm products - it is simply too hard or impossible for them to bring their goods to market," Senator Clinton said. "I am so grateful that Foodlink recognizes those challenges and has stepped forward to help in this way."

"Expanding markets for fresh, locally grown New York State produce not only helps our farmers, but it also provides consumers with the high-quality, specialty foods they demand and the nutritious produce that they deserve," Senator Clinton said. "We hope that this announcement today will help make farmers throughout the region aware of this incredible resource that is now available to them. We also hope that the success of this Distribution Fulfillment Center will serve as a model that could be implemented in other parts of the State."

An initial focus group held by Foodlink in March 2005 found that area school districts and food purchasers, despite their commitment to supporting local producers, experienced considerable difficulty in buying locally-grown, New York State produce. Among the identified barriers was the lack of time that food purchasers have to personally connect with multiple farmers to locate the product they need and the desire for a central source point for quality, fresh, home-grown produce. Conversely, smaller regional farmers were experiencing difficulties in getting their quality product to suppliers because of their own limitations, including lack of available staff, difficulties with transportation and the challenge of delivery schedules that conflict with the demands of the land.

Through her "Farm-to-Fork" initiative, Senator Clinton has been an avid promoter of New York State's agriculture and has been working hard with New York State growers, distributors, retailers, restaurateurs, and others to expand markets for New York's diverse array of agricultural products, particularly in downstate regions such as New York City. As the regional food bank, Foodlink delivers donated food

products to over 550 human service agencies in a 10-county area. After delivering food to area food pantries and shelters, Foodlink's fleet of refrigerated trucks returns to its central warehousing facility empty while passing local farms struggling to find an economical way to bring their product to market.

Recognizing the very real connection and distribution needs of New York's smaller local farmers, Senator Clinton's office connected with Foodlink several months ago to work on creating an alternate system that would not only help meet the needs of local producers and purchasers but would potentially open markets in New York City and beyond.

The Foodlink Fulfillment Center partnership will provide the missing connection between small local farmers and food purchasers, serving as an ordering and central distribution point to link farmers and food producers with purchasers from restaurants, schools and other markets. By capitalizing on its existing infrastructure, which includes a fleet of trucks delivering to area non-profits, a Fulfillment Center food warehousing infrastructure, a USDA-certified repackaging facility and a computerized inventory system, Foodlink will pick up locally grown produce in its 10-county service area. Once the product is at the Foodlink warehouse, the product is either combined with other growers for a larger delivery to New York City, or is delivered directly to regional retailers for sale to local consumers.

The Foodlink Fulfillment Center has already begun working with four area farmers including Finger Lakes Organic, Freshlink Farms, Pederson Farms and Red Jacket Orchards. The Fulfillment Center is seeking additional partners on both the supply side of product and the demand side for consumers who desire fresh New York State products.

Foodlink is the foodbank of the Genesee Valley and Finger Lakes region, rescuing over 7.5 million pounds of food annually and redistributing it to over 550 human service agencies in a 10 county service area. In addition, Foodlink's Community Kitchen prepares over 1500 meals daily for area youth in after-school and summer meals programming. More information on Foodlink can be found at www.foodlinkny.org.

Senator Clinton's "Farm to Fork" initiative was designed to promote and conserve the amazing diversity of New York State's agriculture and to connect farmers and producers with consumers, retailers and restaurateurs across the state and in New York City and beyond. Her "Farm to Fork" initiative is part of a long-term effort on Senator Clinton's part to establish the infrastructure that is vital to the effective marketing of upstate product to the downstate market and to promote upstate New York agriculture as a whole. As part of her campaign, Senator Clinton has held meetings to join growers and producers from across the state with key distributors and wholesalers, has taken restaurateurs and buyers on tours to experience the best of what New York's growers and producers have to offer and has reinstated "New York Farm Day" each year in Washington, DC.

During the press conference product from local farmers will be loaded onto a vehicle for delivery to New York City. Shortly following the press conference, images of the event may be downloaded for use by the press at <http://www.lrsiiimages.com/foodlink.html>

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