Regional Prosperity: Collaboration Across Boundaries
Summary with focus on Round Table Discussions
Finger Lakes Regional Prosperity Network

Attendance:
- 80 people participated in the forum
- 12 rural counties represented – from Bath to Norwich, Elmira to Geneva
- plus several state and federal representatives

Keynote speaker: Leslie Schaller presentation, *Rooting Opportunity, Creating Wealth through Entrepreneurship*, provided a vision based on ACEnet's regional network that leverages prosperity in rural Appalachia (ACEnet serves 32 counties in eastern Ohio).

Panel: 5 panelists, whose programs serve multi-county rural regions, discussed the benefits (and some challenges) of working across a large rural region.

Presentation: Martha Armstrong presented the results of the USDA funded study: *Needs Assessment and Strategy for a Food-Processing Business Incubation Program*. Based on the results of this study, FLRPnet is planning to initiate a food sector incubation program in 2017.

Table discussions: The heart of the forum was the breakout sessions where groups of about 8 participants at nine tables had the opportunity to share ideas and discuss regional issues that could benefit from collaborative solutions.

Top ideas / morning session
Regional Collaboration for Economic Prosperity
- Branding and marketing: build a Finger Lakes brand – tell our story, market the region
- Building leadership coalitions across counties: strengthen resources and the economy in this rural region
- Other top issues: Transportation, Tourism, Workforce Development, Energy

Top ideas / afternoon session
Regional Collaboration to Grow the Manufactured Food and Beverage Sector
- Branding and marketing: build a regional identity and connect to markets
- Transportation: for food distribution, workforce, tourism, shipping
- Asset mapping and resource analysis: as a basis for food processing sector incubator program development
- Collaboration for incubator program development: share knowledge, resources and venture development

More details of the breakout sessions' top ideas for collaboration are on the following pages.

More information about FLRPnet and forum materials are available at www.FLRPnet.org.
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Morning: Regional Collaboration for Economic Prosperity

1. Branding and marketing the Finger Lakes region (5 tables commented on this topic)
   o Build the Finger Lakes brand
     ▪ Market our products – connecting sellers to buyers
     ▪ Inspire revitalization of our communities and protection of our environment
     ▪ Unite the region
   o Tell our story:
     ▪ Create case studies to tell about successful businesses and entrepreneurship in our region
     ▪ Preserve our rural identity
     ▪ Improve our image
   o Market our region
     ▪ Attract businesses
     ▪ Attract workforce

2. Building leadership coalitions across counties to strengthen resources and the economy in this rural region (5 tables)
   o Political/County government coalitions and collaboration across counties
     ▪ Iron out the existing disparity of resources
     ▪ Strengthen voice in shaping policy e.g.:
       • Convince State officials ag economics are an essential part of overall economics
       • taxes too high
   o Develop leadership to move the process started at the forum forward
     ▪ Address need for a cohesive consistent voice across the region

3. Ideas on improving collaboration and networking (3 tables)
   o Opportunities for collaboration:
     ▪ Improve existing infrastructure
     ▪ Network information and knowledge – e.g. market research
     ▪ Share facilities
   o Broaden the conversation and networking throughout the region
     ▪ Face to face meetings are important
     ▪ Keep politics out
     ▪ Celebrate good examples of collaboration
     ▪ It is in our interest to help each other
     ▪ Think without boundaries – network instead
   o Challenges for collaboration
     ▪ Defining the scope: what is the region; what is local vs. regional?
     ▪ Funding

4. Four common issues were discussed by 3 tables each
   o Transportation
     ▪ Address challenges for rural residents travel to work
     ▪ Utilize existing infrastructure more efficiently
     ▪ Many sectors face transportation challenges

- o Tourism
  - ▪ Support development of tourism "trails" (wine, cheese, cuisine, heritage, etc.)
  - ▪ Provide development support to ag and culinary tourism entrepreneurs
  - ▪ Need multi-year funding, and incentives to collaborate
  - ▪ Need more lodging along the wine trails
- o Workforce training
  - ▪ Workforce development needed generally
  - ▪ Specifically need training for providing service to tourists/visitors including customer service and tourism knowledge (food and other destinations)
- o Energy Infrastructure
  - ▪ Develop micro-grids across county lines
  - ▪ Develop renewable and distributed energy generation
  - ▪ Lack of utilities and natural gas in parts of the region

5. Other Issues mentioned for collaboration
   - o Funding (2 tables)
     - ▪ Need more engagement of private sector through public private ventures supporting regional initiatives
     - ▪ Pool grant specialists from different organizations to help attract more grant funds to our region
   - o Entrepreneurship – need one stop shopping for entrepreneurs to help them start up and find resources
   - o Housing – need better housing stock and more types of housing stock (e.g. there is not housing younger people want and can afford)

Summary of breakout sessions' top ideas for collaboration
Afternoon: Regional Collaboration to Grow the Manufactured Food and Beverage Sector

1. Branding and Marketing (6 tables commented on this topic)
   o Build a regional food identity
     ▪ Wine Trail has branded the region very well, let's learn from them
     ▪ Communities could put their unique local flavor on a shared brand e.g. "edible" idea, "30 mile meal" idea
     ▪ Good brand examples: Red Jacket, Wegmans, Pride of New York, Finger Lakes Fresh
     ▪ "Finger Lakes" and "Southern Tier" mentioned as potential brands
     ▪ Link to tourism
   o Develop shared solutions for market analysis and reaching markets
     ▪ Create marketing assessment and feedback programs
     ▪ Tap into campus programs
     ▪ Co-op
     ▪ Reach markets outside New York State

2. Transportation Distribution (5 tables)
   o Develop the infrastructure and related technical assistance for distribution – to get food from farm to processors, to wholesale logistics, to consumers
   o Transporting the workforce to work
   o Tourism transportation services
   o Shipping services – no local shippers

3. Asset Mapping and Analysis for Incubator Program Development (4 tables)
   o Map existing infrastructure and resources for the food processing sector
   o Analyze needs for agriculture and food processing
   o Identify strengths and gaps in the system from test kitchens to co-packers, to labeling and storage facilities

4. Collaboration for Incubator Program Development (4 tables)
   o Need organizational collaboration: e.g. joint grant-writing
   o Get rid of silos via networking, joint ventures, pooling resources, food hubs
   o Share information and resources: provide a one stop resource for entrepreneurs; include market research

5. Topics discussed by 3 tables
   o Support growth: from capital and risk management needs, to start-up needs and scale-up needs of business
   o Regulatory knowledge: Licensing, regulations, policies, FSMA, etc
   o Developing the network system: coordinate the 6+ incubators in and near the region; increase connectivity in the processed-food value chain; take a systems approach; questions about how a navigator service would work

- o Technical knowledge: avoid duplication and make easier to find information and resources through a single point of contact for expertise; leverage existing knowledge in the region and share it; provide a platform for peer knowledge sharing
- o Workforce development: need more workforce and better trained workforce

6. Other top topics mentioned
   - o Create a local food value chain as a model and a guide to development
   - o Connect "seconds" of farm produce to gleaners and processors
   - o Dynamic of land value and crop value