

## #56 Phase Two Possibilities, Sullivan County Sustainable Energy Commission

This column follows on the column of last week in discussing possibilities for Phase Two goals for the Sullivan County Sustainable Energy Commission that will be formed in the months immediately ahead. It is hoped that this column will stimulate public interest in participating in the design and implementation of sustainable energy projects sponsored by the SEC as well as projects directed entirely by town and village, by home and business owners. The conclusion of last week's column was that there are thousands of existing buildings that need to be retrofitted for energy savings, renewable energy production, higher indoor air quality, greater durability and affordability. New construction is projected at more than one billion dollars in the near term and every effort must be made to secure the community, health and economic benefits of sustainable building design and performance.

Phase Two of the SEC, according to County Legislature Chair, Jonathan Rouis, "will deal strictly with the production of energy for farms and agribusinesses and will be completed with assistance from the Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development...and the County Grants Administration. This work is already in progress.

Here are some of the details. A thorough farm energy audit will commence by April 1 on as many as 20 dairy farms. This work done under a 100% financed NYSERDA contract will collect the data necessary for individual farmers to make decisions about where to conserve energy, where to be more efficient in energy use and which renewable energy production technology to employ. Choices range from small to large wind turbines, solar electric, solar thermal, geo-thermal, bio-mass and micro-hydro.

The strategy is to focus on controlling and lowering costs of operation where farmer decision-making remains strong compared to the majority of decisions which are controlled by large conglomerates remote from farming in general and local farmers in particular. Such a strategy also supports the independence, self-reliance and frugality of farmers. Of course, it also contributes to the necessity of cutting back in consumption of resources and reducing the use of fossil fuels and their toxic effects on public and environmental health. When the dairy farm audits are finished, audits will become available for non-dairy and non-farming agribusinesses. This auditing activity will take at least two or more years to complete.

Farmers who complete the energy audit will then decide on construction and retrofit measures to obtain the benefits in energy and dollar savings. These decisions will create a demand for green materials and technologies that will lead to many new jobs and growth in size for several local businesses.

Concurrent with the energy audits, farms will be measured and surveyed for optimal renewable energy production systems. There are many obstacles here as well as the largest opportunities to lower costs of operation and mitigate the negative impacts of the decisions made in the past about buildings, materials, equipment and energy use. Four farms have already been evaluated and the main obstacle is the same issue this column has identified many times. There is a lack of coordination, a lack of knowledge of what is needed, what other organizations are doing and requiring in their regulations, and what impact this has on efficient, effective implementation of energy savings. The old, flawed ideas and relationships have not yet been adequately replaced. NYSERDA, USDA and other funding sources do not engage in the creation of articulated or compatible protocols

with the existing utility that provides supply and transmission of electricity. This is the tip of the iceberg of obstacles.

But, the hours spent on-site and on the phone with local farmers warms and energizes the will to find the way to accomplish the first stage in the outfitting of farms with labor, energy, dollar savings and income producing opportunities. After all, farmers are the most essential of businesses the world over. This incontrovertible fact has been ignored and forgotten. The welfare of every citizen is tied up with success in changing that. Our local farm and agribusiness families comprise the largest industry in Sullivan County and they deserve a major increase in support for the Sullivan County farm energy project.