

Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation

FARM AND FOOD BUSINESS ACCELERATOR PROGRAM REPORT



Putting farms and food entrepreneurs
on the fast track to accessing capital and
discovering new market opportunities

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This report is dedicated to Carlos Garcia of Farmer and Baker, a Peer in the 2018-2019 FFAA class. Carlos embodied the spirit of the FFAA program through his entrepreneurship, collaboration, and mentoring.



HUDSON VALLEY AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (HVADC) is the region's sole economic development agency with a specific focus on the viability of the agricultural economy in the Hudson Valley. It assists both new and existing agribusinesses such as farms, food businesses and food distributors, by providing technical and business consultation and resources. The non-profit promotes balanced, market-based solutions that lead to enhanced agricultural entrepreneurship, rural economic growth and community enhancement. Its one-on-one intensive technical assistance programs are among the most successful development tools in the region that foster advancement for local food producers. HVADC now provides 35-40 businesses a year with direct technical assistance, totaling close to 250 businesses since 2007.

Our vision is for a prosperous Hudson Valley community consciously investing in resilient agriculture and viable local food systems.

ment Corporation

Our mission is to develop and provide innovative solutions that create dynamic agricultural entrepreneurship and enhance economic growth in the Hudson Valley.

HVADC's Commitment to Increase and Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

In recognition of the environment in which we live and work: of climate change, social and racial inequities, international and national socio-political stress at the macro level...to questions of the sustainability of local food systems and the future of farming in the Hudson Valley, HVADC offers the following commitment to provide leadership, accountability and inspiration to our staff, our business practices, clients we serve and the broader community:

We are listening
We are learning
And we will do better

Among current HVADC initiatives are:

Incubator Without Walls Qualified business that are admitted into this program can tap into a wide range of services to accelerate their growth and increase their chances of long-term success, ranging from comprehensive business planning, strategic planning, marketing and promotion, project planning, matchmaking services, food safety certification, grant writing, value-added infrastructure, farm transfer, land access and production diversification.

Farm and Food Business Funding Accelerator A six-seven month intensive training program designed to help farmers and food entrepreneurs develop the necessary skills and materials to access capital, refine their business models, scale their business, and discover new sales opportunities. Funding for 2018-2020 FFFA program was made possible by the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Agency.

Hudson Valley Bounty The Hudson Valley's most comprehensive local farm and food online portal featuring close to 500 farms and enterprises throughout the seven county region, with descriptions, product lists, photos, maps and wholesale and contact information included for each. The fully searchable high-traffic website is used by local consumers, tourists, chefs, farmers, wholesalers, and institutional buyers. www.hudsonvalleybounty.com

FeedHV HVADC serves as administrator for this community food rescue network which covers Dutchess, Orange, Ulster, Columbia, Greene, Putnam and Sullivan counties. Through the ChowMatch app, FeedHV facilitates the harvesting, processing and distribution of locally grown or produced agricultural products, shelf-stable food donations and prepared nutritious food and directs it to agencies serving those in need. The FeedHV network includes over 300 volunteers, approximately 130 donor organizations and over 100 receiving agencies. www.feedhv.org

HVADC Agriculture Loan Fund HVADC is a designated lender administering a recently established \$10 million from New York State that is available to assist local agribusinesses have easier access to capital. Eligible borrowers of program funds include value-added processors, food distribution companies, food aggregators, wineries, breweries, distilleries, cider producers, farms and Food Hub participants.

HVADC produces a monthly e-newsletter The Cultivator featuring the businesses of its Incubator Without Walls and FFAA program clients, as well as its other programs. For more information, please visit: www.Hvadc.org.



Farm and Food Funding Accelerator Program OVERVIEW

Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation (HVADC) launched its inaugural Farm and Food Business Accelerator (FFBA) Program in June 2016, and at the conclusion of that program, re-branded the program as the Farm and Food Funding Accelerator (FFFA) program, based upon participant feedback and lessons learned.

Through 2018 and 2020, HVADC conducted the second and third confabs of the program. Both launched their call for applications mid-summer of their respective start years, and for the class beginning in fall 2018, ten farmers and food entrepreneurs were selected from a wide field of applicants to join the FFFA program, and for the class beginning in fall 2019, nine were accepted. For both classes, the FFFA Peers represent a wide spectrum of farming models and food producers in the Hudson Valley region, and were representative of HVADC's seven county coverage.

The seven month intensive FFFA training program was designed to help farmers and food entrepreneurs develop the necessary skills and materials to access capital, scale their business, and build sales. To qualify for the program, the FFFA Peers must be a farm, food, fiber or agriculture-dependent business having their home office, farm or production facility, and the majority of their labor force in the Hudson Valley. In addition, they must be able to make a commitment to the time and resources required of the training program and be able to commit the same to future FFFA participants as a peer or mentor. Funding for the 2018-2020 FFFA programs were made possible by the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Agency, with additional generous support provided by the Novo Foundation, and matching funds from HVADC.



THE TWO 2018-2020 CLASSES

October 2018 – June 2019
October 2019 – June 2020

Through a customized curriculum, FFFA participants engaged in a series of classroom training activities, monthly Peer meetings, expert instruction, one-on-one mentoring sessions, group interaction, field visits and industry networking events to learn how to talk to investors, discover new market opportunities, and pitch to potential funders.

Participants were given a number of opportunities to connect with the growing network of New York City and Hudson Valley-based funders that are seeking to invest in ventures that support the local food system. Training and sessions were conducted by HVADC, its industry partners, industry professionals, and institutional and retail stakeholders in the Hudson Valley food system.



CURRICULUM

Over the course of the seven month FFFA program, FFFA Peers received instruction in business planning, marketing, and how to strategically access the right capital for unique food and farm businesses of the Hudson Valley, and were provided numerous networking exposure opportunities for their businesses. Based upon feedback from the inaugural class of 2016-2017 the FFFA curriculum was augmented for the two more recent classes. Group sessions and individual mentoring focused on:



The Fundamentals of Accessing Capital



Business Planning



Financials and Management



Managing Human Resources



Marketing



Organizational Management



Wholesale Sales



Pitch Development

INSTRUCTORS/MENTORS

John Brusie, *Ginsberg's Foods*

Sylke Chesterfield, *Chesterfield Advantage*

Tyler Dennis, *Alewife Farm*

Ann Finnegan, *National Development Council*

Jason Foscolo, *The Food Law Firm*

Diane Greco, *Tactix Inc.*

Loretta Kuhland, *Pinnacle Human Resources, LLC*

Megan Harris-Pero, *Harris-Pero Legal Counsel, PLLC*

Gregory Mruk

Donna Williams, *Field Goods*

Brian Zweig, *Business Opportunities Management Consulting*



FFFA Class 2019-2020

Former FFFA Peers Acting as Mentors

Marge Randles, *Argyle Cheese Factory LLC*

Diane and David Allen, *Lavenlair Farm, LLC*

Jennifer Soukup, *Soukup Farms*

Karianna Haasch, *Local Artisan Bakery*

Note: Due to the COVID-19 crisis, in-person classes and interaction for the 2019-2020 classes concluded on March 4, 2020. However, all subsequent monthly meetings, pitch presentation practice sessions, as well as the final pitch presentations were professionally conducted via Zoom meetings, with 100% participation and significant interaction.

As testament to the relationships developed by the Peers of all three classes, throughout the COVID-19 crisis there were countless instances of Peers exchanging information and support as they changed their models to adapt, as well as selling and distribution arrangements made within the group, as all worked through how to deliver product and to satisfy the growing consumer demand for local products, while providing opportunities for other Peers.



NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

During the course of their training in the FFFA program, Peers were provided numerous opportunities to network with industry experts and showcase their products.

October 2018

Taste of New York's Business Expo Events: held simultaneously at Anthony's Pier 9 in New Windsor and at The Desmond in Albany. Combined, the two events attracted over 200 food industry leaders, chefs and media.

February 2019

Capital Area Agriculture & Horticulture Program: Presented by CCE Albany County, this regional direct marketing conference provided FFFA Peers with the opportunity to lean from the staff of Farm Roots about ways to enhance market sales.



FFFA Class 2018-2019



March 2019

Kick-off event for spring Hudson Valley Restaurant Week: Hosted by Valley Table magazine, FFFA Peers showcased their products to an audience of restaurant owners and chefs and press at The Factoria @ Charles Point on the Hudson River waterfront in Peekskill, Westchester County.

May 2019

Buyer ConneX: An HVADC sponsored event held at Locust Grove Estate in Poughkeepsie, in Dutchess County, this showcase featured 18 Peers from two FFFA confabs displacing and sampling their products to an audience of restaurant owners, chefs, caterers, specialty food markets, institutional buyers, colleges and schools, corporate food service providers and distributors.

June 2019

Pitch Event: All FFFA Peers presented their preliminary pitch presentations to an audience of alternative funders, banks and credit unions, including Kinderhook Bank, Farm Credit East, HV Start UP Fund, UC Economic Development, and Local Farms Fund.



October 2019

Kick-off event for fall Hudson Valley Restaurant Week: hosted by FFFA program media sponsor Valley Table, Peers were invited to showcase their products to an audience of restaurant owners, chefs and media at an event held at Sloop BrewingCo. @ The Factory in Hopewell Junction, Dutchess County

December 2019

Access to Capital Workshop & Expo: Held at Cobleskill SUNY, this event was sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Empire State Development, New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets, UAlbany green scene, and HVADC.

March 2020

Kick-off event for spring Hudson Valley Restaurant Week: Hosted by Valley Table magazine, FFFA Peers were invited to showcase their products to an audience of restaurant owners and chefs and press at Crabtree's Kittle House Restaurant in Chappaqua, Westchester County.

April 2020

HVADC FFFA Three Class Networking Event - Pay It Forward: This event was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, but will be held at a later date.

July 2020

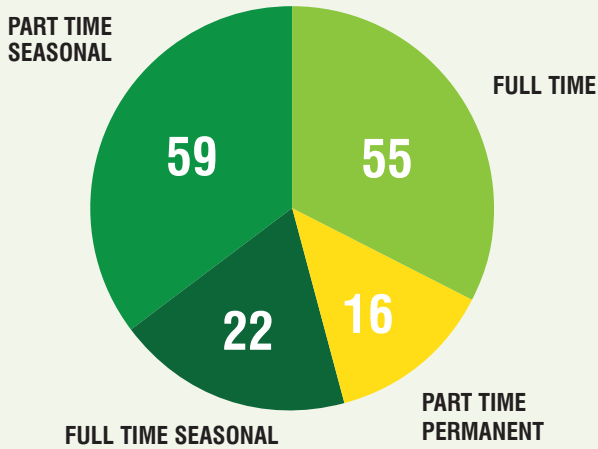
Pitch Event: All FFFA Peers presented their preliminary pitch presentations to an audience of alternative funders, banks and credit unions, via Zoom call, including The Jeff Bank, Farm Credit East, HV Startup Fund, Armonia Fund, and Community Capital.

2018-2019 RESULTS

JOB CREATION [combined both classes]

The expected economic benefits of the project included retaining or creating 69 jobs and \$2 million dollars in private investment. Of course, these estimates were provided pre-pandemic.

Actual job creation or retention for the 16 businesses which reported results after participating in the program was reported as follows:

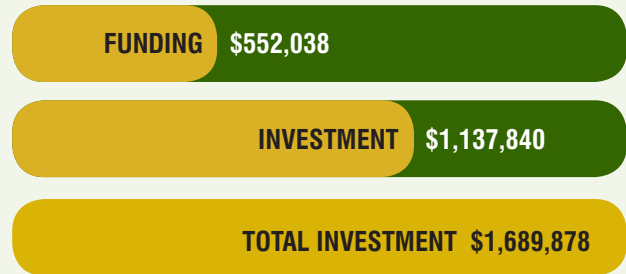


INVESTMENT [combined both classes]

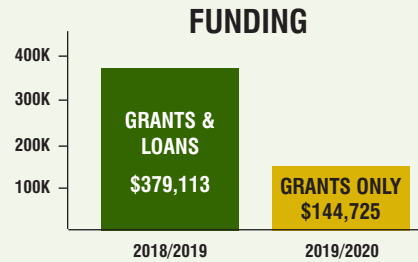
Private investment was tracked based on grants or loans secured by the businesses in addition to the business's own investment.

Twelve of the nineteen participating businesses secured funding in the amount of \$552,038, including \$28,200 in Federal Economic Injury Disaster Loan or the Paycheck Protection Program.

Additionally, 12 businesses reported \$1,137,840 in investment in their operation for a combined total investment of \$1,689,878.

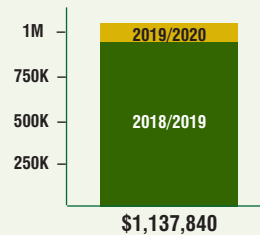


While this is below the expected investment, it is important to look at the differences between the two classes and consider the affects of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Interviews with the 2019/2020 businesses at the end of the program revealed all the businesses scaled back their intended projects and put on hold any thoughts of pursuing loans due the economic uncertainty created by the pandemic. Nearly all expressed financial concern not only for 2020, but perhaps 2021 and 2022.

PERSONAL/BUSINESS INVESTMENT



ADDITIONAL KEY ECONOMIC METRICS

Several additional key economic metrics were captured as part of the program. These include the following:

Since the Accelerator program's inception, the three Peer classes have secured over \$2.3 million in funding – through grants, private funding or loans.

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TOTAL COMBINED SALES for all business participating for the period 2017 to 9/2020 equaled **NEARLY \$5,650,000.**

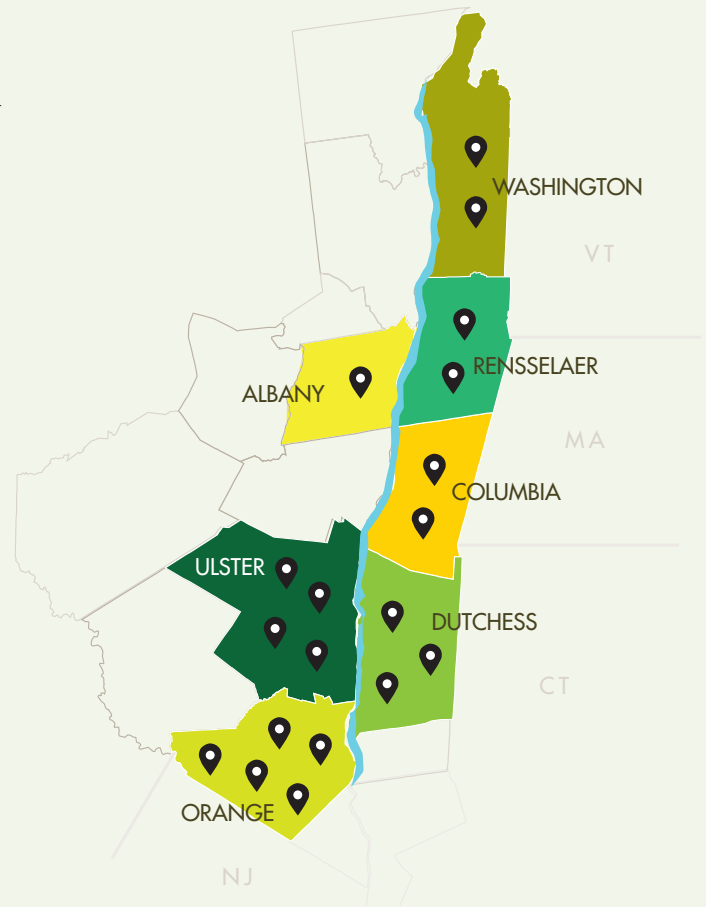
11 BUSINESSES identified **31** NEW MARKET OPPORTUNITIES for an estimated **\$378,000** in additional sales

FFFA Peers Represented Seven Counties in the Hudson Valley

NINE BUSINESSES identified 21 expanded market opportunities for an estimated **\$114,620** in additional sales



TEN BUSINESSES reported making purchases at



FFFA Peers identified the following components of the FFFA program as helping them gain new skills:

- Networking with fellow Peers: collaboration and lead generation
- Long-term planning
- Presentation and pitch development
- Legal issues – corporate structure, trademarks, contracts
- Succession planning
- Funding opportunities and approach
- Marketing tactics
- New markets/distribution possibilities
- Field visits to Peer businesses

MEET THE 2018-2020 FFFA PEERS

Learn About Their FFFA Experience and Their Plans

While each of the FFFA Peers entered the program with some concept of how they wanted to scale their businesses, each had varying products, experience as a food producers, business models, structures, and long term visions. Their stories illustrate how intense business training programs can help farms and food producers solidify plans for growth, think further about new marketing, collaboration and distribution opportunities – and in some cases, re-evaluate their business premise. Through the instruction, mentoring, interaction with other Peers and networking events, each FFFA Peer either advanced their original plans, modified their expectations, or developed new initiatives they had not previously contemplated.

FFFA Class of 2018-2019

Beatrice
Berle
BERLE
FARM
Hoosick, NY,
Rensselaer
County
Dairy Farm and Orchard



Berle Farm has been a certified organic dairy business producing yogurt and aged cheese in its on-farm creamery since 1997. The farm also sells breeding stock, steers, calves and packaged beef as well as growing a variety of vegetables, apples and other fruits, and produces maple syrup and cornmeal. Current distribution is through the farm store, sales of gift boxes, neighboring farm stands, retail stores and restaurants. At the point of joining the FFFA program, a cider business was in development. Berle was also planning to scale the business by adding new products, expanding sales regionally, building a solar powered farm store, and increasing space for cider making and produce storage.

Since the FFFA program, Berle opened its new farm store in summer 2019 and added new products from other local producers. They have launched a new website, and constructed a heat pump system, as well as building a new well, adding a new cooler, and constructed a grain dryer in September 2020. The store was able to continue operations throughout the COVID-19 crisis using an online ordering and porch pick up system. Berle was the recipient of a USDA REAP grant, as well as a NYS Grown & Certified grant.

Ted Berndt
BATTENKILL
VALLEY
FARMS
Cambridge, NY,
Washington
County



Agri-Tourism Destination and Market

Strategically located between Saratoga Spring, Manchester, VT, and Lake George, Ted first operated a corn maze/haunted house on his property in 2017 and an antique and flea market in 2018. The farm also has a variety of other revenue

sources, such as providing winter storage facilities for RVs, boats and cars. Ted joined the FFFA program planning to further develop the property by opening a destination agri-tourism venue, including a farmer's market, craft fair and craft beverage facility that would generate revenue from vendors. Plans included converting 24 previous grow buildings into vendor space and developing utility infrastructure for the space.

“

Participation in the FFFA helped me refine my business plan and be able to make pitches [to funders]. I found the peer networking to be invaluable. The feedback from my peers who had used farmers' markets as sales channels was extremely helpful.”

- TED BERNDT

Ted continued to develop his business plans and viability studies for the market during the FFFA program; In March 2019 he won second place in a Business Plan competition conducted by the Farmers Market Federation of New York. After the program he further progressed his plans, recruiting potential vendors at events and through sales, preparing the property and was planning to open in May 2020. He was awarded a New Farmers grant. Unfortunately, given the COVID-19 pandemic he decided not to open in spring 2020, and is evaluating plans to open in 2021, post-COVID.

“

The FFFA makes a variety of businesses possible. It is a push in the right direction for small businesses that give us such a flavorful culture, as opposed to all box stores. This is a very nice direction for small businesses. Since there are so many regulations, this type of program is very useful. This program encourages a lot of positive things; food, land preservation, jobs... all the things you would like to see in a culture. There should be more programs like this, we are lucky to have HVADC in the area.”

- BEATRICE BERLE



Jaimie Cloud
MIRACLE SPRINGS FARM
Gallatin, NY, Columbia County
Goat Dairy, Farm and Cheese Producer

Coming from a family farming tradition, Jaimie Cloud is the founder/president of the Cloud Institute for



Sustainability Education. Since forming Miracle Springs Farm in 2015, Jaimie, along with her husband David Levine, work closely with their team including Rene' DeLeeuw, Head Farmer and Goatman. Together and in partnership with Chaseholm Farm Creamery, they produce a variety of delicious cheeses. Regionally, sales are largely to wholesale customers such as restaurants, markets, cheese stores and distributors, with retail sales being made through farmers markets, farm sales, a cheese club and CSA. In 2018, demand for Miracle Springs' cheese was exceeding production capacity, and Jaimie was projecting that the farm would need to expand the herd and improve efficiencies to reach its critical size.

Through the FFFA program, Miracle Springs worked toward better identifying the sources of its sales revenues from various channels and gaining a better understanding of its cash flow and accounting system. They then recognized that NYC farmers markets were a prime and efficient distribution market and they have since expanded their presence in the city to multiple market venues, as well as additional specialty stores. They continue to partner with other food/drink producers to host events (some virtual), and for inclusion in other purveyor product offerings such as subscription programs and online outlets.



The greatest thing that came from it has been the information and the networking.” - CRISTINA GARCIA

Carlos and Cristina Garcia¹
FARMER AND BAKER
Middletown, NY, Orange County
Bakery/Farm

Husband and wife team, Cristina and Carlos Garcia had been operating a wholesale artisan bakery



in New Jersey since 2005 along with a network of 14 farmers markets in NY and NJ when they decided in 2018 to create Farmer and Baker to produce the vegetables, eggs and grains needed in the bakery. With plans to move the bakery to Middletown and extend it to a fully developed food market, the couple planned to evolve their wholesale business to retail, and utilize their local Kikiriki Farm to grow crops and pasture animals, as well as develop an aquaponics system to raise tilapias, trout, shrimp and crawfish. As part of the move they were also working with GrowNYC to receive support for their project.

In 2018 the Garcia's were one of the businesses winning the Middletown revitalization Project Race 4 Space competition and were chosen for the Rail Trail Commons initiative which was revitalization of the old Woolworth's building in the city. The project involved

a complete build out, but developing the farm, recipe testing and social media outreach ramped up during the prolonged construction. The couple opened their retail store in spring 2020 with limited hours for pick up, but since has been increasing the store's open hours. At this time they decided not to pursue developing the aquaponics system. One of the farm's next projects was to be building a well and washing station, and Cristina was pleased to report that thanks to the FFFA program, she learned that the state grant could cover 90% of the expenditures for the otherwise costly project. The Garcias did receive a grant under the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for farm infrastructure.

¹ Note – Mr. Garcia passed away unexpectedly in October 2020. HVADC is assisting Mrs. Garcia as she contemplates the future of the farm and the bakery.

Shelley Gray
GRAY FAMILY FARM
Windsor, NY, Orange County
Diversified Farm



After 30 years of operating a successful horse boarding and training facility, Shelly and

her husband were planning to expand production on Gray Family Farm when she joined the FFFA program. The farm currently raises poultry, vegetables, maple syrup, honey, hay and flowers, and sells beef and pork from another farmer. Products are generally sold through a CSA with some on-farm customers, particularly for turkeys. Hay is sold wholesale to small farms, and hops are planted on their third farm: Rock Ridge. Shelly is planning to increase marketing for the CSA, improve electrical and water supplies, and develop the infrastructure for hops production.

Through the FFFA program, Shelly benefited from legal assistance in clarifying the corporate structure of multiple farms. Through her work with business and marketing advisors, she was able to refine her projections for her



Community is paramount in farming. HVADC's Farm and Food Funding Accelerator invited us to join a community of people who have expertise in, and experience with funding opportunities, financial planning, the investor world, and the agricultural scene in the Hudson Valley. It would take us years to build those relationships on our own. FFFA is also a community of farmers—folks like us who are entrepreneurial, edgy and passionate about farming and want to make a living doing it.”

- JAIMIE CLOUD



various lines of businesses and better ascertain the most efficient revenue generation potential vs. cost analysis and cash flow for each, as well as a marketing plan for the CSA. She has significantly improved her cash flow and met her goals of increasing her CSA membership, which was fully subscribed in 2020.

**Nimai Gupta
GOPAL FARM
New Paltz, NY,
Ulster County
Specialty
Product Farm**



Nimai owns and manages an organic, no-kill, biodynamic farm following the rudiments of permaculture, that produces ethnic Indian vegetables, herbs, beans, grains and milk products— and may be the only farm in the Northeast doing so. Much of his product has been developed through trials and experiments with heirloom seeds sourced from different regions throughout India. He has developed a market by distributing through weekly grocery boxes to affluent Indian-Americans, specialty chefs, Indian fusion chefs, and online sales.

“

Brian [Zweig] has been extremely helpful in understanding our business model first and then suggesting ways to improve upon it, and getting valuation done.” - NIMAI GUPTA

Nimai identified that institutional sales, especially targeting universities with high percentages of Indian students, participating in the Union Square Farmers Market and expanding to retail chains will help the farm meet its potential and is planning to scale production to meet those markets.

During his participation in the FFFA program, Nimai worked through the logistics of his labor and funding requirements and project plan. Since the program, Nimai received private funding to enable him to further his plans. He has expanded his CSA program, now offering three specialty farm boxes delivered direct to homes (Indian, American and

Jain), and increased his online presence – including other related products. His model is no longer focused on institutional sales but pivoted to direct-to-consumer. He was also awarded a USDA grant for his use of bio diesel on the farm.

**Karianna Haasch
LOCAL ARTISAN BAKERY
Kingston, NY, Ulster County
Bakery**

With a background in marketing, Karianna launched Local Artisan Bakery as a pop-up shop in the spring of 2018, selling at events and farmers markets throughout the Hudson Valley. Local Artisan Bakery embraces the art of baking by using high-quality, local ingredients and baking in small, hand-crafted batches. With the motto of “new flavors every week,” the bakery offers a rotating selection of sweet and savory pastries, cakes, cookies, breads, and more. Upon joining the FFFA program, Karianna was preparing to open a retail storefront and commercial kitchen to enable clientele growth and expanded product offerings.



Karianna opened the Local Artisan Bakery store on Broadway in Kingston in May 2019 with the help of private funding, and quickly expanded her product line to include the Local Artisan Gift Collection featuring handcrafted foods and gifts crafted by other local Hudson Valley artisans. She was named as one of Dutchess County’s 40 Under 40 Movers & Shakers in August 2019. While COVID-19 forced her to quickly pivot back to her pop-up and market selling model, enhanced through social media strategies, Karianna was able to re-open the store during the summer of 2020.

**Jason and Heather Kading
JSK CATTLE COMPANY, LLC**

**Millbrook, NY, Dutchess County
Cattle, Pork and Poultry Farm**



The Kadings raise pasture grazed cows, pork and poultry, selling meet and eggs through their

own farm store, and well as to other farms, online and wholesale to other farm stores and restaurants. With a focus on “from our pastures to your plate,” they were planning to increase their registered Angus herd, enhance their online store pick-up and delivery model, expand wholesale distribution, increase store traffic and elevate customer experience by adding an event kitchen/pavilion and developing and adding other local products.

The Kadings worked with FFFA legal and business planning advisors to evaluate and redefine their business structure which was identified as a priority for them. While they have not yet been able to implement plans for the expanded kitchen space, they are active networkers within the Harlem Valley Farm and Food Alliance and with other food producers, and have implemented an online ordering system for pick up and have kept their current store running throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

“

It has really opened my eyes to all the different funding sources out there, and how hard it is to get some of it. One of our classes was on these different grants out there, it blew me away. I have learned from a business coach and marketing coach; I’m getting a lot of questions answered and coming up with more questions based on what others are going through. I am networking with other farm and food businesses – learning about other sources of funding, rather than going to the bank, like investors, crowd funding, all different options.”

- HEATHER KADING



**Jose “Jaq”
Quezada
VEEDA HOLI
HYDRATION
Newburgh, NY,
Orange County
Consumer
Packaged Goods**



Founding Veeda in 2016, Jaq has a strong background in project management, entertainment, branding, marketing, and business development. As a plant-based beverage company, Veeda is committed to redefining hydration for the health conscious consumer by delivering a wholesome hydration alternative that is naturally refreshing, low in carb and calories, as well rich in nutrients. At the time of joining the FFFA program, Veeda was selling throughout New York City specialty retail accounts including 13 Whole Foods market locations and online via e-commerce. Veeda was seeking to expand production and distribution throughout the Tri-State region (NY, NJ, CT) with plans to introduce the beverage through new distribution channels including fitness facilities, hotels and restaurants, schools and hospitals.

The FFFA program helped Jaq re-evaluate the plans for Veeda. He worked extensively with the FFFA business and marketing consultants to refine several configurations for the product, including the actual viability of the product, the sales model, the financial and logistical ramifications of procuring raw materials in the Hudson Valley vs. off-shore, and where to locate the production facility. Ultimately, he shifted his own personal plans and has decided to pursue other avenues.

**Rebecca Shim
PHOENICIA HONEY CO.
Mount Tremper, NY, Ulster County
Consumer Packaged Goods**

Marketing infused honey products since 2014, Rebecca is a trained chef from Brooklyn, who migrated to the Hudson Valley. Since purchasing the business in



2016, she has expanded the product line to include other bee inspired products including a skincare line and beeswax candles, and distribution from markets and fairs to wholesale accounts, online and through an Etsy store. Rebecca had recently moved the operation to the production kitchen at the Cornell Creative Business Center, providing the opportunity to almost double production. Future plans included expanding an on-site apiary, creating a pollinator-friendly cutting garden of native plants for forage for the bees, as well as cut flower sales.

Through the FFFA program, Rebecca worked toward developing and refining her business plan and projections and marketing plan. During the program, she decided to move her production to the Phoenicia Arts and Antiques center which also provided her with retail space. She was awarded a Catskill Watershed Grant which allowed her to test social media advertising. Since completing the program, Rebecca has refined her website, increased her online sales, continues to sell at the arts center and at events, and for the 2020 season introduced cut floral bouquets to her offerings.

FFFA Class of 2019-2020

**Shereen Alinaghian
ARDITH MAE FARMSTEAD
GOAT CHEESE
Stuyvesant, NY, Columbia County
Goat Dairy and Cheese Producer**



Ardith Mae Farmstead Goat Cheese is a small Animal Welfare Approved farmstead

goat cheese creamery focusing on raising animals humanely and creating healthy, healing products. The farm is owned and operated by Shereen Alinaghian and the backbone of her farm is her amazing crew, Katie Dober, Calista Tarnauskas and Jeremy Shapiro. Ardith Mae farm has been in business since 2009 primarily selling at the GreenMarkets in NYC,

CSAs, The Good Food Farmers Network, restaurants, and a few farms stores. The farm's product line includes goat's milk cheese, cow's milk cheese, mixed milk cheese, pestos, and goat's milk soap. Upon joining the FFFA program, Shereen was strategizing to re-locate the farm and design a facility where she can continue to increase production, allow for co-packing, conduct cheese making and goat yoga classes, add a small farm store and lease portions of the facility to new cheese makers.

While still looking for the perfect future farm location, the pandemic kept Ardith Mae busier than ever, and they were properly structured to handle it. Through it, Alinaghian found opportunities to adapt, fill a new need, and even grow. They continued to trip down to the NYC GreenMarkets, even taking other producers' products with them. When area goat farms were dumping milk at the beginning of the crisis, Ardith Mae took some on, increased production and hired new staff. The farm has also been selling more to food hubs and food businesses with delivery. Alinaghian was a recipient of a NYS Grown & Certified Producer grant and is looking forward to purchasing her own property and setting up a new facility to support her growing business.

**Jamie Caligure
SOULCRAFT FARM
BREWERY
Cambridge, NY,
Washington County
Farm Brewery and Market**



Start-up Soulcraft Farm Brewery is led by Jamie Caligure an experienced commercial brewer. Situated on 20 beautiful acres, Soulcraft will be a farm brewery, taproom, market and creative gathering space. Soulcraft collaborates with local farmers, growers and producer to created unique beverages utilizing N.Y. ingredients. Caligure believes that Soulcraft Farm Brewery is a vessel through which the couple expresses themselves in what and how they create. For the Caligures it is a full body experience using their hands to farm and forage for ingredients that utilize sustainable practices. Seasonal ingredients will dictate the farmhouse

saison beer styles and recipes, and original recipes will be developed based upon the availability of the natural flora and fauna and on the property. Wild yeast on the farm will be cultivated and utilized to create a truly distinctive terroir.

With the help of private funding, Jamie was purchasing equipment and developing his brewery through the course of the FFFA program.

Carrie Dashow and Suresh Pillai
ATINA FOODS
Catskill and Kingston, NY, Greene and Ulster Counties
Ayurvedic Fermented Condiments

Handcrafted by married team; Carrie and Suresh, Atina Foods works with local farms and other sources



for ingredients. Atina Foods adapts traditional South Indian Ayurvedic recipes to make complex, delicious condiments that help balance health and diet. Combining local and global whole fruit, roots, and spices, Atina's ferments and preserves accentuate any meal, even dessert. Since 2015, the couple has focused on direct sales at events, festivals and markets, and through that experience learned that their products need more education that can be accessed at regular retail locations. When they joined the FFFA program, the couple was planning to launch into a storefront which would feature their and related products, and to focus on improving their e-commerce platform.

“

It's been great with HVADC. They really helped us professionalize what we were doing. We get to bounce things of mentors who have been in our position before and it helped us speed things up that we needed to do anyway, like the online store.”

- CARRIE DASHOW

The FFFA program proved to be a journey for Atina, as the couple worked hard to develop several different business models for the storefront. Ultimately, they decided to open Atina Food Home Store seasonally on their property in Catskill which had previously been used to host a minimal number of pop up sales and event. Opening in early summer 2020, the store now features all the Atina condiments, and weekly meal specials. Their social media promotion is augmented by online fermentation workshops and cooking events. They continue to also sell at a limited number of markets. Atina has been growing through online sales, new relationships and some very well-timed media exposure in local print publications as well as broadcast. Though it filmed almost a year ago, in May, Atina was featured in an episode of the PBS program *Lucky Chow* on healing foods, along with previous FFFA Peer Gopal Farms. The spotlight has continued to drive new interest in their products.



Emily Eder and Margaret Thomas
GREAT SONG FARM
Red Hook, NY, Dutchess County
Diversified Farm

Maggie Thomas

and Emily Eder were just finishing their first season owning and operating Great Song Farm when they joined the FFFA program. They grow a variety of vegetables, flowers, and herbs on 1.5 acres, using organic, regenerative, and biointensive growing practices. During their first year, they supplied a 90 member CSA and a few local restaurants. Maggie and Emily planned to increase their CSA membership, grow sales to their current restaurant accounts, and add more. Through small infrastructure projects, they hope to increase output and open

“

We have a lot of questions and we knew that FFFA would set us up with professionals who would be able to provide answers and needed guidance.” - EMILY EDER

their farm store to the public. They are interested in producing value-added goods such as salves, teas, and ferments. Their intention is to eventually be able to leverage some of their profits to make their vegetables more accessible to low-income communities.

Through the FFA program, Maggie and Emily worked with advisors to solidify their corporate structure and arrangements with their landlord. By the beginning of their second season, and the completion of the FFFA program, they had increased their CSA program to 145 members, and had a waiting list. They hosted some pop-up events and built chicken chariots to transport their flock around the farm. As the pandemic hit, they reached out to neighboring farmers who were suffering due to a loss of sales to restaurants to include their products in their CSA and as add-ons.

Jude Goldman and Reuben Schwartz
VITAL EATS LLC

Albany, NY, Albany County
Plant-Based Sauces and Condiments



Vital Eats was established in 2013 by cousins Jude Goldman and Reuben Schwartz who seemed destined to create a brand together since childhood. Both have backgrounds in creative cooking and visual arts, and love to create healthy and beautiful dishes. Vital Eats unveils bold, dynamic flavors through its line of condiments using only plant-based ingredients. All products are vegan, vegetarian, gluten free, GMO free, dairy free, and 100% free from any artificial preservatives. Vending at farmers markets has provided valuable feedback from customers which had helped to refine each product. Vital Eats



had identified that it has the opportunity to develop an incubator co-packing operation, not only to create its own value-added products but to be able to produce products for other food producers. There are currently very few co-packers in its region that can help a prospective food start-up business produce their product without imposing large minimums.

Jude and Reuben identified that while they were already selling through major retailers such as TJ Maxx, their pitch would be to seek funding to further their marketing efforts. This would include improving their Amazon presence, augmenting their website with new e-commerce tools, and hiring a marketing employee. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they refined their current website, streamlining online ordering, offering products from other food makers, and offering delivery services.

Zack and Annie Metzger
LAUGHING EARTH FARM
 Cropseyville, NY, Rensselaer County
 Diversified Farm

Laughing Earth has been providing vegetables, flowers, and pasture-raised meat to the surrounding



community for the last 20+ years, with Zack and Annie Metzger taking over the reins in 2015. With the transition to new ownership has come a transition to organic certification and a focus on increasing community involvement and providing food to the community for a

greater percentage of the year. Zack is focusing on sustainable growth of the business through the addition of a commercial kitchen and processing facility that will allow an increase in the product line toward more value-added products such as cured meats.

Laughing Earth has been a recipient of a NYS Grown and Certified Producer grant, as well as a grant for estate planning which was enabled by the FFFA legal advisor. They quickly implemented an online ordering system when the pandemic hit and brought in goods from other producers. They completed construction of their new farm market, which has further enabled their Farm Share distribution and self-serve pick-ups. When the markets opened, they returned to the Troy market.

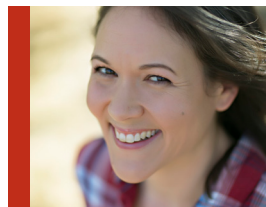


One of the most important elements was the incredible support from our mentors and great learning opportunities and camaraderie among Peers. Meeting the others in the cohort and being able to see how our businesses all face distinct challenges has been reassuring...no matter if our issues are similar or different; we all have something to learn from each other's experience."

- KRISTIN NELSON

Kristin Nelson
THE ARDENT HOMESTEADER
 Arden, NY, Orange County
 Salted Caramel Sauces

After Kristin Nelson fine-tuned a recipe for homemade caramel, it became a signature gift for family and friends.



In 2014, with encouragement from other Hudson Valley farmers and food entrepreneurs, Kristin launched The Ardent Homesteader Inc. to produce and market

Cara-Sel salted caramel sauce. Cara-Sel is hand-crafted in small batches with just five all-natural ingredients (no preservatives) and is sold wholesale as well as direct to consumers at select festivals and in her online shop. While the wholesale demand is growing steadily, Kristin had identified that there are additional opportunities to sell direct to consumers online and was developing plans to increase sales in that channel, as well as potentially launch a second product.

By mid-way through the FFFA program, Nelson was testing recipes for a new product, caramel popcorn with a twist, and evaluating packaging and co-packing options. She was testing it at markets, and as an FFFA Peer, at both the fall 2019 and spring 2020 Hudson Valley Restaurant Week Industry Day kick off events. With the COVID-19 crisis forcing her to re-focus on the homestead and family, Kristin is still baking and selling her products through her existing and new outlets.

Richard and Alicia Romano
SCREAMIN' ONIONZ
 Millbrook, NY,
 Dutchess County
 Craft Sauces



Screamin' Onionz is the pioneer brand of Aha! American Healthy Appetite, the Romano's specialty food company focused on all natural, shelf stable food products. Using sliced N.Y. sourced



We went to them [the FFFA Program] because we knew they could help us build a bridge to get the product where we need it to go. One thing that kept me going when I was starting restaurants was passing on the philosophy that every guest needs to feel cared for. I feel that with HVADC. We feel cared for. We feel that they want us to succeed."

- RICHARD ROMANO



We all have different needs, but HVADC seems committed to exploring those needs and offering its vast resources—such as knowledge, connections and funding."

- ZACK METZGER



onions slow cooked in craft sauces, the Romanos have developed a versatile food product that satisfies every diet constraint: plant-based, vegan, vegetarian, Keto, Paleo, Dash, and gluten free. Screamin' Onionz are available in Hudson Valley stores such as Adams Fairacre Farms, regional Tops Friendly Markets and some WholeFoods in the North East. The Romanos have also launched into the school market and think they can make a big impact in public schools with Screamin' Onionz by providing a bridge product that helps them move away from processed foods in their menus.

The Romanos used the FFFA program as an opportunity to refine their business plan, branding strategy and pitch presentation for Screamin' Onionz and also worked with the legal adviser to confirm corporate legal structure and trademarks. They continued to pick up additional wholesale accounts, initiated partnerships to progress institutional sales, and have proactively been marketing online sales.

Pamela Clarke Torres
PROSPECT HILL ORCHARDS:
FARM MARKETS
Milton, NY, Ulster County
Diversified Fruit Farm

The Clarke family has been farming in Milton since 1817 and Pamela is the seventh generation to pursue a life on the farm. In 1996,



Pamela and her husband Robert returned to the farm and began attending farmers markets. The farm grows a wide variety of fruit and selling at several Greenmarkets in New York City was a natural fit. Over the years Pamela and Robert have added more value-added products by converting a farm out-building to a solar powered bakery with an innovative dried apple production area. The family farm is in the middle of a generational transition, and is planning on focusing more on direct retail, its U Pick operation, and new products.

Through the FFFA program, Pamela worked with the program's legal, business strategies and marketing advisors to develop and progress a plan to expand marketing of the farm's dried apple product, as well as work

through the logistics of the generational transition and increasing the farm's public facing U Pick operations. She developed branding and packaging for the apple crisps and a plan for expanded automation of the production line. She continues to sell the crisps at Greenmarkets, and on the farm, and has increased marketing of the U Pick operation, opening a second location in fall 2020.



Without talking to Megan [FFFA legal consultant] consistently and feeling the momentum for the family working together, we would have never been able to envision opening my grandfather's farm for pick your own this year. It ran smoothly, earned me some much needed money, and set up a vision of success for all of us. We accomplished what a year ago seemed improbable – three pick your own operations running in tandem. We have many modifications and improvements to make of course, but working together is becoming a more natural way to do things, and we are communicating better.”

- PAMELA CLARKE-TORRES

Read more about the class of 2018-2020 FFFA Peers in back issues of *The Cultivator* at www.hvadc.org.

Future Programs

Identifying its value as a one-to-one provider of intense training to guide farms and food producers in the Hudson Valley grow and scale their business models, HVADC is committed to continuing the FFFA program. Partnerships, sponsors and funding opportunities are now being explored for the 2021-2022 class.

The FFFA program has solidified HVADC's mission to support and enhance its mission to develop and provide innovative solutions that create dynamic agricultural entrepreneurship and enhance economic growth in the Hudson Valley.

With subsequent FFFA classes paying it forward in terms of mentoring and instructional participation, the FFBA 'network' will continue to grow, fostering the incremental increase of creative collaboration within the group for business, sales, product development and referral opportunities.

Based upon the past three classes' input, additions to future programs could be:

- Additional press involvement at networking events.
- Inventory management.
- Distribution and sales channels.
- Accounting software.





Hudson Valley AgriBusiness
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



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