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**MEDIA ALERT:**

**PRESS CONFERENCE ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2011 11:30 A.M.  
RUST TO GREEN @ CITY CENTER (HARZA), 177 GENESEE STREET, UTICA**

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**RUST TO GREEN UTICA AND CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
RECEIVE \$100,000 GRANT TO IMPROVE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM**

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**Utica, NY** -- Although Oneida County is one of the top agricultural producers in New York State, many of its residents cannot routinely access healthy, affordable foods. To address this multifaceted problem, Rust To Green Utica and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County co-convened New York State's first local Food Policy Council in December 2010, with support from The Resource Center for Independent Living (RCIL) and the City of Utica.

Today the Council announced the receipt of a highly competitive \$100,000 grant award from the United States Department of Agriculture's "Hunger Free Communities" program, one of a series of new initiatives aimed at helping communities increase food access by promoting coordination and partnerships between public, private and non-profit partners. The USDA will be investing \$4.98 million in grants to 14 communities in 8 states to end hunger and improve the nutrition of low-to-moderate income Americans.

"Access to quality, nutritious foods is vital to the health of all Oneida County residents. With the creation of our Food Policy Council and with the help of this grant we will improve access to locally grown, nutritious foods. We also hope to improve education on how to eat healthier, and make people aware of the correlation between diet and overall health," said Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente, Jr.

The program is funded from The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (also known as the Farm Bill), which authorized \$5 million in competitive Federal funding to deliver help to Americans in need. Congress appropriated the funding partially in response to the USDA study "Household Food Security in the United States", which found that 14.6%, or 17 million households, could not provide enough food for all their members at some point during the year.

Utica Mayor David Roefaro said, "This award is a huge win for the City of Utica and the region. Thanks to our partners in the USDA we will all benefit from a new approach to food policy that will educate, sustain and usher in a commitment to buying, thinking and living local. Undoubtedly, Rust To Green will continue to advance the broad, progressive urban agenda that we are so excited about."

The Utica/Oneida County Food Policy Council is a diverse coalition of city and county governments working in concert with over two-dozen not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions, community coalitions, private sector businesspeople, farmers and local citizens.

These members have come together to research, analyze and recommend improvements to the entire food system - production, processing, distribution, consumption and post-consumer waste and recycling. Goals include a measurable decrease in food insecurity, improved public health, and an increase in the sustainability and profitability of the entire local and regional food system.

“Hunger is a reality for many of our area residents,” said Debra Richardson of RCIL’s Leaf, Loaf & Ladle program. “Whatever the reason - lack of transportation, poverty, cultural barriers - right now, thousands in our community go hungry every day. We need to know why.”

The USDA grant will support a comprehensive food system assessment, which will identify priority areas for policy and program recommendations; educate and engage the public about the food system; leverage external resources for food system improvements; contribute to economic development; and strengthen links among existing food system components. From this research, a comprehensive set of recommendations, projects and action steps will be developed by the Council to support a healthier local community, economy and environment.

Other specific tasks of the Food Policy Council will include:

- Supporting and developing community gardens, food cooperatives and farmers’ markets;
- Coordinating food services with parks and recreation programs to broaden access;
- Creating nutrition education programs to enhance food-purchasing and food preparation skills and to heighten awareness of the connection between diet and health;
- Supporting and developing sustainable networks for distributing food;
- Providing outreach and assistance to increase participation in existing nutrition programs;
- Conducting surveys, research and data collection activities to assess the extent and causes of hunger in the community;
- Resource mapping to identify available assets and gaps in resources necessary to end hunger in the community;
- Developing tools to assess hunger on a one time or continual basis;
- Support existing agencies in their efforts to identify resources, partners and funding; and
- Planning activities.

“The health of all Americans depends on a sustainable food system that makes nutritious food a real choice for everyone, regardless of where they live or what their income level. Increasing this access has been shown to decrease the rate of diet-related diseases, especially among children, while boosting the local economy and protecting our common treasure – farmland,” said Ron Bunce, Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County.

Please visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov) for information about the USDA’s FNS and nutrition assistance programs.

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### **About Rust to Green**

In 2009, five professors from Cornell University’s Landscape Architecture, Education and Natural Resources Departments created the Rust To Green New York State Initiative as an action-research and service-learning project to get faculty and students working together with local community partners in Upstate NY cities to encourage sustainable urban development. Rust

To Green builds on the findings of a 2007 Brookings Institution report entitled “*Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America's Older Industrial Cities*”. After analyzing New York State’s older industrial cities, Brookings determined that seven of them (Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Rochester, Schenectady, Syracuse and Utica) had “existing assets that, if fully leveraged, would serve as a platform for their renewal.” Overall, the study concluded that, “The moment is ripe for the revival of older industrial urban economies”. Cornell University selected two of these cities, Utica and Binghamton, as the pilot sites. In February 2010 a dozen community stakeholders convened the first meeting of the Rust to Green Utica core team. By February 2011, this “smart network” included more than 100 members and organizations.

More info at: <http://www.rust2green.org/utica/> OR on facebook at: Rust To Green Utica

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