

## Ag Station Gets Center of Excellence Designation

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GENEVA — Funding for a new state Center of Excellence focusing on food and agriculture development at AgriTech, formerly the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, has been secured, State Sen. Pam Helming said Wednesday.

Helming said \$1 million in funding to establish the Center of Excellence in Food and Agriculture Innovation is included in the 2018-19 state budget.

According to Cornell University, which owns and operates AgriTech, the new Center of Excellence becomes the state's first incubator for food-related enterprises.

Helming said the new Center of Excellence in Geneva, one of 11 in New York state, was definitely not a given.

There was a move, she said, to take the former Center of Excellence in Canandaigua (the old Infotonics site) and move the designation and associated funding to Albany- and New York City-based organizations.

Helming said she led the effort to shift both the designation and \$1 million to Geneva for the creation of the new center of excellence.

Indeed, Mike Manikowski, who heads economic development for Ontario County, said that during the Pataki administration county officials asked that the Geneva station and the Tech Farm (Geneva Agriculture & Food Technology Park) receive a Center of Excellence designation in agriculture and food.

“During that time, they didn't provide a C of E (Center of Excellence) for that sector,” Manikowski said. “But times have changed, and the current administration recognizes that ag and food is a high-tech business with much potential for more growth in New York state.”

Manikowski said that “Geneva is strategic to this industry in New York state,” and added that the county will “use it to leverage more economic growth from that very important sector.”

Kathryn Boor, dean of the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said the move will bolster the state's food and agricultural industries.

“New York's food manufacturing sector is the nation's second largest, behind only California in terms of the number of food-based businesses, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture,” she said. “The strength of our farming community and the entrepreneurial energy of our people has led to this remarkable success. ... The strengths of our local food and farm communities and help create new businesses that will push growth even farther. We can't wait to get to work with our partners.”

And John Johnson, executive director of the Geneva Agriculture & Food Technology Park, also owned and operated by Cornell, said the new center “will pull together the significant agriculture and food resources and talent of the region, making this one of the leading entrepreneurial development locations in the United States in the coming years.”

Bill Strassburg, vice president of strategic initiatives at Wegmans, a partner in the Center of Excellence, said the “center will encourage food innovators and entrepreneurs to start their businesses in a locale that is fertile for their successful development, right here in New York.”

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