

Capital Improvements to Enhance Student Success and Engagement with the Farm and Food Business Community in New York State *A SUNY 2020 Challenge Grant Proposal*

Executive Summary: SUNY Cobleskill is committed to providing superior experiential, market-driven educational opportunities for students across a wide range of technical disciplines. As the only academic institution in New York with a contiguous diversified farm, SUNY Cobleskill is uniquely positioned to expose students to real-world food production and processing paradigms and to produce work-ready graduates for the burgeoning food economy in New York and beyond. The College seeks to expand its capacity for applied learning opportunities in agriculture and to add novel direct business development services targeted to the farm and food business community through two strategic capital investments.

The “Coby Farm” Initiative: The “Coby Farm” is a 120-acre parcel of land just across the Cobleskill Creek from the south side of campus. It, unlike all of the state-of-the-art farm facilities on the campus’s north side, is largely undeveloped and is currently utilized for supplemental grain and hay production. The Coby Farm is ideally suited for diversified crop and livestock operations and has potential to become the focal point of farm-to-table programming at SUNY Cobleskill. Once developed, the farm will be utilized:

- To enhance existing agricultural laboratory courses
- To offer new courses in sustainable crop management, grazing system management and soil & water conservation
- To launch a summer residential, credit-bearing “Coby Farm Experience” course that will be taught by SUNY Cobleskill faculty and senior baccalaureate interns and targeted to students within the SUNY system seeking unique, hands-on technical transfer credit opportunities
 - Students selected for this summer program will work in cross-functional teams under the supervision of faculty and interns to fully manage all production, planning and marketing aspects of the Coby Farm each summer
- As a demonstration farm for the farm business community in New York State on which business owners and fledgling entrepreneurs can receive intensive hands-on training in specialty crop management, rotational grazing management, soil conservation, stream bank restoration and “precision agriculture” technologies (with support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service)
- As a START-UP NY site for private orchard, fruit and apiary enterprises (START-UP NY designation in process)
- As a hub for undergraduate student research in pond management, soil conservation, native pollinator habitat maintenance and grazing system management

Funding requested here will be used to renovate key buildings on the Coby Farm, to establish mixed crop production areas and to develop soil conservation demonstration plots.

Agricultural Retail Facility Initiative: In 2013, a historic carriage house was relocated from its original location on State Route 7 in Cobleskill to the center of the north side of campus so that it could ultimately be transformed into a food retail facility serving as both an outlet for campus-produced food products *and* as a pivotal element of the College’s growing efforts to spur economic development in the regional farm and food complex.

Support has been received from the SUNY High Needs Program Initiative and the Appalachian Regional Commission for project engineering/design and to purchase retail equipment but a need remains for renovation/construction funding.

Once complete, the facility will feature products produced by students on the Coby Farm as part of Animal Science, Plant Science, Fisheries and Culinary Arts programs and will be managed by students

enrolled in Agricultural Business Management and Business Administration programs. Further, through a program designed with support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, novel value-added food products developed by students in collaboration with regional agricultural producers will be piloted in the retail facility. This is a tremendously valuable service to the farm and food business community as participating businesses will receive assistance with recipe development, regulatory processes, marketing strategy development and market research during the retail pilot phase. The applied learning opportunities presented by these collaborative projects and facilitated by a completed retail facility will be unique and significant.

Funding Request: Funding is requested here from the SUNY 2020 Challenge Grant Program in the amount of \$1,155,669, to be utilized as follows:

- \$350,000 for Agricultural Retail Facility renovation/construction
- \$330,000 for renovation of student intern living quarters at the Coby Farm
- \$184,000 for renovation of historic multi-purpose barn structure at the Coby Farm
- \$88,000 for construction of a pedestrian bridge to connect the campus's south side with the Coby Farm property
- \$28,000 for construction of a small parking lot on the Coby Farm
- \$124,400 for renovation of an existing workshop space on Coby Farm to become a field classroom
- \$28,080 for development of a soil conservation demonstration/teaching unit
- \$19,167 for development of a mixed vegetable demonstration/teaching unit
- \$4,022 for upgrades to the Coby Farm pond as a demonstration unit for recreational/utility applications

Matching Funds: To date, the following have been secured by SUNY Cobleskill to advance the Coby Farm and Retail Facility projects:

- \$21,778 from NRCS for establishment of rotational grazing paddocks at Coby Farm
- \$54,000 from Schoharie County Soil & Water Conservation District for stream bank restoration at Coby Farm
- \$100,000 from the NYS Department of Health to establish an online farmers' market (Schoharie Fresh; currently operating on campus) that will be housed within the Retail Facility
- \$67,105 from the Appalachian Regional Commission to equip the Retail Facility
- \$72,000 from the SUNY High Needs Program Initiative for retail facility design, engineering and partial renovation
- \$7,800 from Cornell's IPM program to establish native pollinator plots at Coby Farm
- \$2,400 from SUNY Cobleskill to establish hops plots at Coby Farm and elsewhere on campus

Proposal Impact: This proposal will meaningfully enhance SUNY Cobleskill's capacity to provide important business development services to the farm and food community in New York and to create incomparable applied learning opportunities for SUNY students. A summary of the anticipated impact of these capital projects is attached as Appendix A.

Project Timeline: An implementation timeline for both capital projects is attached as Appendix B.

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Attachment A

Summary of Anticipated Investment Impact

Metric	Inaugural Year 08/ 2016 - 09/ 2017	Year Two	Year Three and Beyond (Annually)
SUNY Cobleskill students utilizing Coby Farm for courses/labs	1,000	1,200	1,400
SUNY Cobleskill baccalaureate internships created at Coby Farm	4	5	6
SUNY-wide participants in summer credit-bearing “Coby Farm Experience”	15	18	20
Farm & Food Businesses participating in NRCS conservation demonstrations at Coby Farm	30	60	90
Farm & Food Businesses participating in production-oriented workshops/sessions at Coby Farm	40	80	120
START-UP NY-approved businesses operating on Coby Farm	1	2	2
Undergraduate research projects conducted at Coby Farm	10	20	30
Farm & Food Businesses participating in product development/retail pilot projects	5	10	12
SUNY Cobleskill students utilizing Retail Facility in Retail Practicum courses	10	15	25
Successful novel value-added food product launches resulting from product development/retail pilot projects *	3	6	12

*“Success” defined as facilitation of relationship for participating producer with mass food retailer

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Attachment B
Project Timeline

Date	Action Item
October – November, 2015	Initial Retail Facility renovations Initiation of currently-funded stream bank restoration and rotational grazing projects at Coby Farm
December, 2015	Notification of SUNY 20/20 award
January – August, 2016	Complete renovation of Agricultural Retail Facility
March - August, 2016	Initial conservation/rotational grazing NRCS demonstrations launched at Coby Farm
December, 2016	Opening of Agricultural Retail Facility
May, 2016 – April, 2017	Complete renovation of Coby Farm structures (field classroom, barn, living quarters) and parking lot construction
April – May, 2017	Completion of demonstration units/production plots at Coby Farm
January, 2017	Launch of Retail Practicum courses and product development/retail pilot collaborative projects
June, 2017	Enrollment of first “Coby Farm Experience” cohort Launch of full slate of production & conservation demonstration/workshop sessions at Coby Farm for the farm and food business community
August, 2017	Launch of regular-semester courses utilizing Coby Farm