

Combining agriculture, MCC will reap profits for Monroe

Robert Colby and Kim Zuber
Guest essayists

STORYCHAT:Post Comment

(December 26, 2006) — The Agriculture and Life Sciences Institute at Monroe Community College will help the local agricultural industry stay profitable while continuing environmentally sound practices in farming.

About 25 percent of Monroe County land is involved in agriculture, giving the industry a significant, positive impact on the local environment as well as the local economy.

Local farming supports a network of processing, retail and associated industries in our area. The institute will help keep agriculture viable in our community so it can continue to provide open green space and economic benefits to Monroe County. It will benefit not only local agriculture but also MCC and the community at large.

At its core, the institute will take the knowledge generated by the land grant colleges and combine it with the additional resources available through MCC to provide outreach and support for local agriculture.

It also will enlarge the toolbox available to farmers to include access to college facilities, multidisciplinary faculty support and other infrastructure already at the college. This will enable the institute to enhance and expand the agricultural programs now in place in Monroe County, as well as develop newer, more effective ones.

Locating the institute at MCC also will allow it to better provide agricultural information to the public and interact with them on agricultural issues.

MCC makes a good home for the institute. It will benefit from the college resources and it will open up new and expanded educational and career opportunities for students. They may even take up farming, helping to replace retiring farmers in the county so that more farmland is not lost to subdivisions and other development.

Within MCC, the institute has been structured so that it can adjust and respond to the evolving nature of agriculture, as well as the changing conditions in which it must operate. The institute's focus is sufficiently comprehensive to allow it to serve in the future as an umbrella organization for other agriculture-related programs. The appointment of Robert N. King as institute director is welcome news. The extension agent for Cornell Cooperative Extension for many years, King is well-acquainted with Monroe County's agricultural community. In the months ahead, he will be meeting with farmers throughout the region as he puts together the institute's work plan.

An agricultural institute at the community college represents a change from the traditional structure of support services for agriculture. This is appropriate, since farming itself has changed significantly since the original models for supplying agricultural services emerged.

The agricultural community has been looking for a more comprehensive, responsive and streamlined way to interact with government agencies and the local community.

The new Agriculture and Life Sciences Institute, as a separate entity within MCC, will accomplish this. It will maintain farmers' access to the most recent research and recommend practices being developed by the land grant colleges. The new institute will work together with related programs such as Cornell Cooperative Extension to meet all facets of local agriculture's needs.

In a way we have not seen in recent years, we now have an agency dedicated to serving agriculture. The college's clear commitment to the new project is especially welcome.

Colby, R-Ogden, represents the 20th District in the Monroe County Legislature; Zuber is president, Monroe County Farm Bureau.