



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Sullivan-Wawarsing REAP Zone

Lead Entity: Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce Foundation, New York

Demographics: Population - 85,855, Poverty Rate: 13.2%

Background: Sullivan County and the Town of Wawarsing (including the Village of Ellenville) located in the Southern tier of New York, was selected as one of the locations to put in place a pilot program to search for ways to revitalize rural areas under the REAP program. Sullivan County suffers from reduced employment opportunities resulting from the decline of college/entrant worker populations as well as geographic isolation.

Sullivan County unemployment rate is higher than the national average. It has lost over 1,370 jobs from 1994 to 1997. From 1985 to 1995 the hospitality industry alone experienced over a 50 percent decrease in the number of jobs available. Sullivan County is in need of programs, activities and education efforts which support sustainable development and establish a mechanism to coordinate these efforts across the region.

The Town of Wawarsing economic base has declined significantly since the early 1980. In 1985, the Channel Master Corporation (the largest antenna manufacturer in the world) left the area, eliminating over 1,000 jobs. In the late 1980, several other manufacturers closed, including a broom/mop handle and nut bowl company, eliminating several hundred jobs. Additionally, since the early 1980, approximately 70 percent of hotels/hospitality-related business jobs have been lost (from 2000 to 600). This has also impacted the other service/support businesses substantially. The Town of Wawarsing is in need of activities, such as tax incentives, training programs and education efforts which support sustainable development and establish a mechanism for coordinating these efforts across the town to assist in retaining businesses and help existing businesses expand.

Purpose: The Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP), as a pilot program, was established to mitigate the negative effects of a lack of employment opportunities and job losses. This REAP was also established to create an environment for communities to find strategies to solve their own problems. The outcomes and lessons learned will help USDA to assist other communities throughout rural America experiencing similar problems.

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