

Press



Release

11 New Hempstead Road, New City, NY (845) 638-5100 Fax: (845) 638-5675 Email: legclerk@co.rockland.ny.us.

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Hon. Alden H. Wolfe, Chairman
Laura Incalcaterra, Community Relations Coordinator

(845) 638-5269
(845) 638-5184

New Rockland County Food Recovery Task Force Kicks Off With State And Federal Backing

Wolfe Seeks To Feed People, Not Landfills

New City, NY (Oct. 6, 2015) – Rockland County Legislature Chairman Alden H. Wolfe officially kicked off the new Rockland County Food Recovery Task Force as state and federal leaders praised the effort and highlighted the growing challenges of food waste.

“Some have found that our nation’s rate of food waste is as high as 40 percent and the question remains, what can we do about it? That’s what this task force is all about,” Wolfe said.

Task Force members will work to identify ways to reduce and recover food waste for the benefit of hungry neighbors, taxpayers, local businesses and the environment, Wolfe said.

Martin Brand, Region 3 Director of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, praised the county for its willingness to seek solutions.

“Rockland County is a leader in addressing this challenge for all of us who want to manage the large volume of waste generated by our society in a sustainable way,” Brand said. “Not only for the environment but for all of you who are trying to increase food security for our friends and neighbors.”

New York is working to develop a statewide strategy for addressing food waste reduction and recovery so that the materials are valued not as waste, but as resources for the greatest good, Brand said.

Already, the state is working to provide combined waste and energy audits to grocery stores and large food generators to identify the best ways to reduce food waste and increase energy efficiency, and to divert excess healthy food to food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and other food rescue agencies, Brand said.

The state encourages animal feeding where it is appropriate and also additional recycling through composting and anaerobic digestion. There are several projects throughout the state that will use food scraps to create energy, Brand said.

Judy Ann Mitchell, Region 2 Chief of the Sustainability and Multi-Media Programs Branch of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, also lauded the county for its new undertaking.

“EPA commends Rockland for taking on this initiative, not only in being the first Legislative body in the country to join hands with EPA in becoming an Endorser of our Food Recovery Challenge, but for walking the walk and establishing the Food Waste task force, the first of its kind in our region,” Mitchell said.

She offered sobering statistics: About 14 percent of U.S. households don’t know where their next meal is coming from; food waste accounts for more than \$150 billion of wasted resources; food waste has increased from about 30 percent in 1974 to about 40 percent today. Mitchell also noted that of the 37 million tons of food waste generated in 2013, just 5 percent was diverted from landfills.

Rockland County Health Commissioner Dr. Patricia Schnabel Ruppert said food waste costs a typical family about \$1,500 per year, and that there were other costs, as well.

“Food waste is a problem that we can tackle in our own home and when we throw out perfectly good food, we throw out all the resources that it takes to get it to our kitchen – the land, the energy and the water,” Ruppert said.

Jill Luther of the New York State Association of Counties, who represented NYSAC Executive Director Steve Acquario, said NYSAC hopes to get involved with the issue and to let other counties know about Rockland’s efforts.

“Food waste is something we all know about, we all care about, but I don’t think it’s a conscious thing we all think about,” Luther said. “I don’t think people are realizing that when they throw out that apple because it looks a little bruised or it’s not pretty, what the impact has on the community.”

The Task Force follows two successful local information sessions that focused on the EPA's Food Recovery Challenge and brought together anti-hunger advocates, business owners, farmers, representatives of the EPA and the DEC, and others.

The EPA's program aims to reduce food waste and in the process, help shrink costs for businesses, reduce municipal use of landfills and provide food to hungry residents, among other goals.

The state hopes to reduce the amount of waste New Yorker's dispose of each day from about 4 pounds per person per day to about half-a-pound per person per day in the next 15 years, according to the DEC. Organics diversion is a cornerstone to achieving this goal.

The EPA, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, hopes to reduce food loss in the United States by 50 percent by 2030. Mitchell said that goal can hoped to be achieved by working with partners like the Rockland County Food Recovery Task Force.

Wolfe hopes to identify projects in anticipation of state and federal funding and wants to position the county as a leader on these issues. Brand noted that Gov. Andrew Cuomo has made food waste reduction and recovery a priority and that funding is becoming available.

The kickoff was held at the historic Cropsey Community Farm, a project of Rockland Farm Alliance, in New City.

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