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| **Contact:** **April Roggio****Sustainable Hilltowns**april.roggio@gmail.com | Building a Makerspace! A look at the Make Movement, sustainable farming and local economic development in the Hilltowns |

# Press Release

### Hilltown communities to host additional public workshops

*Examining the data, formulating a plan*

**February 23, 2016.** This spring Sustainable Hilltowns will be hosting several additional community discussions. Led by April Roggio, a local independent researcher, these community dialogues hope to answer the following question: would the development of a “makerspace” in the hilltowns help to nurture small farmers? Based on last fall’s workshops, and armed with data supplied in part by the Capital District Regional Planning Commission, additional conversations are planned in Medusa, Rensselaerville, Westerlo and Berne in March and April.

Funded with a grant from the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NESARE), Sustainable Hilltowns is interested, broadly, in pursuing activities that encourage sustainable economic development, food security and prosperity for our region.

Preliminary results focused around several themes. In our region, farming and homesteading are interconnected, and while there are families in our region who focus on production for market, there are many more who are focusing on self-provisioning and homesteading. In light of this, our MakerSpace investigation has expanded to be inclusive of both groups, and to consider the development of a space that would support both interests. Second, responses have coalesced around the vision of a 21st century grange: it isn’t a MakerSpace, exactly, although ideally it would be integrated into one, but a physical (and perhaps virtual) place that can link farmers and neighbors, provide a place for discussion, collaboration, networking, and do all that regularly. (One participant dubbed it a “grangerspace”.) This supports a growing interest in the development of a food hub, as well.

Third, every workshop eventually evolved into a conversation about climate change, it’s effect on our land and people, and how we can prepare our rural communities. How do we provide energy? How will we feed our communities? These questions are repeated often, with passion, and, more often than not, with lots of suggestions about how we meet the challenges of the next 5, 10 and 50 years.

Lastly, with an eye to our local and regional legislators, our farmers, and rural businesspeople of all flavors, simply do not have the time to engage in the kinds of activities that would make them more prosperous. So while they would like to, for example, apply to more farmer grants through SARE, they simply do not have the resources to face the task of preparing proposals. Having help with this piece - someone to help write grants, someone to negotiate the political process involved in garnering local government support for projects, someone to organize and promote regular grange meetings - would be a huge asset to our farmers.

Roggio has scheduled workshops during the months of March and April, and is asking interested residents to join in the conversation.

Workshop schedule:

Tuesday, March 15, 2016, at 6pm, at the Berne Town Library

Friday, March 18th, 2016, at 6pm at the Westerlo Town Library

Friday, March 25, 2016, at 6pm, at the Rensselaerville Library

Saturday, April 2, 2016, during the Medusa potluck at the Medusa Firehouse

More information will be available at the Medusa Museum (located at the village church) during MedusaFest, to be held on April 30th this year. Additional presentations can be scheduled as requested. Contact april.roggio@gmail.com or leave her a message at 518 239 2738. Updated information is also available at the Sustainable Hilltowns Facebook page.