

## The Waterfall Center for Bioregional Learning Listening and Networking Session

**Date:** March 7, 2025

**Location:** 256 West Fulton Rd, West Fulton NY 12194

### Attendees:

- Waterfall Center Board/Staff/Advisors: Janet Hawkes ([janet@waterfallcenter.org](mailto:janet@waterfallcenter.org)), Mona Polacca, Bethany Yarrow ([bethany@waterfallcenter.org](mailto:bethany@waterfallcenter.org)), David Cox([david@waterfallcenter.org](mailto:david@waterfallcenter.org)), Sarah Bachinger ([sarah@waterfallcenter.org](mailto:sarah@waterfallcenter.org))
- Community Members:
  - Dennis Derryck (Corbin Hill Road Farm)
  - Joy Anderson (Corbin Hill Road Farm)
  - Kevin Berner (Jefferson Historic Society)
  - Erynne McCabe (Iroquois Museum, SEEC, Tourism, Community Advocate) -
  - Emily Smith (Marketing Coordinator, SEEC)
  - Jim Hayes (Sap Bush Hollow Farm) -
  - Marilyn Wyman (Watershed Ag Council)
  - Ted Shuart (Schoharie Historian)
  - Robin Ressler (Faith Leader)
  - Todd Heyn (NY Farm Bureau)
  - Ellen McHale (NY Folklore/Schoharie River Center)
  - John McKeeby (Schoharie River Center)
  - Shannon Hayes (Sap Bush Hollow Farm)
  - Caroline Myran (Ag Development Specialist - Schoharie County)
  - Liz Callahan (Executive Director, CCE Schoharie & Otsego Counties)
  - Kelly Doolin (Ag & Food Systems Educator, CCE Schoharie & Otsego Counties)

### Meeting Purpose & Overview

- **Goal:** To introduce the Waterfall Center, explore bioregional assets, challenges, and visions, and gather community input for future planning.
- **Focus:** Identify bioregional needs, strengths, gaps, partners, and the Waterfall Center's potential role.

### Key Themes from Discussions

#### Strengths & Opportunities

- **Community Resilience & Engagement:** Strong civic ties, mutual support, rich cultural and spiritual life.
- **Diversity:** Ecological, cultural, spiritual, and agricultural diversity seen as regional strengths.
- **Geographic Advantage:** Proximity to NYC/Albany supports tourism, agriculture, and education.
- **Education:** Involvement of SUNY Cobleskill, local schools, and youth programs.
- **Tourism & Natural Resources:** Agrotourism, recreation, landscapes, and biodiversity contribute to local vitality.

#### Weaknesses & Threats

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Limited broadband, childcare, housing, transportation, and healthcare.
- **Economic & Social Concerns:** Farmer disenfranchisement, declining ag education, and reduced federal support (e.g., USDA, SNAP).
- **Environmental Issues:** Climate change, resource mismanagement, untreated sewage, and weak land use planning.
- **Governance & Representation:** Need for better planning, inter-agency coordination, and legislative education on rural/ag issues.
- **Community Inclusion:** Lack of diversity and representation from a wide range of community voices.

## Visions for the Future

- A **comprehensive bioregional plan** inclusive of diverse voices.
- Greater **community engagement** and **education**.
- Stronger **support for farmers**, regenerative ag, and economic sustainability.
- Improved **local services**: healthcare, childcare, housing, energy, and transportation.
- Continued **convenings and outreach** for inclusive bioregional dialogue.

## Recommendations for Outreach

- **Public Sector:** Local government officials, planners, state/federal agencies (e.g., DEC, USDA, EPA).
- **Education:** Schools, FFA, SUNY Cobleskill, other regional colleges.
- **Private & Nonprofits:** Chambers of commerce, farm orgs, museums, arts, tourism, builders, and healthcare orgs.
- **Community Groups:** Faith-based orgs, libraries, retirees, local historians, cultural orgs.

## Next Steps for Waterfall Center

- Continue **convenings** and small group outreach.
- **Collaborate on funding & grants** with other groups.
- Help coordinate **regional planning and communication**.