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Funds would preserve Wyoming Co. farmland

By Matt Surtel
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GENESECO -- The Genesee Valley Conservancy has received state funding to help preserve Wyoming County farmland. The state has awarded \$16,893 to the group for a two-year project. The funding will help develop a program to buy development rights on Wyoming County farms.

"It's a voluntary program," said Eric Grace, the Conservancy's executive director. "The landowner will maintain ownership, but cannot sell the property for conversion of farmland into commercial, residential or industrial use."

The Conservancy will hire a staffer to work with Wyoming County's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board, he said.

A similar program is already under way in Livingston County, and Wyoming County has identified its own need.

"It's a program that's really geared toward maintaining the land base necessary for having a viable farm economy," Grace said. "In Livingston County, farmers have enrolled 7,500 acres into this program, so for future generations that land will be there."

The state budgets about \$20 million annually for such programs, he said. But the process is very competitive, with about \$80 million worth of applications last year statewide.

The purchase of such development rights wouldn't necessarily rule out the placement of wind energy projects, Grace said. They're considered an ancillary issue by the state.

Income from such developments could help farms survive, which coincides with the program's overall purpose.

The development rights purchase application must be submitted by a county or town, Grace said. In Livingston County, officials find two or three farms interested, and the application is then submitted to the state.

"The whole thing is designed for saving farms," he said.

The Genesee Valley Conservancy was founded as a not-for-profit organization, dedicated to preserving open space in the Genesee Valley Region. It's protected more than 8,300 acres of habitat, scenic vistas and farmland since 1990.

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