



OBSERVER Photo by Shirley West

**New York State Commissioner Patrick Hooker and State Senator Cathy Young stand at Baron's Vineyard in Westfield to award a grant to Helen Baron, president of the Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association, Inc.**

## Over \$200,000 going toward WNY agri-tourism projects

By **SHIRLEY WEST**  
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**WESTFIELD** — New York State Commissioner Patrick Hooker announced \$1.15 million for 51 agri-tourism projects throughout New York State.

Western New York will receive a total of \$207,873 for nine projects in the area.

"Tourism has become a popular and important component of the agricultural industry," Hooker said. "Not only does it allow our farmers to attract more customers and add value to existing commodities and services, it provides an essential educational component for the public.

"Many consumers today have never visited a farm, nor understand where their food comes from. These grants will support agri-tourism opportunities that will enhance the awareness of agriculture and help connect farmers and consumers in an educational, yet entertaining setting."

Hooker thanked Young for all her hard work in the State Senate on behalf of agriculture, which is the biggest industry in the state. Tourism being the second biggest industry, it only makes sense that the two should be married, said Young.

"The Senate Majority created the agri-tourism grant program to promote our top two industries in New York," Young said. "Agriculture and tourism are economic engines that drive jobs and growth statewide. These grants will strengthen innovative projects that bring visitors and dollars to our communities and I commend the recipients for their ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit."

These grants provide up to \$50,000 in matching funds for projects that develop, implement or expand activities which promote New York food and agriculture by attracting visitors to New York State food and agricultural destinations.

The awarded projects include a variety of community events, promotional materials, organized tours, new tourism destinations, festivals, media campaigns and more.

Helen Baron, president of the Concord Grape Belt Heritage Association, Inc. accepted the \$12,500 grant awarded to the association for the creation of the Lake Erie Concord Grape Belt Heritage Discovery Center.

"We plan to create a Discovery Center with a museum, an interactive display for students and tourists, good food and hopefully attract local artists," Baron said.

The Village of Fredonia also received a \$6,100 grant to enhance the Fredonia Farmers' Market with local musical and cultural groups.

In Cattaraugus County, the Bicentennial Wagon Train and Stagecoach Run received \$20,000.

Agri-tourism generates income, creates jobs, provides economic diversification and stabilization, and attracts tourists and the dollars they spend, according to Hooker. It can also help preserve rural lifestyles, increase awareness and appreciation of agriculture, enhance community pride, and help protect farms and agri-businesses by adding value to existing operations.

*Comments on this story may be sent to [swest@observertoday.com](mailto:swest@observertoday.com)*

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