



Farm manager says she's reached agreement to buy Stone Ridge Orchard

By WILLIAM J. KEMBLE Correspondent

Tuesday, August 06, 2013

STONE RIDGE, N.Y. — Farm manager Elizabeth Ryan says an agreement has been reached for her to purchase the 117-acre Stone Ridge Orchard on state Route 213.

Ryan said the terms of the pending sale from Stone Ridge Orchard LLC will remain confidential until after the closing, but the property had been on the market for \$2.5 million.

"I've been working the farm for six years," she said Monday. "It's been on the market for two years. I've been quietly raising funds to acquire it, get them under contract at a number that works for both parties ... and we're raising additional funds for things that need to be done there."

Ryan said storms at the end of the past two growing seasons have resulted in losses of up to 90 percent of crops and made it difficult to pay for improvements on the land. She considers it important to gain public support for keeping the farm viable.

"The last couple of years it's been a terrible struggle for fruit growers because we've endured hail, frost and hurricane and it is the worst I've seen in the 30 years I've been growing fruit," she said.

"We've been listing 10 reasons why the orchard needed to be saved and the 10 things that we hope to do there," Ryan said. "These would include increasing local employment, having an organic cider orchard, put in a small cidery there and we're already producing cider of great renown on an artisanal scale and protect the orchard, and connect the rail trail to the ... Route 209 corridor."

Among concerns are proposed changes to the Marbletown comprehensive plan that would shift commercial development, having the property considered valuable as potential residential development, and preserving farms in an area where agriculture is threatened.

"There was a proposal to build out a new town center and 400 condos," she said. "This is also the last working orchard in the Rondout Valley."

Ryan said community events have been welcome at the orchard as a way to show how education and agriculture can work together.

"The Common Ground Fair that happened in Stone Ridge last year as a big community event with a lot of local partners will be held at the orchard this year," she said. "We have also just been permitted to have a small farmers' market on the weekends."

Ryan is owner of Breezy Hill Orchard and Cider Mill in Staatsburg and expects to use her experience to have Stone Ridge Orchard expand its cider offerings.

"We're looking to raise another half a million dollars to build up a cidery here," she said.

Ryan noted that having a connection between the Marbletown Rail Trail and U.S. Route 209 could help provide a safe alternative for bicyclists on state Route 213, where there is poor line-of-sight and there are sections without shoulders.

"This is a very treacherous area," she said. "We see people biking all the time, so our thought is they'll be able to come through here and they would entirely be able to avoid this 213 corridor."