



Chautauqua County, New York

Located on Lake Erie in western New York, Chautauqua County is a popular destination for wine, recreation, and culture enthusiasts. The county has a vibrant agricultural sector, which boasts the largest grape growing region east of the Rockies. Home to Lucille Ball, the beautiful Chautauqua Lake, and the widely renowned Chautauqua Institution – an intellectual, spiritual, and artistic summer retreat – residents value quality of life, community, learning, and tradition.



Chautauqua Vineyard / Shelly Wells photo

Jamestown – Chautauqua County’s largest city – was once the “furniture capital of the world,” but many of the county’s important industries were hit hard by the Great Recession. However, manufacturing survived and is beginning to experience a resurgence. Tourism is also important to the county’s economy, but with more than \$300 million of total economic impact, agriculture remains the county’s leading industry.

Chautauqua is a rural county, with about 133,500 residents on 1,060 square miles. Nearly a quarter of its people live in Jamestown. The median household income is \$42,720 – lower than the state median of \$58,687; 19% of the population lives below the poverty line. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the majority of the county’s population is White alone (93%), 3% is Black alone, and 2% is foreign-born. In addition, nearly 8,800 people identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino.

Agriculture and Food Production While it is said that dairy and grape production “rule the roost,” Chautauqua County’s 1,515 farms are surprisingly diversified for a rural county. Livestock, fruits, vegetables, poultry, and niche markets are all important to the local economy. The range of micro-climates affects what is grown: in the north, the lake effect creates conditions that favor grape and other fruit production, while more rugged conditions in the south support livestock and feed grains.

Chautauqua County Agriculture

Number of farms ¹	1,515
Percent of land in farms ¹	35%
Percent of land with high quality soils ²	74%
Percent of farms that are small ¹	91%
Average market value of agricultural products sold per farm ¹	\$107,000
Average age of farmers ¹	57 years old

Sources: ¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2012 Census of Agriculture; ² USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. General Soil Map, 2007

The county’s once prosperous dairy and grape producing sectors are still critically important to the agricultural economy, but they have struggled in recent years due to low and often widely fluctuating commodity prices. More than 90% of Chautauqua County’s farms are classified as small farms (having annual gross cash income of less than \$250,000) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and average net farm income is only about \$30,000/year. These smaller operations produce sheep, goats, poultry, eggs, vegetables, honey, and maple syrup, and tend to focus on specialty markets. The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chautauqua County maintains a Farm to Table Directory that features more than 100 direct to consumer farms that also supply nine farmers markets, a produce auction, and numerous farm stands. In addition, 25 wineries and a Grape Discovery Center contribute to a significant agritourism sector.

Many Chautauqua County residents participate in small scale food production – in home gardens, school gardens, and in an increasing number of community gardens. Many residents enjoy hunting and fishing, and several businesses process meat for personal consumption.

Much of the county’s food processing and manufacturing infrastructure has declined in recent years, including the loss of a major grape processor. The farm community points to a shortage of aggregation, processing, and distribution facilities as major limiting factors to growing the farm and food production sectors. However, a handful of institutions and restaurants, and a small-scale distributor, CHQ Local Food, are stepping in to source and distribute locally grown products.

Food Access Tied to both income and geography, access to healthy food varies greatly across the county. Overall, 64% of Chautauqua County students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, with eligibility ranging from 25%–96% between school districts. Three USDA-designated “food deserts” point to a breakdown in the availability of fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods. In 2014, Chautauqua County experienced record enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



Chautauqua County Population

Area ³	1,060 sq. miles
Population ⁴	133,556
Percent of population below the poverty line ⁴	19%
Percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch ⁵	64%

Sources: ³U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts; ⁴2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; ⁵New York State Department of Education, Chautauqua County, January 2015

(SNAP) and reported higher rates of diabetes and related deaths than the state of New York and the United States at large. One major barrier to increasing access to healthy food is limited transportation choices, especially for seniors, disabled residents, and rural residents.

A handful of programs aim to improve food security in Chautauqua County. Many of the farmers markets accept SNAP benefits, and two double the value of SNAP recipients' vouchers, which is reported to greatly increase purchasing of fruits and vegetables. These markets partner with the Field & Fork Program, a New York nonprofit that sources dollars from a variety of foundations to provide this incentive at farmers markets throughout the state. A Jamestown corner store is also making a concerted effort to stock healthy foods. In addition, a network of 29 food pantries and three soup kitchens make up a strong emergency food system.



Jamestown Farmers Market / Katelyn Walley-Stoll photo

Growing Food Connections
Chautauqua County was selected to be one of eight Communities of Opportunity across the country to participate in Growing Food Connections (GFC), a 5-year initiative funded by USDA-NIFA to improve community food security and support local agriculture and food production. County leadership demonstrated a need and a strong commitment to strengthen the county's food system and created a steering committee of local government representatives and

food system stakeholders to accomplish this work. This steering committee works with the GFC team of researchers and technical assistance providers to identify and address local policy opportunities and barriers to achieve its food system goals.

The steering committee's goals center on increasing food security, supporting specialty agribusiness, promoting agritourism, training farmers, and connecting a broad base of consumers to local agriculture. These goals are guided by the following vision statement:

"Our countywide partnership will strengthen the local food system by developing a sustainable agricultural industry that produces affordable, high quality, accessible, culturally appropriate, and nutritious food to enhance production and distribution, and promote food security in Chautauqua County. We will educate and connect producers, processors, government agencies, and consumers to work towards an efficient, effective, and secure food environment that strengthens the economy and promotes a healthy lifestyle."

May 2016

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEE

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| Ann Abdella
Chautauqua County Health Network | Daniel Heitzenrater
Office of Chautauqua County Executive |
| Bree Agett
Chautauqua County Department of Health & Human Services | Vince Horrigan
Chautauqua County Executive |
| Brooke Barone
Cattaraugus Community Action, Inc. | Kim LaMendola
Southern Tier West Regional Planning & Development Board |
| Margaret Bruegel
Fredonia Farmers Market / Roo Haven Farm | Peter Lombardi
Jamestown Renaissance Corporation |
| Chuck Cornell
Fredonia Technology Incubator | Kathleen Peterson
Chautauqua County Rural Ministry |
| Fred Croscut
Chautauqua County Soil & Water Conservation District | Jason Toczydlowski
CHQ Local Food, Inc. |
| Patrick Gooch
Chautauqua County Department of Planning & Economic Development | Katelyn Walley-Stoll
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GROWING FOOD CONNECTIONS PARTNERSHIP

