



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #27: Go To The County Fair

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO July 3, 2014

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The mercury on the thermometer is hitting 80-plus degrees and the children are out of school. Summer vacation is officially underway, and you may be wondering what to do.

Well, there's plenty of great ways to have fun without having to travel far or put a dent in your bank account. I'd like to talk about one of my favorite activities.

The county fair is an immersive experience, with lots of rides, games, music and unique food.

While those may be the lure to get you to the fair, don't forget to check out the agriculture exhibits. County fairs were created to promote and encourage farming. Never has this outreach been more important than right now. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says the average New York farmer is 57 years old. They've also found that for each two people aged 65 or older that are farming, there's just one under 35 doing the same thing.

Our recent state budget included a new Young Farmers initiative, which I hope will encourage the next generation to become more involved. I recognize that there are a lot of barriers to taking over a farm or starting a new one from scratch. Taxes can be high. Personal and farm debt can be mounting. And the cost of equipment? It's not for the faint of heart.

The Young Farmers initiative says: If you've graduated from college with an agriculture degree and you're going to work full-time in the industry for the next five years, the state is going to forgive your student loans. In addition, the state will offer you up to \$50,000 to purchase that piece of equipment that you need to get the business off the ground or to expand an existing one. We've also amended the estate tax, because it's counterintuitive to force future farmers to sell assets so they can afford the taxes levied for transferring property from one generation to the next.

The budget also includes a record \$8.5 million in increased agriculture support, funding programs that apple growers, maple producers, wineries and many other agri-businesses rely on for their expertise and their research. We also increased FFA funding by \$158,000 – again, because we’re trying to inspire young adults to take an interest in farming.

Agriculture is a huge part of our state economy, producing more than \$5.7 billion in value directly and employing more than 45,000 people. When you consider all the businesses that farmers indirectly support – food manufacturers, chemical suppliers, equipment sales, and the like – that value balloons to more than \$34 billion.

If you attend this year’s fair – and I hope you do – I encourage you to check out the agriculture offerings. Ask questions. The farmers I know are always happy to talk about their profession. It’s hard work, certainly. But it’s also rewarding work.

The Lewis County Fair runs July 15-19 at the fairgrounds in Lowville. The Boonville-Oneida County Fair will be held July 22-27 at the Boonville fairgrounds, near Adirondack High School. The Gouverneur and St. Lawrence County Fair will be open July 29 to Aug. 3 at 85 E. Barney St., Gouverneur. The Herkimer County Fair will be staged from Aug. 12-17 at 133 Cemetery St., Frankfort.