



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Strengthening the Connection Between Farm and Fork

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Here in our region, throughout New York State, and across the country, the “eat local” movement is becoming more and more popular. Whether it’s picking up fresh produce at your local farmers market, or eating at a “farm to table” restaurant—people are becoming more aware of the benefits of eating foods that are grown and produced by farmers and agribusiness owners in our region and beyond.

When people eat local, they not only consume fresher, more nutritious foods, they also support the bottom lines of our hardworking farmers. Recently, I met with local agriculture experts to discuss an exciting new development when it comes to better connecting farmers with people who are looking to eat locally produced and grown foods. While the “eat local” movement is gaining in popularity, one of the biggest challenges facing farm and agribusiness owners is finding metro markets in which to sell their products.

In an effort to address this issue, and expand markets for agriculture professionals, the new state budget included more than \$1 million to help establish “food hubs.” These hubs will present farmers and agribusiness owners with an opportunity to bring their goods to one central location, where they can then be transported to major cities throughout the state, including New York City. In addition to making it easier for farmers to get their products out to the public, food hubs will also help consumers eat more fresh, nutritious and locally grown goods.

Establishing food hubs is just one way I’m working as Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee to support our state’s farmers and grow our agriculture industry. This year, I was proud to lead the way in securing funding in the state budget to support programs that strengthen and preserve family farming. In addition, I’ve also been continuing to work to expand my “Young Farmer” program, which was created in 2014 to address the challenge of replacing aging and retiring farmers, as well as to introduce my “Grown in New York” initiative, which aims to strengthen farmers’ bottom lines by connecting local farms and consumers.

Gaining feedback from agriculture experts on how to best establish food hubs is the first step to making them successful, sustainable ventures that help to expand business for our farmers, and make fresh foods more accessible to people throughout our state. In the months to come, I'm looking forward to continuing to work to strengthen the connection between "farm and fork." For more information, as well as updates on this effort, I encourage you to visit my website, www.ritchie.nysenate.gov.