



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

NY Senate to USDA: Give Farmers What They're Owed

DARREL J. AUBERTINE April 20, 2009

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Agriculture Chair's Resolution calls on USDA to investigate, fix reporting errors and repay farmers

ALBANY (April 21, 2009)—State Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine and the entire New York State Senate are sending a message to the United States Department of Agriculture: Make sure our dairy farmers get what is rightfully theirs.

The Senate unanimously approved a resolution (J.1135) sponsored by Sen. Aubertine on Monday calling on the USDA to correct reporting errors in milk prices that short-changed farmers nationwide around \$6.4 million over a two month period, investigate how long these errors have gone unchecked, and then pay back the money owed to each farmer with interest as early as possible.

“Reporting the price of nonfat dry milk incorrectly within a complex milk pricing system means our farmers were not getting a fair price for their milk,” said Sen. Aubertine, who is the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. “The USDA has already acknowledged the error for two months, but it seems to go back further than that and we need action. These mistakes are partly responsible for sinking milk prices that have made it harder and harder for our dairy farmers to make ends meet.”

The U.S. Congress in 2000 and 2002 instructed the USDA to conduct regular mandatory audits, but these audits have not occurred and it appears that without these audits incorrect reporting will continue.

“The USDA must be expected to follow through,” Sen. Aubertine said. “The USDA has the ability and I believe, the obligation, to pay our farmers what is owed with interest and expand its investigation to determine just how much our New York farmers have lost. This resolution received unanimous bi-partisan support and we hope that the Secretary Vilsack and the USDA do what is right and move forward with audits that will prevent this from happening again.”

Under Section 32 of the Agriculture Adjustment Amendment Act of 1935, the USDA is authorized to repay the farmers once the overall impact has been determined. In addition to the repayment and mandatory auditing, the resolution also calls for daily and weekly reporting on dairy commodity transactions, including prices and quantities by location and product.

The Northeast States Association for Agricultural Stewardship (NSAAS), of which New York is a member, has also agreed to draft a similar resolution. NSAAS represent state agricultural and rural policy leaders in the northeast, working on behalf of farmers. Copies of this resolution will be sent to USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack, all 28 of New York’s federal representatives in the U.S. Congress and the state Department of Agriculture and Markets.