



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Dairy Farms Still in Crisis

CATHARINE YOUNG September 3, 2009

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News Column from

***Senator Cathy Young
Representing the 57th Senate District***

Ranking Member of the NYS Senate's Agriculture Committee

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DAIRY FARMS STILL IN CRISIS

By Senator Cathy Young

Is help finally on the way for struggling Upstate dairy farmers?

Earlier this year, New York State Senate Republicans proposed using federal stimulus money to create an emergency assistance fund to provide immediate help for Upstate dairy farmers, who are enduring their worst year ever as a result of plunging milk prices and soaring production costs.

A similar program that I initiated in 2007, used \$30 million in state funds and served as a critical bridge for hundreds of Upstate farm families who were then facing a horrific farm crisis, but one that pales in comparison to the current situation.

And while there seemed to be plenty of stimulus to help boost the size of the bloated state budget, and pay for dubious programs like highway advertising signs and no-strings-attached grants for welfare recipients, the New York City controlled Senate rejected my proposal.

Instead, they opted to pass a disastrous budget that increased taxes by \$8.5 billion and spent \$13 billion – all during a recession. Their fiasco only passed by one vote, and I'm proud that every Senate Republican voted against their budget.

Now comes word that another Senator—in this case, federal Senator Chuck Schumer—is stepping up to find ways to help.

Sen. Schumer recognizes that more loans to dairy farmers aren't the answer. Rather, farmers need the kind of cash infusion that my dairy assistance program would have provided.

He's proposed raising the federally controlled prices that farmers get for their milk, and that's a great start, but dairy farmers need cash now.

How bad is the current crisis?

Across upstate, hundreds of dairy farms have already shut down, and conversations that I have had with local farmers makes clear that many more could face a similar fate.

Sen. Schumer says without this relief, even bigger farms with relatively healthy finances will have difficulty hanging on for another six months.

The time to act was in April, when Albany's budget was being put in place. But it's not too late to help save dairy farming.

The federal stimulus program, which is supposed to create and protect jobs, is the perfect avenue for doing so.

Under the stimulus, every state, including New York, has access to discretionary funding to use in ways that will strengthen our local economy.

Dairy farming is such a critical part of the local economies of so many Upstate communities that the industry is custom made to fit that profile.

Following the defeat of my emergency assistance program, I wrote to Gov. Paterson to solicit his help for our struggling dairy farmers. I am still awaiting a reply to that request.

In the meantime, I have drafted legislation that I am pushing to be considered when the Senate returns to Albany next month to reauthorize and expand the 2007 program. This emergency legislation is designed to provide \$60 million in immediate assistance to struggling dairy farmers.

And with the new reform measures passed earlier this year, the Senate has moved from a leader-driven body to member-driven – providing a greater opportunity for important pieces of legislation like this the chance for an up-and-down vote.

New York is the nation's third-largest dairy state, generating \$2.3 billion annually, over half of the state's total agricultural receipts. I hope my colleagues join me in acting now before another dairy farm, perhaps one that has been around for generations, is lost for good.

Sen. Young (R,I,C-Olean) grew up on a dairy farm, and is past chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee.