



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

Aubertine to Host Roundtable Discussions on New York Agriculture

DARREL J. AUBERTINE September 17, 2009

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Ag Chair wants to give more farmers a voice on a spectrum of issues, including Farm Labor Bill

WATERTOWN (September 17, 2009)—State Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine announced today that he will be hosting a series of agriculture roundtable discussions with farmers in the coming months—both in the 48th district and at locations in other parts of the state—to discuss what can be done on the state level to help farmers endure the dairy crisis and other important issues facing farmers.

“These are extremely difficult times for our farmers in just about every agricultural sector, but especially dairy,” Sen. Aubertine said. “As we work with our federal representatives for real changes that would compensate dairy farmers fairly for their milk and cover their cost of production, there are steps we can take at the state level. It’s important that all state lawmakers and officials recognize that our farming industries are a cornerstone of our state’s economy. I want to give farmers from across the state a platform to express their ideas.”

As chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Sen. Aubertine has repeatedly stressed that a sound economic future for New York State must start with agriculture and that economic development efforts cannot overlook the importance of farms to our rural communities. A former dairy farmer and the only still active farmer in the state Legislature, the Senator has sponsored bills intended to increase demand for raw milk and cut costs for farmers, lobbied federal lawmakers to take action on milk prices, promoted agriculture as a means to meeting our energy needs in the future, and worked to both pass legislation and also lift regulations so more local farm products are on kitchen and school cafeteria tables across New York.

The Senator is looking to continue these efforts and use these roundtables to bring the voices of many other farmers across the state to join with him to help shape the legislative agenda for agriculture. The Senator has reached out to the New York Farm Bureau to assist in putting these roundtables together and

has worked with the bureau on many important issues.

“I commend Senator Aubertine for holding these roundtables and giving farmers a strong voice in public policy options that impact farm family profitability,” said Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau. “The Fair Labor Practices Act would place New York farm families in an uncompetitive position in an already high cost state and Senator Aubertine understands the importance of promoting local agriculture and encouraging family farmers. Senator Aubertine has been leading the charge on farming issues, and farmers sincerely appreciate his commitment and hard work to opening the door to hear the actual farmer, and farm worker, side of the debate rather than the inflamed rhetoric.”

The “Farm Worker Fair Labor Practices Act,” despite its name, is legislation Sen. Aubertine, the Farm Bureau, and members of both political parties oppose on the grounds that it would harm consumers, farmers and farm workers alike. The Senator has worked to keep the bill from coming to a vote because it would increase costs for farmers, who are also farm workers, causing many farms to close or alter the way that workers are hired and limit what farm workers can earn. Farm Bureau and Sen. Aubertine have received hundreds of letters from both farmers and farm workers opposing the bill.

“The sponsors of this legislation and its proponents are well meaning, but this legislation would devastate New York’s agriculture industry and farm workers would suffer as a result,” Sen. Aubertine said. “These roundtable discussions will be used in part to discuss the effect this bill will have on farming throughout New York State and give farmers the opportunity to offer alternatives, including substantial revisions to the current proposal. Agriculture in New York State supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and is the backbone of our rural economy. Losing more farms is bad for our economy as a whole and we cannot afford to pass this bill as it is written.”

Sen. Aubertine has worked with his colleagues in the Senate to explain how this bill will not benefit farm workers. He recently met with farm labor advocates and Senate leadership to make this point and all were receptive to the idea that without substantial changes, the current bill would do more harm than good.