



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

Senator Winner, Colleagues Hear Testimony from Dairy Farmers

GEORGE WINNER October 19, 2009

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Albany, N.Y., October 19—State Senator George Winner (R-C-I, Elmira) joined legislative colleagues from across the upstate region today at a public hearing in Albany to hear testimony from New York dairy farmers and industry leaders on ways to address the ongoing dairy crisis.

“We’re looking at a disaster-in-waiting throughout many rural, upstate communities already under enormous pressure. Dairy farming is a mainstay of upstate New York’s culture and

economy, and we can't risk devastating losses within this critical industry," said Winner, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and of the Legislature's joint, bipartisan Commission on Rural Resources.

Dairy farmers in New York received an average of \$12.50 per hundredweight of milk sold during September, up 50 cents from August but \$6.50 less than September a year ago. A study by Cornell University estimated that farmers need to be paid at least \$17.00 per hundredweight in order to meet their production costs.

Tom Sleight, Executive Director New York Farm Viability Institute, said, "Bringing good minds together to explore the array of near and longer term solutions to help New York farmers to cope with and recover from this downturn in price has been a top priority for the Institute. This forum will add momentum to the growing statewide and national discussions on the critical issues facing the dairy industry."

Eric Ooms, Vice President of New York Farm Bureau and a Columbia County dairy farmer, said, "Dairy farmers are going through an extraordinary pricing downturn, the worst in three decades. New York Farm Bureau is committed to exploring any and all short and long term options to help our dairy farm families through this crisis."

Over the past few months Winner and other Senate Republicans have been calling for the approval of the Dairy Investment Act, which would provide \$60 million of direct emergency relief to struggling farmers. The program, which has bipartisan support, is modeled after a similar – and successful-- effort in 2007.

In a February letter to Governor David Paterson, Winner wrote, "There is now widespread concern that this price collapse, in concert with record-high fuel and fertilizer costs, will begin to put New York State dairy farmers, particularly small family farms, out of business

by the end of the year. . .As a state legislator deeply concerned about the future of the upstate region, I am writing to urge your administration's focus on this disaster-in-waiting. We all recognize the challenges New York faces in the 2009-2010 state fiscal year, however I strongly believe we have to be ready for an appropriate state response to the dairy crisis."

"It's terrible for farmers to work so hard, only to see their livelihoods destroyed by volatile milk prices. Not only are the farmers suffering, but all of the related small businesses are on the brink of disaster, too. We need to give them a boost, or they will be lost from our economy forever," said Senator Cathy Young (R-C-I, Olean), who's the ranking Republican on the Senate Agriculture Committee.

New York is the nation's third-largest dairy state, generating \$2.3 billion annually. New York's 6,200 dairy farmers produce 1.4 billion gallons of milk annually. The average state dairy farm is family-owned and consists of 100 cows.