



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

Aubertine, Burling, Koon Host Agriculture Roundtable

DARREL J. AUBERTINE October 21, 2009

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Lawmakers discuss dairy crisis, farm labor with farmers, business and community leaders

WARSAW (October 21, 2009)—State Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine, Assemblyman Daniel J. Burling and Assemblyman David Koon today hosted an agriculture forum in Warsaw. The agriculture roundtable, which took place at the American Legion Post, was attended by local agricultural experts and dairy farmers, as well as business and community leaders.

Their discussion included the key components of the economic crisis plaguing New York State agriculture, including low milk prices, the misguided farm labor bill and the need for state lawmakers who are less familiar with agriculture issues to visit Upstate and see New York's farms firsthand.

"Our farmers and agricultural businesses need to be at the center of our discussions on economic development and job creation," said Sen. Aubertine, chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. "This roundtable in Warsaw and discussions across the state give our farmers a seat at the table and a voice in the decisions being made in Albany. I'd like to thank Assemblyman Burling and Assemblyman Koon for hosting this roundtable with me. As colleagues and friends, we are committed to working across party lines on these important issues."

"Here in Western New York, our family farms are shutting down," said Assemblyman Burling, a member of the Assembly Agriculture, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Task Force. "With each farm that we lose, our community loses a valuable energy, cultural, economic, and environmental asset."

All three lawmakers are part of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, a bipartisan and bicameral commission, which works for the advancement of issues relating to our state's rural communities, including agriculture. Sen. Aubertine and Assemblyman Koon are co-chairs.

"I think this was a great opportunity for farmers to get together and get the ears of our representatives in state government and their opportunity to respond to us," Cathy Martin, of John B. Martin & Sons Farms Inc., and president of Monroe County Farm Bureau. "I would like to thank Sen. Aubertine, Assemblyman Burling and Assemblyman Koon for listening to our concerns and being interested in our issues. They will take our input back to Albany and that's all we can ask them to do. Agriculture in New York State is in a tough position and we need all the supporters we can get. I was pleased to hear their positions on the misguided farm labor bill and that they understand how this bill would negatively impact agriculture."

Economists have noted that the cost of doing business for farmers has increased significantly, while reports claim the supply of dairy products has remained high, while the overall demand for milk has declined. A recent Cornell University study found New York's dairy farmers are unable to generate profits. This was a cause for concern, considering the

agriculture industry generates \$3.6 billion in state revenue plus much more when the impact on the surrounding community is factored in. Wyoming, St. Lawrence, Lewis and Jefferson counties are the state's leading dairy producers.

"Agriculture is the cornerstone of our economy in New York State and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs statewide," Sen. Aubertine said. "Make no mistake: Agriculture is an industry and we cannot afford to lose another industry in this state."

Several farmers personally relayed their concerns with the outdated Milk Dairy Product Price Support program, which originated to allow **the federal government** to serve as a dairy buyer of last resort when unique market conditions threatened the nation's agriculture industry. However, the price paid by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is outdated and remains too low to benefit farmers in our communities. The price paid to farmers has dropped to around \$11 per hundredweight of milk, while a recent Cornell University study estimates that New York's dairy farmers would need a price of \$17 per hundredweight to break even. The USDA calculates the cost of production for farmers as more than \$25 per hundredweight.

"We are seeing a perfect storm in the form of an agriculture apocalypse," said Assemblyman Burling. "The global economic crisis has decreased the demand for milk and other agriculture products. This has caused domestic prices to drop, while the costs of doing business have continued to escalate. Because of this crunch, many struggling farmers have been forced to extend their lines of credit, a task made much more difficult due to the financial crisis."

Assemblyman Burling and Sen. Aubertine discussed the need to restructure the outdated payment system, highlighting their collaborative efforts with New York's congressional delegation, senate delegation, and U.S. agriculture officials to overhaul the federal model. They also pointed to recent successes like securing federal money for dairy farmers, but urged that this was just the beginning in turning around the state's troubled dairy industry.

"The purpose of this roundtable was to empower our neighbors in the agriculture industry. This begins with all of the involved parties communicating their concerns," Assemblyman Burling said. "And it starts with all of our public officials working in a bipartisan manner, as Senator Aubertine has graciously done, to ensure government is aiding – rather than hindering – our state's agriculture industry. But what we need next is action. We need viable short-term and long-term solutions to sustain agriculture as a way of life and the foundation

of our local economy. The recent injection of money does not address the long-term difficulties facing this industry.”