



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

Aubertine: Agriculture Bills to Grow Economy, Create Jobs

DARREL J. AUBERTINE March 10, 2010

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Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine with the NYS Maple Producers Association earlier this year, from left to right, Dave Campbell, Helen Thomas, executive director, Dwayne Hill, Senator Aubertine and Mike Hill.

Bills to benefit maple industry, roadside stands and wine industry will benefit Ag, Upstate economy

ALBANY (March 10, 2010)—The New York State Senate under the leadership of Agriculture Committee Chair Darrel J. Aubertine passed four bills this week designed to grow the state's agricultural industries by expanding sales opportunities for New York-made agricultural products.

"Our state's farmers and agricultural producers sell around \$4.5 billion worth of goods each year, but the economic impact goes well beyond in supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs," Sen. Aubertine said. "It's important we remain focused on growing our agricultural industries because these local businesses will help us emerge from these tough economic times. These bills put agriculture in the context of economic development and will in fact generate revenue and help to preserve and create jobs."

The Senate today passed unanimously two bills sponsored by Sen. Aubertine which address the state's maple industry, already second in the nation in sales receipts behind only Vermont.

The first bill (S.6317-A) would amend the state's Agriculture and Markets Law to include not only tree sap in the definition of an agricultural commodity, but also the products derived from it—maple syrup, maple cream, maple sugar, and shaped sugar. Expanding this definition provides protection for maple producers through commodity insurance and makes maple operations eligible for U.S. Department of Agriculture and state Agriculture and Markets funding.

The second bill (S.6443-A) will include maple sap and pure maple products in the definition of agricultural tourism, giving maple producers the same rights and protections afforded to other farmers who invite the public onto their land for the purposes of agricultural tourism. Similar to legislation passed last week to ease building regulations for tourism, this bill will ease regulations limiting the ability of maple producers to engage in agricultural tourism.

"Our maple industry is growing and our producers need to be able to maximize on the growing popularity of this quality New York product by building their businesses and in turn creating jobs," said Sen. Aubertine, who is also chair of the Rural Resources Commission and Senate Upstate Caucus. "Even though the finest maple syrup in the country comes from trees in Upstate New York, tourism has been a largely untapped resource for the maple industry with tremendous room for growth. The word is out about our quality maple products and whether we're talking about maple weekend every March or throughout the year, our maple industry has great potential to draw in tourists and further increase sales."

New York has about 1,500 maple syrup producers who made more than 362,000 gallons of syrup in 2009, according to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service and the New York State Maple Producers Association. New York's increase was 10 percent more than 2008's production output. The state's 1.51 million taps produce enough sap to account for almost 15.6 percent of the maple syrup made in the United States. That averages out to 0.240 gallons of syrup for every tap in the state with an average cost per gallon of syrup at \$42.40.

The final value of the 2008 crop is estimated at \$13.907 million, a huge increase of 55 percent from the year before. The economic impact of maple production in New York State is estimated \$55.6 million in 2008. The USDA will release 2009 crop values in June of 2010.

On Monday, the Senate unanimously passed another bill sponsored by Sen. Aubertine to ensure that seasonal farmers, including maple producers, can advertise their products with signs along the highway to sell directly to consumers.

"The ability to sell directly from the farm ensures that our farmers have a direct market for their goods and consumers get the freshest products at a low price," Sen. Aubertine said. "These seasonal signs are vital to many farms looking to reach a market of increasingly local-minded consumers. Unfortunately, in recent years, many farmers have been told they can no longer engage in this traditional form of advertising. This law corrects that so passing motorists have advance notice of quality roadside produce."

The fourth agriculture bill (S.6780-introduced by Sen. David J. Valesky) passed 53-5 by the Senate will expand the production of frozen desserts made with wine. Currently, a law passed in 2008 permits the production of wine ice cream here in New York, most notably in Central New York by **Mercer's Dairy**, but other frozen desserts, such as sorbet, sherbet and gelato cannot be made legally with wine.

This will open up new markets for New York wines as well as in-state producers looking to offer a new product. The legislation contains the same provisions mandated in the original law, including a five percent alcohol content limit, restricting sales to those over 21 years of age, and requiring product labeling and warning statements similar to those established for other frozen desserts containing alcohol.