



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Farm Labor Bill Dies in Agriculture Committee

CATHARINE YOUNG April 20, 2010

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ALBANY – A major victory was scored on behalf of farms across Upstate New York on Tuesday, when a farm labor bill that would devastate upstate’s farming industry was defeated in the Senate’s Agriculture Committee, according to the committee’s ranking member Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C – Olean).

“The effects of this ill-conceived legislation would have been catastrophic to our state’s top industry. Thousands of farms would have gone under, and countless jobs at farms, processing plants, and farm supply businesses would have been lost. This is a step in the right direction for upstate’s economic recovery,” said Senator Young.

The bill, defeated in the Agricultural Committee with a 6 -1 vote with two other votes to move the bill to another committee without recommendation, would have mandated farm worker overtime pay after 55 hours, drive up unemployment insurance costs, and allow collective bargaining.

“This legislation would create the most repressive labor mandates in the entire country. New York farm workers already are paid 56 percent higher than the national average and receive additional benefits like free housing, utilities, health care, and transportation. Farms would be shut down for good, and the

economic fallout would send shockwaves across the entire state,” said Senator Young.

“Our agriculture industry pumps billions of dollars in our economy every year, but it is very fragile right now. All of the commodities are down, and dairy especially is in terrible shape because of low milk prices,” she added.

In January, the bill cleared the Senate Labor Committee and was fast tracked to be voted on by the full Senate. It wasn’t scheduled for an Agriculture Committee review until Senator Young and several of her colleagues intervened and demanded the bill be referred.

“Very powerful and influential special interest groups from downstate have attempted to seal the fate of this bill without the public even having an opportunity to fully understand its consequences. Our committee held hearings, heard from advocates on both sides of the issue, met with top industry officials and was very deliberative in its review before we came to this outcome,” said Senator Young.

"We are grateful for Senator Young for her unwavering support of farm families during the deliberation of this bill," said Dean Norton, president of New York Farm Bureau. "At times, groups opposing farmers were extremely disrespectful in their public comments. Senator Young repeatedly defended the agricultural community and the reputation of our industry. We thank her for her vote and for her staunch defense of our good name."

Although the farm labor bill was voted down, the committee did vote in favor of a bill that would reduce taxes, fees and mandates for farmers. The Farmer Tax, Fee and Mandate Relief Act will help farmers ensure their land is recognized as part of an agricultural district, obtain tax credits for farm investments, exempt farm wineries from sales tax reporting requirements, ease corporation filing fees for farmers and reduce permit fees with the Department of Environmental Conservation. That bill will now be reported to another committee.

“Our family farms are the backbone of Upstate New York and one of the most significant economic engines in this state. If we are going to turn our economy around and bring more jobs to upstate New York, then we need to do everything we can to help our agricultural industry become strong again,” said Senator Young.

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