



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

New York's No. 1 Industry?

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A quick quiz: New York State's largest industry is:

a.) Tourism b.) Manufacturing c.) Agriculture or d.) High-tech

We're beginning this week by celebrating Columbus Day and recalling how that early voyage began opening the way to the settlement of America which, in turn, is remindful of the fact that throughout the centuries we have been a nation of agriculture and farming.

And that's right, the answer to the above question is this: agriculture remains New York's No. 1 industry. In fact, today's farm economy generates more than \$4 billion worth of annual economic activity statewide and provides a livelihood for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

We can't afford to forget it.

For the 20th consecutive year recently, I was named as a member of the New York Farm Bureau "Circle of Friends" -- an honorary organization formed in 1990 by the state's leading farm advocacy organization to recognize state legislators who strongly support agriculture. The Farm Bureau represents more than 35,000 member farm families.

Many of you know that I'll be concluding my tenure in the Legislature at the end of the year after a combined 32 years of service in the state Assembly and Senate, and I can say without hesitation that it's been deeply satisfying to receive this long-running Farm Bureau recognition.

The corps of state legislators who understand the challenges facing New York's farmers keeps getting smaller and smaller as state government falls under the control of downstate, New York City-based leaders. I've been proud to stand up for our local farmers and for an agricultural industry that's been a mainstay of our culture and economy across hundreds of communities throughout New York, especially upstate.

Across these past three decades, I've helped sponsor and support any number of state programs and policies to strengthen agriculture as a way to try to spark a revitalization of the entire upstate economy. For example in 2005, my first year in the Senate, I sponsored a new law to put in place a permanent, comprehensive regulatory review process designed to weed out state rules and regulations detrimental to the agricultural industry. In 2008, through the work of the bipartisan Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, which I chaired, we made Cornell

University home to the nation's first legislatively established "Center for Rural Schools" to explore ways of expanding the role schools can play in helping address rural challenges.

So it's been satisfying and, I can only hope, meaningful work. Most importantly, I hope that it carries on. There was an encouraging sign toward that end last week. The New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), under the capable guidance of Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli, published a new report summarizing the findings and recommendations of its Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Future of New York Farming.

"These recommendations are practical advice from elected and appointed government officials who come from farm families. We have a major economic engine that contributes to all of our communities. We must continue to invest in this industry as a way to stimulate the economy, put people to work and continue to provide essential food for New Yorkers and those outside New York State," said NYSAC Executive Director Stephen J. Acquario.

You can read more, including the full report, on NYSAC's Web site at:
www.nysac.org/Legislative_Action_Center/.