



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie Bill Boosts Maple Farming

PATTY RITCHIE June 16, 2011

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Seeks to treat ‘sugar bush’ as farms, not factories

State Senator Patty Ritchie (R-C, Heuvelton) today announced passage of another of her bills that cuts the red tape on farmers, and will help spur continued growth for New York’s maple syrup industry.

Senator Ritchie’s bill, S. 5499, exempts maple producers from strict industrial pollution rules that threaten to derail the growth of this important agricultural sector, which currently is valued at \$13 million in 2010, with strong potential for explosive growth.

“New York maple farmers are coming off a record year, where renewed interest in this traditional product, new technology and favorable weather, helped producers achieve results not seen since 1947,” said Senator Ritchie, who is the Chair of the Senate’s Agriculture Committee.

“But overly restrictive industrial anti-pollution laws—never intended to apply to farmers—threaten to derail this growth, by burdening producers with unnecessary rules and expenses. My bill would exempt the short-season practices of maple farmers from these industrial pollution rules, and help give farmers an added boost to grow their businesses,”

Senator Ritchie said.

Senator Ritchie's bill would exempt farmers from pollution discharge rules, including requirements for a minimum \$600 permit and inspections, that were written to apply to heavy industry, including companies that handle radioactive and hazardous wastes.

But regulators have begun to apply the rules to maple farmers who use soapy water to clean osmosis equipment, newer technology that helps farmers reduce labor and fuel costs to process the watery sap into the thick, sweet end product.

Typically, the washing process will use a few tablespoons of soap and between 10 and 20 gallons of water, compared to over 100 gallons of soapy water used by a homeowner washing her car.

"The maple sugaring season in New York typically lasts about a month. But regulators want to impose rules that are aimed at companies that are working around the clock and throughout the year. Requiring these investments by farmers to comply with the rigid pollution rules would be an insurmountable burden for many small producers," Senator Ritchie said.

New York maple farmers posted a 64-year record this year, producing 564,000 gallons of maple syrup, according to the USDA. New York is the nation's number two maple producer and, together with New England, responsible for 75 percent of all maple syrup produced in the US. A recent Cornell study found that New York has the potential to dramatically boost its production, and could someday exceed Quebec, the world leader.

The center of New York's maple syrup production are the Northern NY's St. Lawrence, Lewis, Jefferson and Clinton Counties.

The bill is sponsored in the Assembly by Agriculture Committee Chair Bill Magee.

Senator Ritchie has been targeting government red tape in her efforts to help boost agriculture, passing the following bills:

- S.3542—exempts maple “sugar shacks” from overly stringent building codes;
- S.5160—eliminates restrictions on land eligible for ag assessments;
- S.5262—eliminates outdated requirements for farmers to carry “blue cards” listing the names of roads on which they will operate registered farm vehicles;
- S.3318—removing restrictions on UTVs, increasingly used by farmers and outdoors men for recreation and also as work vehicles;
- S.4144—eases requirements for nursery registrations, saving money for businesses and state government;
- S.4080—repeals outdated rules on grocery stores that increased costs for consumers.

Senator Ritchie is also the sponsor of the comprehensive Agriculture Regulatory Reform Act (S.4340) which include tax credits and incentives to promote family farming and stop over regulation, and is a cosponsor of S.2468, the “Buy from the Backyard Act,” which would require state prisons, colleges, hospitals and other agencies to increase their purchases of New York-grown farm products.