



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie: State Budget Includes Welcome Boost to Farmers

PATTY RITCHIE March 25, 2013

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New Funding, Initiatives to Help NY's Leading Industry Grow

State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced that the new state budget restores cuts to key agriculture programs, while adding new funding and a new marketing initiative to help farmers grow.

Senator Ritchie, chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, once again led efforts to stop funding cuts to key programs aimed at boosting productivity and strengthening the bottom lines of 36,000 family farmers who are at the center of New York's leading industry.

For the first time in years, the budget also includes new funding, and a new initiative that makes it easier for farmers to market products to government agencies, creating an opportunity for dramatically expanded markets. Many of the provisions were included in Senator Ritchie's sweeping "Grown in New York" legislative plan to boost agriculture.

"For two years, my focus has been on stopping budget cuts and ensuring that farmers continued to receive the support they need to make their businesses more productive and profitable," Senator Ritchie said.

“Now, New York’s farmers are poised to grow, and state government is stepping up with new and restored funding, and initiatives to help them take advantage of expanding markets and new opportunities,” Senator Ritchie said/

“That’s what ‘Grown in New York’ sought to accomplish, and it’s what we have done with this new budget plan.”

On Sunday, the Senate gave its approval to a budget bill that encourages state agencies to purchase more local food, by giving them expanded authority to spend up to \$200,000 for “food commodities that are grown, produced or harvested in New York.”

That provision echoes a proposal by Senator Ritchie and Senator Thomas Libous, called “Buy from the Backyard,” that would also encourage more local purchases.

And the Legislature is expected to act shortly on budget bills that increase funding for key agriculture research, marketing, education and promotion, including:

- \$1.7 million for the New York Farm Viability Institute, a farmer-led nonprofit that sponsors dozens of agricultural research and other programs across Central, Northern and Upstate New York to help bolster farmers’ bottom lines. The total is more than \$1.2 million above than the Governor originally proposed, and includes \$220,000 to expand so-called dairy profit teams to help boost farmers’ bottom lines;
- \$884,000 for Cornell University’s FarmNet program—an increase of nearly \$400,000—to help struggling farmers with services, counseling and assistance;
- \$500,000 restoration for Northern New York Agricultural development. The program was eliminated in the Governor’s budget;
- \$40,000 for research aimed at helping farmers who want to take advantage of the state’s growing microbrewing niche, under provisions of a new law sponsored by Senator Ritchie;
- \$1 million each to state apple growers (an increase of \$794,000 above the Governor), to help farmers who suffered significant weather-related crop loss last year, and for expanded marketing of New York wine and grape products (an increase of \$287,000);
- \$125,000 for promotion of New York maple products, representing a restoration of \$100,000 and a \$25,000 increase from last year;
- \$100,000 restoration to continue the state’s highly successful tractor rollover prevention program. Tractor accidents are a leading cause of on-the-farm injuries and fatalities, and funding was eliminated in the Governor’s budget;

- \$200,000 in new funding to help berry growers combat invasive species that are destroying their crops;
- \$150,000 in new funding for turf growers, and \$100,000 in new funding for Christmas tree farmers. New York ranks seventh for Christmas tree production in the US;
- Increased funding for prevention of rabies, following growing incidences of the disease on farms and among wildlife, and the mosquito-borne EEE virus.

“New York, especially northern New York, is in the beginning of an agricultural revolution. Our farmers are working hard to meet the demand for more dairy, more value added products, and more healthy nutritious food, grown locally and also exported across the world. These agriculture budget proposals support the needed assistance in research and development for meeting this opportunity and revolution. We applaud Senator Ritchie for having the vision to invest in agriculture,” said Jay M. Matteson, Jefferson County Agricultural Coordinator.

“The board of the NY Farm Viability Institute would like to thank Senator Ritchie, chair of the Senate Agricultural Committee, for her support in securing funding for the work the Institute does,” said Jim Bittner, the Institute’s chairman, and a Western NY fruit farmer. “The Institute funds agricultural research and education projects that are targeted to improve the efficiency and profitability of agricultural producers. With this new funding, we will be able to continue and expand this work to keep New York producers on the cutting edge in an ever changing world.”

“We appreciate the efforts of Senator Patty Ritchie as Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee to include the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program in the state budget deliberations and for recognizing how valuable it is to invest in this research, outreach and technical assistance programs for the agricultural industry across the North Country,” said Northern New York Agricultural Development Program Co-Chair Jon Greenwood, a dairy farmer in St. Lawrence County.

The Senate is expected to act on the agriculture portion of the state budget in the next few days. The Assembly is scheduled to act on the bills later this week.