



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

A Helping of NYS Food and Drink for the Holidays

PATTY RITCHIE December 9, 2013

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

It's the holiday season, and for many people, that means there are holiday parties to attend. This time of year, get-togethers are not only a great way to spend quality time with family and friends, they are also an opportunity to treat ourselves to our favorites—whether it be Christmas cookies, hot cocoa, mulled cider, eggnog or any of the season's specialties.

Much of the food and drink we enjoy during the holidays (and in fact year-round) is produced right here in New York. If you'd like to taste the best of what our state has to offer—and help support local businesses too—I encourage you to visit the “Pride of New York” website. Located at www.prideofny.com, you can use the site to search for locally grown and produced food and beverage products from more than 3,000 “Pride of New York” members.

But it's not just individuals who are buying locally produced food and drink. According to a recent, informal survey I conducted, half of our region's bars, taverns and restaurants serve wine and beverages produced locally in Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence Counties. Key findings of the survey—which included barkeepers, restaurateurs and chefs from the region—include the following:

- 65% said they currently serve New York-made wine, craft beer or distilled spirits;

- 51% said they served products from some of the 14 wineries, craft breweries or distilleries in Jefferson, Oswego or St. Lawrence Counties;
- 91% said they believed local products were “as good” or “better” than national brands.

While the growth of wineries, craft brewers and distilleries has exploded across New York State in recent years, there’s still a lot more that can be done to foster their growth—as well as the growth of the jobs they will create.

Recently, I sponsored and supported legislation easing taxes and regulation on wineries, craft brewers and distillers. In addition, for the past three years, I have also published an annual Farmers Market Guide for consumers. Most recently, I have been working on drafting legislation to create the region’s newest Wine and Beverage Trail, located in St. Lawrence County, to help promote local businesses and draw new tourists to the region.

As the holiday season continues, I hope you’ll think about buying—and tasting—some of the local food and drink our region has to offer. As a reminder, if you do decide to enjoy locally made wine, beer, spirits or other alcoholic beverages, I encourage you to do so in moderation and in a way that’s safe. Remember to pace yourself, make every other drink a nonalcoholic one and be sure to plan on having a designated driver that can get you home safely.