



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Room to Grow in NY's Biggest Industry

PATTY RITCHIE February 24, 2014

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

From sowing crops by hand and working the land with simple wooden plows to employing new and advanced technologies to grow better—and more—crops, agriculture has come a long way since it first took root in the United States. Illustrating these changes is the newly-released USDA 2012 “Census of Agriculture” ([read the full report here](#)). The survey, which is taken every five years, not only indicates that agriculture continues to be a strong and major driver of our state and local economies, it also shows that there are tremendous opportunities for further growth in the industry. According to the report, the market values of livestock, crops and total products

grown and produced by those in the industry are at an all time high, as farms in the United States saw sales totaling \$395 billion in 2012—that's 33 percent higher than in 2007. Specifically, in New York state, farmers saw sales grow more than 25 percent since 2007. While there has been significant growth in the agriculture industry, the report points to a number of sobering statistics. According to the survey, over five years we continued to lose three farms per week. This figure is due to a number of factors including consolidation, competition and lastly, aging farmers. According to the survey, a third of farmers were older than 65 in 2012. Although the farming population is aging, the number of young farmers has increased slightly. Despite this small increase, we need to continue to work to add more young people to the ranks of our state's hardworking farmers. As chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, encouraging growth of the industry is a top priority for me, and in the days to come, I plan to unveil an ambitious plan to put New York at the forefront of addressing the issue of our state's aging farmer population. Responsible for generating more than \$5 billion annually, agriculture is New York's leading industry and it's poised for explosive growth thanks to an increased consumer demand for food, drink and other products that are high quality, fresh and local. As state senator, I'm looking forward to working alongside our state's farmers to seize opportunities for expansion in an effort to keep New York's number one industry vibrant and growing.