



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Senate Republicans Unveil Plan to Secure the Future of Family Farming

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| ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE**



### **"YOUNG FARMERS NY" ENCOURAGE NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS, STRENGTHENS NY'S LEADING INDUSTRY**

Senator Patty Ritchie, Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and members of the Senate Republican Conference today unveiled their "Young Farmers NY" plan to address issues related to the advancing average age of New York farmers and to preserve the future of family farming. The initiative will support and encourage a new generation of farmers and help strengthen the state's leading industry for decades to come.

"Young Farmers NY," which was announced today at a Capitol news conference, is a series of proposals to smooth the transfer of farmland to the next generation, preserve existing farmland, and help young farmers overcome obstacles to give them a greater opportunity for a successful career in agriculture.

"Farming is critically important to the economic success of our state. It's also a way of life, handed down from generation to generation," said Senator Patty Ritchie (R-C-I, Heuvelton, St. Lawrence County). "But the next

generation of family farmers is being driven off the land by skyrocketing start-up expenses, tight profit margins, and high risk. The real risk we face is a continuing decline in family farms if we don't do more to preserve them by investing in the next generation of farmers. The Senate plan would do that and more."

Senators were joined at the news conference by Orion and Jessica Behling, co-operators of Behling Orchards, a family-run apple farm in Mexico, Oswego County. Orion is also President of Young Farmers and Ranchers of Oswego County.

Mr. Behling said: "When farming is in your family's DNA, it's hard to imagine doing anything else. Farming is hard work at any age, but beginning farmers face particular challenges in starting their business, and the Senate's plan takes away some of the uncertainty, and helps us create a foundation for future success."

Young Farmers NY is in response to research that shows the average age of New York farmers is increasing, as fewer young people pursue farming careers. According to new data from the USDA Census of Agriculture, the average age of New York farmers is now 57.1 years. There are two farmers aged 65 and older for each one under age 35. This and other factors lead to farmland being lost forever to development. About 50,000 acres of farmland were lost in New York in each of the last five years, the federal agency reported.

Young Farmers NY addresses these problems in two ways, by helping to encourage more young people to consider a farming career, and by reducing financial roadblocks to starting a new agriculture business. The plan calls for a state investment of more than \$30 million.

Highlights of the Young Farmers NY program include:

- Loans, grants, and tax credits for the sale or lease of land and equipment, as well as for new technological innovations;
- Estate tax reforms to encourage farm preservation from generation to generation; and
- Agricultural education efforts including an apprenticeship program, student loan forgiveness and increased funding for the in-school Future Farmers of America (FFA) program.

Senate Republican Leader Dean G. Skelos said: "The Senate's Young Farmers NY plan would help ensure the future success of New York farmers. I applaud Senator Ritchie for developing a plan that directly addresses the issues facing young farmers who want to make farming their future and help grow the agriculture industry which is vital to many local economies across New York."

Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau said: "As the average age of farmers grows each year, it is imperative that we encourage and promote the development of our young farmer community. This plan is designed to not only help young farmers that are already involved in agriculture, but to get more young people involved in farming. New York Farm Bureau thanks Senator Skelos, Senator Ritchie and the Senate Republican Conference for their work to ensure that New York State agriculture remains the state's top industry."

Senator Joseph Griffo (R-C-I, Rome) said: "Agriculture is an essential economic engine in the Mohawk Valley and North Country, so my fellow Senate Republicans and I are going to take a proactive approach to help this industry continue to prosper. The Young Farmer NY program will help preserve family farms by reforming punitive tax measures, as well as encourage new blood by investing in education and reducing the barriers to owning land and equipment. This program is exactly what's needed at a time when the age of an average New York farmer is 57 years old."

## **LAND OWNERSHIP**

The biggest single obstacle to starting a farm business is the high cost of land, equipment and supplies for starting farmers. Long-time farmers face pressure to sell to developers for higher prices than can be gained from keeping land in farming, lenders can be wary of extending credit to untested new farmers, and the state's tax code makes it difficult for farmers to pass on their business to the next generation. Young Farmers NY seeks to help prospective farmers overcome these obstacles.

**Young Farmer Farm Preservation Tax Credit:** Provides eligible farmers with up to 10 percent of the sale or rental price for the sale or lease of land or equipment to a new farmer. This preserves farmland, allows retiring farmers a more equitable return on their lifelong investment, and lowers the cost of farmland for beginning farmers. (\$5 million)

**Young Farmer Revolving Loan Fund:** Provides \$5 million for start-up loans for land and equipment purchases by new farmers. (\$5 million)

**Young Farmer Innovation Grants:** Allocates up to \$50,000 for new farmers through a competitive grant program that seeks to encourage new technology or production innovation. (\$1 million)

**Farm Savings Accounts:** Establishes savings accounts similar to college or retirement accounts. Savings intended for the purchase of farmland or equipment would grow tax-free. (\$5 million)

**Estate Tax reform:** Increases the estate tax exemption and lower rates as proposed in the Executive Budget. (\$14 million)

## AGRICULTURE EDUCATION

Just as many other successful industries, modern farming relies on technology and cutting-edge information to improve production, cut costs and boost profits. Young Farmers NY includes:

**Young Farmer Apprenticeship Program:** Provides funding to BOCES programs to establish partnerships with real working farmers to help young people gain hands-on experience they can bring to their own successful farm operation. (\$500,000)

**Young Farmer Student Loan Forgiveness Program:** Directs the Board of Regents to establish a student loan forgiveness program for up to 10 agriculture degree graduates annually who agree to work full-time in agriculture a minimum of five years. (\$100,000)

**Funding for Agriculture Education:** Increases funding for the in-school FFA program, which encourages careers in agriculture. There are 77 FFA chapters in New York, including in New York City. (\$158,000)

The Senate Republican Conference has been a leader in supporting family farming. Over the past three years, Senate Republicans successfully fought to restore budget funds affecting key agricultural research, education and marketing programs. The Republican Conference also spearheaded the "Grown in New York" plan and other important new laws to help boost farmers' bottom lines, including a cap on farmland tax assessments and increased funding for tractor rollover prevention efforts, additional agriculture research, marketing and promotion.

The Young Farmers NY program will be included in the Senate's budget resolution.

"The future of agriculture in New York is bright, and we can strengthen our rural, farm economy by taking steps now to preserve family farming for the next generation," said Senator Ritchie.