



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Building a Future for Farming in the New State Budget

PATTY RITCHIE March 31, 2014

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Snow and cold aside, March is a “sweet” month. That’s because of “Maple Weekend,” an annual celebration held to promote New York’s maple industry. With 2.2 million taps, our state is the nation’s second largest maple producer with plenty of room for growth. During this year’s Maple Weekend, I had the chance to visit with our region’s newest young farmer, Josh Parker. A 16 year-old, Josh has set up his own maple sugar operation in St. Lawrence County. The operation uses wood pellets to power an evaporator—a first for the maple industry in New York State. Meeting with Josh during Maple Weekend gave me the

opportunity to talk with him about my Young Farmers NY plan, an initiative to support and encourage careers in agriculture. Included in the new State Budget is \$1 million to support key elements of this plan including my proposal for new farmer innovation grants—now called the “NY Beginning Farmer Fund”—of up to \$50,000 each to help start or expand an agriculture business.

In addition, the budget also includes \$100,000 for student loan forgiveness for agriculture college graduates who commit to farming careers, increased funding for the in-school, agriculture leadership-focused FFA program, and reforms the Estate Tax, to make it easier for families to pass on their farm business to the next generation. In addition to funding for my Young Farmers NY plan, the budget also includes record funding—the highest rates in six years—for critical agriculture marketing, education and research programs. This record amount includes funding for the Apple Growers Association, Farm Viability Institute, the NY Wine and Grape Foundation, wildlife rabies prevention, the NY Maple Producers Association and much more. Throughout my years as your senator, I have worked to restore cuts to agriculture funding and secure new funding to help our state’s largest industry continue to grow. I’m confident the investments contained in the new State Budget will encourage more young people to consider careers in farming and strengthen family farms across the state.