



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Hat Trick! Senate Approves Three Bills to Boost Farming

PATTY RITCHIE June 10, 2014

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Two Sent to Governor on Way to Becoming Law

State Senator Patty Ritchie announced that three bills she's sponsored to boost farming in New York were approved by the Senate today, and two were sent on to the Governor, the last stop before they become law.

The measures would expand markets for New York farm products, allow farmers to increase their land that's available for agriculture purposes, and look for ways to boost programs that can help aging farmers who want to stay in business.

"New York's \$5.7 billion agriculture industry is key to our region's and the state's economy and I am constantly working to find ways to keep farmers growing," said Senator Ritchie, who serves as chair of the Senate's Agriculture Committee.

"These three bills build on—and complement—my earlier legislative efforts to strengthen New York agriculture and help preserve family farming as the backbone of our agricultural industry."

The measures passed today by the Senate include:

- "Buy from the Backyard" Act—sponsored by Senators Ritchie and Deputy Senate Leader Thomas Libous, of Binghamton, this measure (S. 978) would require state agencies—which each year serve tens of millions of dollars worth of food products in prisons, hospitals, colleges and schools—to make 20 percent of those purchases from New York growers. The bill was sent to the Assembly. Last year, Senator Ritchie won praise for a new "food metrics" law that she sponsored which requires agencies to more accurately track the sources of their farm purchases.

- Drainage tile revolving loan fund—recommended by Senator Ritchie’s farmer-based Agricultural Advisory Council, a group of local working farmers who regularly advise the Senator on key agricultural issues, this bill (S. 5482) would provide low-interest loans to farmers to install drainage systems to increase the availability of tillable farmland or areas for grazing, and would be especially helpful to “muckland” farmers in Oswego County and Central New York. There would be no cost to taxpayers because the fund would be replenished by farmers’ repayments.

- Support for aging farmers—This bipartisan bill (S.7433) is sponsored by Senator Ritchie and Central New York Senator David Valesky, and would direct the state Agriculture Commissioner to find ways to support aging farmers who want to stay in business. The average age of farmers in New York is now over 57 years old, and Senator Ritchie has been focused on expanding the number of farmers, such as through the new, \$1 million “Young Farmers” initiative she included in the State Budget. This measure complements those efforts by ensuring longtime farmers can continue to work if they want.

“I know that farming and agriculture are especially important to the North Country and Central New York but, increasingly, legislators and state leaders are beginning to recognize how vitally important this industry is as a whole. We need to continue to build on that support to help strengthen the future of farming,” Senator Ritchie said.