



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Precision Agriculture Bill Passed in State Senate

CATHARINE YOUNG June 16, 2014

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ALBANY – Senator Catharine Young (R, I, C–Olean), Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, has passed legislation allowing New York’s farmers to continue a long history of developing and using innovative technology to grow and strengthen the agricultural industry in the State. The bill, (S.6543-B), calls for an assessment of precision agriculture in the state, including a review of rural broadband availability and usage.

Precision agriculture is a method of managing farmland by measuring a wide range of variables including soil conditions, crop yields, topography and more. When this data is associated with precise locations within a field, farmers are able to make site-specific adjustments to improve the management of their farmland. Global positioning systems (GPS), specialized sensors and other technology are important components of precision agriculture.

By using precision agriculture techniques, farmers are able to adjust the amount of seeds, water, soil nutrients, and pesticides to ensure that only the necessary amounts are used in specific areas. Doing so can lower costs, improve crop yields, and reduce the environmental impact of fertilizer and pesticide runoff.

The bill requires the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets to conduct a review, including a cost benefit analysis, of the use and development of precision agriculture in New York State. The New York State Broadband Office would also be involved in the assessment to include recommendations that address shortcomings in rural broadband access.

“We need to have a thorough understanding of how precision agriculture is being used in the State, as well as the opportunities it can provide for the future. The results of the study will help us encourage its development and remove obstacles that prevent its wider implementation in New York,” said Senator Young.

One of the biggest obstacles is likely to be access to broadband. In much of rural New York, the availability of broadband is limited or nonexistent.

“It is especially vital to identify the actions that must be taken to ensure farmers have access to the broadband services they need to efficiently operate their farms. With precision agriculture’s increased reliance on data and GPS, having access to broadband becomes critically important,” said Senator Young.

The New York Farm Bureau is a supporter of the bill.

“Precision technology is quickly becoming an integral part of modern day agriculture. For instance, the use of GPS equipped tractors allows our farms to be more efficient and better stewards of our natural resources. This legislation will further enhance those efforts by helping identify real technological needs and where resources could be best spent. New York Farm Bureau thanks Senator Young for this legislation that will help farmers and lawmakers alike make more informed decisions about the agriculture needs in this state,” said Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau.

“Precision agriculture holds great promise for New York’s farmers and rural communities. By reducing runoff and waste, communities will see environmental benefits from this method of farming. Precision agriculture data should help farmers determine the best locations for specific crops, including specialty and high value crops. With the resulting efficiency improvements, farmers will also see improved crop yields and significant cost reductions, and that can only benefit New York State’s agricultural industry,” said Senator Young.

The bill has been sent to the Assembly.