



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #17: Celebrating Earth Day & Arbor Day

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Earth Day and Arbor Day are wonderful reminders of our ongoing obligation to protect our natural resources, which provide us shelter, food, fuel and beauty.

I was pleased to support this year's state budget because it recognizes the importance of protecting our clean air and clean water and expanding our access to park lands and other open spaces. Our spending plan also includes needed investments in agriculture, which will allow our farmers to better use their land and to have an easier time bringing their harvest to homes.

Whether they know it or not, millions of New Yorkers rely on the Environmental Protection Fund to protect the purity of our drinking water and the air we breathe. This year's budget adds \$9 million to the fund, for a total of \$162 million – its highest level since 2008.

We've also set aside an additional \$132.5 million for NY Works projects. Seventy percent of those funds will be put toward improvements at state parks and historic sites, which will make communities more attractive and simultaneously generate additional tourism revenue. The remainder will be used to pay for flood control as well as clean-ups and restoration efforts after natural disasters.

Agriculture is a big part of New York's economy, with about 25 percent of our state's total area committed to farming. Recognizing the importance of food security to our well-being, the budget creates new incentives for young people to take over established farms or start their own.

There is a \$1 million Beginning Farmer Fund that will provide up to \$50,000 to help defray the cost of purchasing land, equipment and supplies. There's also a new \$100,000 student loan forgiveness program for farmers who are also recent graduates from a state college.

New York farmers rely on researchers and experts in areas like soil management and pest eradication to make their operations more efficient. The budget protects organizations such as the Farm Viability Institute, the Apple Growers Association and the Wine and Grape Foundation from proposed cuts. It also increases funding for several research, marketing and education endeavors.

I'm committed to growing healthy families and healthy communities. I voted for this year's budget because it makes significant investments in clear air and clean water and because it will protect the quality and natural beauty of our environment for years to come.