



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## State Launches Components of Ritchie's "Young Farmers NY" Program

PATTY RITCHIE October 10, 2014

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### **Includes Initiatives to Encourage Young People to Pursue Agriculture Careers**

State Senator Patty Ritchie has announced components of her "Young Farmers NY" program—a plan aimed at addressing issues related to the advancing average age of New York farmers and preserving the future of family farming—are being made available today.

Parts of the program launched today include more than \$600,000 in grants as well as a loan forgiveness program, both aimed at helping young farmers overcome obstacles and giving them a greater opportunity for a successful career in agriculture.

“It’s hard to imagine a world without farmers,” said Senate Agriculture Chair State Senator Patty Ritchie. “But it’s something that could become a reality if we don’t take proactive steps towards addressing the issue of our state’s aging farmer population.”

“The components of my Young Farmers NY program rolled out today will give those who are just starting out a real incentive for joining the ranks of our state’s hardworking farmers and more importantly, will serve to protect our state’s biggest industry for many years to come.” The following components of the Young Farmers NY plan are now available and taking applications:

***New York State New Farmers Grant Fund:*** Administered by Empire State Development, this \$614,000 fund will be utilized to provide grants of up to \$50,000 to eligible beginning farmers. Successful applicants may use funds for the lease or purchase of farm equipment, supplies and other necessities. Those interested can visit [www.esd.ny.gov](http://www.esd.ny.gov) for more information and to apply. Applications must be received by January 28, 2015.

***New York State Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program:*** Administered by the Higher Education Service Corporation (HESC), this program provides loan forgiveness awards to students who commit to farming careers after graduation from an approved New York State college or university. Applications and more information on the program are available at [www.hesc.ny.gov](http://www.hesc.ny.gov) and the deadline for applying is December 15, 2014.

In addition to these programs, Senator Ritchie’s Young Farmers NY initiative also includes reforms to the Estate Tax to help assist in the transition of family farms from one generation to the next as well as increased funding for in-school, agriculture leadership programs such as Future Farmers of America.

Senator Ritchie developed her Young Farmers NY plan 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.