



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## New Incentives for the Next Generation of Farmers

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Can you imagine a world without farmers? For many, it's hard to do. Where would our fruits, vegetables and meats come from? Who would help to put items like butter and milk on store shelves? And, who would be responsible for making sure our state's leading industry continues to thrive?

Our state's hardworking farmers are the backbone of our economy. That's why it's especially concerning that the average age of New York farmers is now 57.1 years. Additionally, the USDA Census of Agriculture estimates that there are two farmers aged 65 and older for each one under the age of 35. It's factors like this that are leading to farmland being lost forever to development. In just the last five years, roughly 50,000 acres of farmland were lost in our state.

As your state senator, and chair of the New York State Senate Agriculture Committee, I'm working to protect our state's farming industry and to encourage more young people to pursue careers in agriculture. Earlier this year, I unveiled my "Young Farmers NY" program, an initiative designed to offer incentives to young and early stage farmers who are interested in pursuing careers in agriculture. Just recently, two components of the program were made available—including 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 to excel in an agriculture-related career.

Components recently announced include the following:

***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, my Young Farmers NY program 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.

Ask anyone in the agriculture industry and they'll tell you—farming is hard work. It's my hope that my Young Farmers NY program will not only make things easier for the young people interested in following in the footsteps of our current farmers, but also will position our state's agriculture industry for continued growth in the years to come.