



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

RITCHIE: WITH \$200,000 IN STATE BUDGET, 'AG ACADEMY' GETS SET TO LAUNCH

PATTY RITCHIE April 7, 2016

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State Senator Patty Ritchie today announced that the new state budget includes \$200,000 in “seed money” to help launch the brand new North Country Agricultural Studies Academy, to help introduce and train a new generation of young farmers.

The funds—which were included among the record budget allocation for agriculture secured by Senator Ritchie—will help cover costs related to staff training, equipment, supplies and

other costs of the program, which is being located at the county's Cooperative Extension Learning Farm in Canton, and is slated to welcome its first class of high school seniors in the Fall of 2016.

"Agriculture is the most important industry in the North Country and throughout New York State, and today's farmers—and those of the future—need innovative business and technology skills, in addition to good old fashioned farming know-how, to ensure their success," said Senator Ritchie.

"That's why I'm so excited about the plans for the Agricultural Studies Academy, which will offer hands-on field experience to help the next generation of young farm professionals compete and succeed in an increasingly competitive, global marketplace."

Senator Ritchie toured facilities that will be home to the Ag Academy, including buildings once used by SUNY Canton's agriculture programs, with representatives from Cooperative Extension and BOCES, as well as farmers and future farmer-members of FFA.

"The regional agricultural academy is an innovative one-year program for high school seniors that will offer a comprehensive introduction to agribusiness careers," said St. Lawrence Lewis BOCES Superintendent Thomas Burns. "Students will earn credits toward a Regents diploma while completing an agricultural curriculum and also earning college credits."

"The program will help make high school seniors aware of agribusiness career opportunities for young farmers, agricultural management professionals and businesses that serve Northern New York's farms of all sizes," said St. Lawrence Cooperative Extension Executive Director Patrick Ames. "The Northern New York Agricultural Academy will serve as a model for agricultural regions across the United States to help introduce young people to our most important industry."

Ag Academy students will be able to take advantage of facilities that were used by SUNY Canton for its own agriculture programs for nearly a half century, beginning in the 1950s. The facilities include office, classroom and laboratory space, as well as a large barn, greenhouses and other outbuildings, located among tillable land and forest.

In addition, Cooperative Extension maintains a commercial sheep flock, beef and dairy cows, broiler chickens, layers and pigs.

Last month, Senator Ritchie joined BOCES officials and local FFA students at a presentation to top state agriculture leaders, including Agriculture Commissioner Richard Ball, about the Ag Academy plan. Video of that presentation is available at www.ritchie.nysenate.gov.

Support for the North Country Ag Academy continues Senator Ritchie's commitment to growing agriculture and preserving the future of family farming in New York.

The just-enacted State Budget includes record funding for agriculture, including renewed funding for several programs first established by Senator Ritchie, who serves as chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, through her "Young Farmers initiative." They include \$1 million to fund a third round of "Beginning Farmers Grants," a student loan forgiveness grant program for new farmers, and record funding for FFA chapters across the state.

The "Young Farmers" initiative aims to address a national problem caused by aging farmers by enticing a new generation to pursue careers in family farming.

A complete list of agriculture programs funded in the new budget can be found at <https://www.scribd.com/doc/307191127/Agriculture-Funding-in-SFY2017-State-Budget>.