



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## Senator Helming Hosts Food Access, Food Safety Roundtable in Geneva

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Senator Pamela Helming (R,C,I – Canandaigua) today hosted the Food Access and Health in Rural NY roundtable discussion at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva. The panels featured experts in food access and food safety speaking about their experiences and sharing their knowledge with close to 70 attendees representing organizations that work in rural communities throughout the Finger Lakes region. The event was held by the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, of which Senator Helming is the Senate Chair, in partnership with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

at Cornell University.

“The New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York is truly the perfect place to put on an event such as this because Geneva has become a hub for the Finger Lakes region in terms of food production and distribution as well as agricultural and nutritional research. Food access is near and dear to my heart because we are sitting in the heart of New York agriculture, and access to healthy food is not always easy within our communities. Our rural communities, certainly, face their own unique challenges here, and I was happy to hear about how we can improve both access to and safety of our local food,” Senator Helming said.

In opening remarks at the roundtable, Dr. Kathryn J. Boor, the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, spoke about how the research conducted at the Agricultural Experiment Station is resulting in produce that is both more nutritional and more flavorful. Recent examples include raising sweet potatoes with enhanced Vitamin A and developing honey nut squash that changes color to indicate its peak ripeness, flavor, and nutritional value.

“Without Senate leadership, several agricultural research projects that are important for our rural stakeholders would not have been funded. These projects matter as we continue to enhance the quality and quantity of our food supply for New Yorkers and beyond. I thank Senator Helming and her colleagues for continued concern and attention to these issues,” Dean Boor said.

The first panel focused on rural population, intervention, and food safety. Jan Vink, the Cornell Cooperative Extension Associate for the Program on Applied Demographics at Cornell's College of Human Ecology, shared population trends and statistics in New York State's rural areas, such as birth and death rates, people moving in and out of New York, health of rural communities, and wealth of rural school districts. Jennifer Garner and Urshila Sriram, doctoral candidates in Community Nutrition in the Division of Nutritional Sciences at the College of Human Ecology, talked about some of the community-based intervention programs that they have worked with through their research to promote healthy eating and physical activity in rural communities. Dr. Elizabeth Bihn, Director of the Produce Safety Alliance at Cornell's Department of Food Science, emphasized how the food supply must be safe as well as accessible and how a safe, accessible food supply can also drive the local economy in rural communities.

The second panel highlighted food assistance programs and the farm-to-school initiative. Elizabeth Claypoole, Executive Director and Agricultural Issues Leader of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Wayne County, pointed out that nutrition education is more than introducing healthy eating guidelines but also involves properly preparing, storing, growing, and transporting food. Mitch Gruber, Chief Programs Officer for Foodlink, advocated for viewing food as a public utility in order to reach the most rural communities in the state. Todd Fowler, Food Service Director for the Bloomfield Central School District and Canandaigua City School District, spoke about the farm-to-school initiative and how he began collaborating with local farmers to supply his schools and surrounding districts with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Joining Senator Helming with their attendance at today's roundtable discussion were Senator Fred Akshar (R,C,I-Colesville), Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton (D-Ithaca), and a representative of Senator Rich Funke (R,C,I-Perinton). Senator Akshar and Assemblywoman Lifton also serve on the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, while Senator O'Mara is a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

"This Food Access and Health in Rural NY roundtable discussion provided an opportunity for my colleagues and I to listen in and take notes as we look for ways to boost food access and safety through legislation. I thank them all for taking the time to join me here today at the Agricultural Experiment Station. We are fully committed to continuing this discussion on our food supply in rural communities and seeing how we can best move forward to ensure safe, accessible food for all New Yorkers," Senator Helming said.

*Senator Helming represents the 54<sup>th</sup> Senate District, which consists of Seneca and Wayne Counties, parts of Cayuga and Ontario Counties, and the towns of Lansing and Webster. For more information, please visit Senator Helming's [website](#), or follow @SenatorHelming on Facebook or Twitter.*

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