



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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'Pining' for that Perfect Christmas Tree

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

For families all across New York State, nothing says Christmas quite like the smell of pine, that deep green color and the way a tree brightens up our homes and businesses this time of year. It's become an annual tradition here in New York to get the family together for a trip to the local Christmas tree farm to pick out that perfect evergreen to take home and decorate.

Not only are Christmas trees a big part of the holiday season—they're a big part of New York's agriculture industry too. Across our state, there are roughly 875 Christmas tree farms covering nearly 19,000 acres. Only three other states in the country have more farms than New York State.

On their own, New York's Christmas tree farms make up an \$8 million dollar industry, but when you consider the ripple effect—buying local supplies, payrolls, etc.—that number nearly doubles. That is why, as Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I am committed to helping grow this important industry.

In the most recent state budget, I was able to secure \$125,000 for the Christmas Tree Farmers Association. This organization helps to highlight the benefits of farm-fresh trees grown right here in New York State. New marketing efforts will grow this industry even further.

This funding will also help ensure our farms remain healthy enough to thrive for years to come. Recently, the Christmas Tree Farmers Association teamed up with Cornell University on an Integrated Pest Management Program. Together, they train growers to identify and control pests. The program also helps growers fight disease and keep away unwanted, hungry visitors.

There is one other way I am hoping we can further promote our amazing Christmas tree farms. I have cosponsored legislation that would establish a statewide, 'Go Green' Weekend. The measure (S.868-A) would designate one weekend a year in early December where all evergreen products—including trees, wreaths, garland and more—would be exempt from New York State sales tax.

This Christmas, if a fresh tree, wreath or other evergreen product is what you are 'pining' for, I encourage you to 'shop local,' support a New York State Christmas tree farm and make

memories with your family that will last for generations to come.

To locate a tree farm near you visit, www.christmastreesny.org