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# Guest Column

*for the week of February 14, 2011*

## "Industry No. 1"

The political buzzword of the moment, the one we're hearing most often from the President and governors and other leaders at every level of government across the nation, couldn't be more straightforward: Jobs. It also couldn't be more on target.

You can't pick up a newspaper, go online, tune in the car radio or sit down in front of the television for your nightly broadcast without hearing another call to get the national, state, or local economy moving again. I can tell you that there's no more talked-about issue at the Capitol. In his proposed state budget, Governor Cuomo laid out his plans to establish regional economic development councils and initiate other changes to New York's overall job-creation strategy. Not long ago the state Senate approved its own version of a new jobs plan, the "Job Creation and Taxpayer Protection Act."

So there's no shortage of ideas being tossed into the mix, which means it's probably a good time for a reminder. As New York State leaders move forward to "reinvent New York," as Governor Cuomo calls it, we shouldn't forget the foundations that have successfully withstood the test of time.

Like agriculture.

Late last year the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) issued a new report and a series of recommendations designed to pinpoint, as it so often does, the association's priority concerns. As local leaders on the front lines of identifying key local challenges and, ultimately, carrying out federal and state programs designed to address them, NYSAC constantly offers a valuable perspective and voice on what's most important to local communities.

One such perspective arrived late last fall with a report summarizing the findings of NYSAC's Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Future of New York Farming, a task force appointed during Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli's year-long tenure as the association's president.

"These recommendations are practical advice from elected and appointed government officials who come from farm families. We have a major economic engine that contributes to all of our communities. We must continue to invest in this industry as a way to stimulate the economy, put people to work and continue to provide essential food for New Yorkers and those outside New York State," said NYSAC Executive Director Stephen J. Acquario. You can read more, including the full report, on NYSAC's Web site at: [www.nysac.org/Legislative\\_Action\\_Center/](http://www.nysac.org/Legislative_Action_Center/).

Stimulate the economy. Put people to work. These phrases are synonymous with New York agriculture and we can't afford to forget it. We can't forget that agriculture remains New York's largest industry. Today's farm economy generates more than \$4 billion worth of annual economic activity statewide and provides a livelihood for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

Earlier this year I was appointed to serve as a member on the Senate Agriculture Committee. It's one of 10 committees I'm serving on in 2011, but it's likely to stand out as one of the most critical and demanding during tough economic times and one of the most difficult budget years we've ever faced.

The number of New York state legislators in tune with the challenges facing New York's farmers and agribusinesses has shrunk as the state has become increasingly urban. But agriculture still plays a key role throughout the regions many of us represent. Its future success demands a key block of legislative support for an industry that's been a mainstay of the culture and economy across hundreds of communities throughout New York, especially upstate.