



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

Roundtable with Sen. Aubertine, Sen. Valesky Gives Farmers a Voice

DARREL J. AUBERTINE October 15, 2009

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Matthew Critz (far left) of Critz Farms (www.critzfarms.com) discusses with Sen. Aubertine (far right), Assemblyman Magee (center right), and Sen. Valesky (center) how the Farm Labor Fair Practices Act would hurt his farm, put farm workers out of work, and force many of the workers themselves to move elsewhere.

Event at SUNY Morrisville draws farmers to discuss issues, concerns and share ideas

WATERTOWN (October 15, 2009)—State Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine, chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, today continued his ongoing discussion with farmers, hosting a roundtable discussion with farmers, processors, and academics interested in protecting and growing New York's agriculture industry.

Assembly Agriculture Chair William Magee and Sen. David J. Valesky of Oneida joined Sen. Aubertine to listen to the farmers and take their interests back to Albany and give farmers a stronger voice in state government and policy.

"New York cannot afford to lose another industry. Make no mistake: Agriculture is an industry and it is the foundation of our economy," Sen. Aubertine said. "Farms create wealth, and do so in the surrounding communities. Yet too often in discussions about revitalizing our economy, agriculture is set aside as though it is something different. Everyone who was here today recognizes that a strong agricultural economy will rebuild the overall economy. That's why we're here. These roundtables and the hearing we'll hold to wrap everything up are intended to make sure that farmers have a voice, a seat at the table."

"These roundtables are very helpful to us as we put together our agenda and policies for the end of this year and into next year," said Sen. Valesky, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. "We held this forum today to listen to the farmers and others in the agriculture industry to get their input. It's important that we put our farmers and the agriculture industries of New York at the top of our priorities."

The Senator has been working with New York Farm Bureau statewide to organize these events and make sure that a cross section of farmers from each community is represented. The Senator toured farms in Western New York and Long Island recently and met with farmers to discuss their issues. As the only active farmer in the Legislature, Sen. Aubertine is committed to raising the profile of agriculture as an economic development tool to help rebuild our economy.

"I think it's great to see Albany come to our communities and listen to our concerns first hand, but we just want to be sure that once we're done talking, we need action," said Debbie Windecker, a dairy farmer from Herkimer County who is also with the United States Dairy Farmers and Friends. "We're spiraling out of control in agriculture and our consumers are in jeopardy with what's going on. We all need to speak out and see what we're eating and read labels. We need to protect our food integrity and our domestic supply. We lose our food—we lose our country."

"Just like all of us, the Legislators are trying to figure out how they can help in a pragmatic and quick fashion. This is a very pressing issue and it's so important to this state," said Raymond W. Cross, Ph.D., President of Morrisville State College. "If we don't address our food issues, our labor issues and our import issues, which are all interrelated, so our food is safe, our production is secure and our economy is strengthened, we're in serious trouble. I appreciate the efforts of Sen. Aubertine, Sen. Valesky and Assemblyman Magee for listening to our issues, and understanding how they can carry them to Albany."

“I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to Senator Aubertine and have Assemblyman Magee and Senator Valesky here to hear our thoughts from the agricultural sector and see what we see as the problems affecting our way of life,” said Darrell Griff, president of Madison County Farm Bureau. “I thought it was a really good discussion and we covered a lot of different areas, not just dairy issues. We discussed many solutions that in and of themselves, are not the solution, but an avenue to an end.”

These forums will gather input on a variety of issues, including efforts to promote local agriculture and buy local campaigns, the current dairy crisis, and the proposed farm labor bill. Farmers today stressed the need for relief to assist dairy farmers by reducing regulations, eliminating stop and hauling fees, getting the federal government to enforce laws on the books to cover farmer costs, and taking bold steps to battle imports of MPCs and caseinates. Issues raised also included consumer education, country of origin labeling, and food safety concerns relating to imports of products from China and other countries with lower standards for production. Farmers also spoke about the damage the Farm Labor Fair Practices Act would have, driving farms out of business either from the increased costs or a lack of available labor because of the impact the bill would have on workers.

“This is a continuation of the discussions I’ve had with farmers in my home district, through Farm Bureau and across the state,” Sen. Aubertine said. “Not since the Great Depression has the need for economic growth and job creation been greater and we cannot lose sight of the fact that our farms have always been a stable foundation from which to create jobs, but that foundation is eroding. We need to protect and grow our farms and agricultural industries. That the truth is that our farms are where real wealth is created and not one cent of wealth is created on Wall Street. Wealth changes hands there, but it’s not created there. It’s created on our farms.”

As chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Sen. Aubertine has repeatedly stressed that a sound economic future for New York State must start with agriculture and that economic development efforts cannot overlook the importance of farms to our rural communities. He has sponsored bills intended to increase demand for raw milk and cut costs for farmers, lobbied federal lawmakers to take action on milk prices, promoted agriculture as a means to meeting our energy needs in the future, and worked to both pass legislation and also lift regulations so more local farm products are on kitchen and school cafeteria tables across New York.

Following is a list of dates, locations and times for remaining roundtables and the concluding hearing:

- 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., October 20, in Tompkins County at Cornell Cooperative Extension, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca
- 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., October 21, in Wyoming County at the American Legion, 89 Liberty St., Warsaw

- 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., November 10, in St. Lawrence County at the Waddington Village Hall, 46 Maple St., Waddington
- 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., November 12, in Oswego County at the Granby Community Center, 812 County Route 8, Fulton
- 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., November 17, in Schoharie County at SUNY Cobleskill, Bouke Hall, Ballroom
- 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., November 19, in Jefferson County at Jefferson Community College