



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Bonacic

Farmers From Hudson Valley and Catskills Come to Albany

JOHN J. BONACIC | October 19, 2009

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Dozens of farmers from the Catskills and Hudson Valley converged on the State Capitol today to discuss the plight of the dairy farming industry in New York State. The farmers came at the invitation of State Senator John Bonacic (R/I/C – Mt. Hope).

“We are trying to make Governor Paterson, Assembly Speaker Silver, and Senate President Smith aware of the plight of the agricultural community, something they are either unaware of, or are ignoring,” Senator Bonacic said.

This year, farmers face added threats from State government, including legislation which has already passed the Assembly to allow farm workers to unionize, mandate overtime payments, requires disability insurance for off the job injuries, and increase unemployment costs for farmers – even for seasonal workers. In all, the legislation would cost farm families more than \$200 million per year in New York. Dairy farmers in New York received an average of \$12.50 per hundredweight of milk sold during September - \$6.50 less than September a year ago. A study by Cornell University estimated that farmers need to be paid at least \$17.00 per hundredweight in order to meet their production costs.

Tunis Sweetman, owner of Sweetman Dairy Farm in Warwick said, “The situation was a crisis eight months ago, it is now a full blown depression. I came to Albany today to highlight the desperate nature of this situation and the urgency that some kind of action is needed. Dairy is the upstate economy and I think legislative leaders fail to realize the impact this industry has. We cannot expect an economic recovery without a recovery of the dairy industry.”

Bonacic noted however, that instead of helping Dairy farmers, the Democratic controlled State Senate has voted against an amendment to provide farm aid, and that the Democratic controlled State Assembly has passed legislation to mandate overtime payments, allow for unionization, and provide for unemployment benefits to farm workers – even those who work seasonally.

This year Bonacic and other Senators offered a budget amendment to direct \$30 million of the State budget – less than ¼ of 1% of the total State budget, as emergency farm aid to the Dairy Industry. The proposal had 30 Republican Senators in favor, but all 32 Democrats in the Senate voted it down. Soon thereafter, Governor Paterson authorized \$200 million in spending as bonuses for welfare recipients.

“Many farmers might be forced onto welfare, but they shouldn’t have to be. Wall Street walks away with Federal bailouts and their executives still get bonuses. No farmer I know is going to get a bonus. Farmers are some of the hardest working people in America. To bail out Wall Street while leaving family farms to rot on the vine is just wrong,” Bonacic said.

New York is the nation’s third largest dairy state, generating \$2.3 billion annually, over half of the State’s total agricultural receipts. New York’s 6,200 dairy farmers produce 1.4 billion gallons of milk annually.

The average dairy farm in New York State is a family owned business and consists of 100 cows, producing an average of 19,303 pounds of milk per cow per year.

Last month Senator Bonacic attended an agricultural forum organized by Cornell Cooperative Extension and carried live on Thunder 102 in Sullivan County. At the forum, the farmers asked Bonacic to organize today's Albany event so they could carry their message directly to State lawmakers.

"New York City Democrats drink milk and eat cheese and beef. Just because they don't drive by a cow on the way to the office doesn't mean the problems of the agricultural community can be ignored. We will continue to fight for our family farms because whenever a farm is lost, more families go hungry," Senator Bonacic concluded.

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