



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Sen. Ritchie Asks the Experts: How Do We Make Farming Grow?

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Advisory Group Holds First Meeting; Power Upgrades, Overregulation Top Priority List

State Agriculture Committee Chair Patty Ritchie is turning to the experts for ways to help Central and Northern New York farmers grow their businesses, create jobs and strengthen the region's leading industry.

Senator Ritchie held the first meeting this week of her 13-member Agriculture Advisory Council, and fielded ideas that ranged from the need for power system upgrades to allow

dairy farms to expand, to examples of overly cumbersome red tape that makes it tougher for farmers to become more efficient, expand production and markets, and lower costs.

“As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I want to give farmers a greater voice in pushing for state policies and programs that can help their farms and businesses grow,” Senator Ritchie said. “That way, I can build on their experiences and ideas to help craft laws and policies to make our leading industry stronger, make today’s farmers more successful, and create an environment where future farmers can find success as well.”

“We can’t afford to lose out on jobs and growth in our agricultural economy because we are not looking for new ideas,” Senator Ritchie said. “I want to work with all farmers and their advocates to make sure that farming remains an important and growing part of New York’s economy.”

Senator Ritchie’s Council comprises farmers, agribusiness owners and agriculture leaders from across Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. They include apple and vegetable farmers, one of the state’s largest Christmas tree growers, the owner of an award-winning local winery, farm advocates and, in a nod to the special significance of dairy farming to the agricultural economy of Central and Northern New York, a number of operators of small and large dairy operations.

Among their ideas for improving agriculture:

- Calling on electric companies to upgrade their systems to allow dairy farms to expand. Many farms are now limited by the lack of sufficient current to expand their milking and other processing operations. Senator Ritchie has already contacted state regulators and utility operators for more information;

- Encourage utilities to improve safety programs in rural areas by making sure lines are buried deeply enough, or placed high atop poles to avoid being hit by farm machinery;
- Provide incentives for more food processors to take advantage of New York's proximity to major markets and agricultural resources;
- Cut red tape and fees on wineries looking to open additional locations;
- Ensure continued funding for proven and successful farm profit programs like Pro-Dairy, the Farm Viability Institute, and the Cornell Diagnostics Lab.

Senator Ritchie said she will work with regulators and other stakeholders to immediately address some of the issues raised, and will look at the possibility of drafting legislation to advance some of the others in the legislative session that begins in January. The Senator's Council is expected to meet again later this month.

Members of the Senator Ritchie's Agriculture Advisory Council include: Oswego Farm Bureau President Nancy Weber, dairy farmers Mary and Allen Kelly of St. Lawrence County, dairy farmer and St. Lawrence County Legislator Mark Akins, Coyote Moon Winery owner Phil Randazzo of Clayton, Senator Patty Ritchie, Jefferson County Ag Coordinator Jay Matteson, New York State Christmas Tree Growers Association President Faye Beckwith of Oswego, St. Lawrence County Farm Bureau President Jon Greenwood, Oswego County Legislator and farmer Terry Wilbur, and dairy farmer Keith Pierce of St. Lawrence County, Oswego County apple farmer Eric Behling, Jefferson County dairyman Ron Robbins, and Jim Curtis and Ellie Stripp of St. Lawrence County.