



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## What if There Were No Farmers?

PATTY RITCHIE March 10, 2014

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column From the food we eat to the products we use, not a day goes by that we don't have a farmer to thank for helping to provide life's necessities. But, what if there weren't any farmers? As recent research suggests, that's a question we should be considering. Farming is our state's most important industry, it's also a way of life handed down from generation to generation. But as the recent USDA Census of Agriculture depicted, the average New York farmer is changing. According to the report, the average age of New York farmers is 57.1 years, with two farmers aged 65 and older for each one under 35. In addition, the survey also pointed to the fact that roughly 50,000 acres of farmland were lost

in New York in each of the past five years. There are a number of factors—including skyrocketing start-up expenses, tight profit margins and high risk—that are contributing to this change. As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, protecting and preserving the farming industry is a top priority for me. That’s why I recently unveiled my “Young Farmers NY” plan to help address issues related to the advancing age of New York’s farming population as well as protect the future of family farming by encouraging more young people to consider careers in agriculture and reducing financial roadblocks to starting a new agriculture business. Highlights of my “Young Farmers NY” plan include: Loans, grants and tax credits for the sale or lease of land and equipment, as well as for new technological innovations; Estate tax reforms to encourage farm preservation from generation to generation; and Agricultural education efforts including apprenticeship programs, student loan forgiveness and increased funding for the in-school FFA (Future Farmers of America) program. This plan builds upon the hard work we’ve done in recent years to foster growth in the agriculture industry. For the past three years, I have successfully fought alongside my colleagues to restore budget funds affecting key agricultural research, education and marketing programs. In addition, I was also pleased to back the “Grown in New York Plan,” and other important new laws that support our state’s hardworking farmers, including a cap on farmland tax assessments to save farmers millions on land taxes and additional funding for efforts that promote farm safety, research and marketing. Hardworking farmers are the foundation of New York State and in the weeks to come, I’ll be working just as hard to help support initiatives that encourage growth in the agriculture industry and ensure it stays vibrant for many years to come.