



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

## Valesky-Sponsored Legislation that Targets Seniors' Participation in Agriculture Signed into Law

DAVID J. VALESKY December 30, 2014

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SYRACUSE--Two bills sponsored by Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida) that expand agriculture-related opportunities for seniors have been signed into law. The legislation includes bill S.7180, which encourages seniors to participate in community gardens, and bill S.7433, which ensures that the needs of older farmers are supported.

"Community gardens provide places for seniors to pass on their knowledge and love of growing things to others and to maintain healthy social contacts," Senator Valesky said. "In addition, as our farmers age, they face unique challenges relating to the continued operation of their businesses. It is vital to the continued health of our agriculture network to ensure that these individuals have the resources they need to stay in business."

"With the average age of farmers in New York continuing to climb, it would be beneficial for state agricultural programs to take into account the unique needs of an aging population. It is imperative that farmland in New York stay in agricultural production and with the additional support from this legislation, it may help keep farmers farming successfully regardless of their age. We appreciate Senator Valesky's initiative on this legislation and his support for New York agriculture," said Dean Norton, New York Farm Bureau President.

Bill S.7180 would expand the goals of the state Community Garden Task Force to include encouraging community-based organizations to increase opportunities for seniors to participate in community gardens. Seniors centers and the elderly would also be eligible for assistance from the state Office of Community Gardens. Such green spaces provide opportunities for community residents to take control of their nutrition and health by growing locally, and for ethnically diverse communities to celebrate their heritage by growing plants that contribute to unique dishes. Seniors benefit from an active lifestyle, which helps stave off Alzheimer's disease, dementia and depression.

Bill S.7433 requires the state Department of Agriculture and Markets to evaluate their support of farmers age 62 and older and to evaluate their programs in conjunction with the state Office for the Aging. In New York State, the average age of farmers is 57 years old. As farmers age, they face unique challenges relating to the continued operation of their businesses. Many producers and processors age out of the system because they don't have supports to enable them to continue on their vegetable farms, dairy farms processing facilities, etc. The agriculture industry has a substantial impact on New York's overall economic health, contributing approximately \$8 billion in overall return to the state's economy. This bill would help to ensure farmers can stay in business as they age.