



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Make It a Maple Weekend

PATTY RITCHIE March 16, 2015

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Feeling like you need a cure for cabin fever? On March 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, more than 160 maple producers across New York State will open their sugar houses for “Maple Weekend.” Maple Weekends are chock full of events—everything from tours, pancake breakfasts, free samples and more—aimed at showing people just how maple syrup and maple products make their way from “tree to table.”

As Maple Weekend demonstrates, maple is more than just a tasty part of many of our favorite foods—it's a major sector of our state's agricultural economy. When it comes to maple syrup production, New York is second only to Vermont. In 2014, 2.2 million taps across the state produced 546,000 gallons of syrup, which accounted for 17 percent of the total syrup produced in the entire United States.

As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I'm working to support our state's maple producers as well as all other farmers and agribusiness owners across the state. Just recently, I was pleased to join with my colleagues in the Senate to unveil a proposed 2015-16 spending plan that includes record support for agriculture. This vital funding will provide the support necessary for programs key to farming operations in the Central and Northern New York region—including those aimed at helping growers and producers of everything from maple syrup to onions.

Also included in the Senate's proposed budget is support for “Grown in New York,” a plan aimed at strengthening the connection between local farms and consumers who are looking to boost their health by eating fresh, local foods. This new program includes the creation of transportation “hubs” to help farmers get their products into new markets, a new branding program for New York-grown and produced products, additional support for energy efficiency, grants and more.

In addition, the proposal also includes expanded support for “Young Farmers,” the Senate's innovative new plan launched last year, which aims to make it easier for farmers to pass their business on to the next

generation and also encourages more young people to consider agriculture as a career path.

Whether they're producing maple syrup or growing apples, I'm committed to supporting our state's hardworking farmers and agribusiness owners. If you'd like to get a behind the scenes look at how these individuals are working to grow New York's leading industry and produce the fresh foods we depend on, I encourage you to take part in Maple Weekend. To learn more, and find a participating maple producer near you, visit [www.nysmaple.com](http://www.nysmaple.com).