



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

DO YOU KNOW WHERE MILK IS FROM?

PATTY RITCHIE February 18, 2012

| COMMITTEE: **AGRICULTURE**

We've all read and heard a lot about the importance of "eating local."

Food that's grown and raised in our backyards can often be fresher, more appealing to the eye and palate, and more nutritious than products that are shipped from hundreds—and maybe thousands of miles away.

Buying local food is also a way to support local farmers—36,000 of whom work hard every single day to make sure that the fresh, quality food we enjoy and expect is available when we want, and where we want it.

As your state Senator, I'm working to help local farmers grow their business by encouraging more consumers to shop and buy locally. It's a small way to help our state's Number One industry—agriculture—to grow, and an important way to help make us all a little bit healthier.

That's why I was surprised recently to find that cafeterias at our own State Capitol were serving milk that was produced in Texas. New York is America's third biggest dairy state, and two of the three counties I represent in the Senate, Jefferson and St. Lawrence, comprise the state's biggest dairy-producing region of the state.

I reached out to Gov. Cuomo's new Commissioner of General Services, who is responsible for overseeing the lunchrooms that serve over 40,000 state workers and visitors every day.

Commissioner Destito immediately responded that she would work to change state food contracts to encourage the sale at state-owned facilities not only of New York milk, but also other locally grown products. (Think Oswego County onions and vegetables!) Today, those eateries are serving milk that's processed by one of Central New York's biggest dairies—and it tastes pretty darn good.

You can find out the source of the milk and dairy products you buy by checking the printed code on the package [with this helpful website](#). When you do, ask your local store manager to buy more locally sourced milk.

I applaud the Governor and his Commissioner for taking this small step that will pay big dividends for New York farmers. And I want to do more.

I'm sponsoring the "Buy from the Backyard Act," a measure which would require state government to purchase 20 percent of food products it serves from New York sources.

And I'm encouraging private businesses to follow suit. I've written to the CEO of one of the nation's largest sandwich shop chains to try to convince him that "eating fresh" means eating local, and that includes buying milk that's locally sourced.

I'm also working with the New York Farm Bureau and members of my own Agriculture Advisory Council, which includes a number of local farmers and farm advocates, to find ways to help farmers grow and succeed.

This week, that effort paid off when we helped find a way to overhaul a budget proposal that would have made it tougher for some New York farmers to directly market their products in the nation's largest consumer market, New York City.

These are just a few examples of how government and farmers can work together to help build business, grow our economy and get New York—and agriculture—moving in the right direction.