



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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PLANTING SEEDS: A LOOK BACK—AND AHEAD—AT NY'S AG INDUSTRY

PATTY RITCHIE January 4, 2016



Each and every day, agriculture affects our lives. From the fresh foods we eat to the clothes we wear, agriculture is at the root of it all—especially in New York State. With 35,000 family farms, record-setting sales exceeding \$6.4 billion annually and a workforce of more than 100,000, farming is our state's most important industry.

As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I've been working in recent years to support and strengthen New York's family farms. In 2015, my colleagues and I made great strides

towards these goals; securing record state budget funding for agriculture, increasing our efforts to better connect consumers with locally-grown foods and continuing to encourage young people to pursue careers in farming. These are just a few of the achievements outlined in the Senate Committee on Agriculture's 2015 Annual Report, which is now [available here](#) or by calling (315) 782-3418. Other highlights include:

Cutting taxes to boost bottom lines: 2015 marked the first year that a new 2 percent cap on agricultural assessments was in effect and, according to the Department of Agriculture and Markets, this new cap resulted in savings of \$11 million in property taxes for farmers across New York state.

Strengthening connections between growers and consumers: In 2015, the Senate Agriculture Committee renewed its focus on strengthening the connection between farmers and those who eat the fresh foods they grow and produce. Our efforts included funding for new Upstate "food hubs," a first-ever expansion of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and new investments to help bring more New York-grown farm products into schools across the state.

Lowering the cost of doing business: In 2015, my measure to save farmers across the state millions of dollars by cutting fees to register trailers used for transporting produce, livestock and other items in half was signed into law.

Improving farmer safety: Once again in 2015, the Senate Agriculture Committee took steps to promote farmer safety by increasing funding for a successful program aimed at reducing injuries from tractor rollovers. To date, this important initiative has benefitted more than 1,300 farmers and has saved countless lives.

Protecting public health: The Senate Agriculture Committee also took major steps in 2015 to protect the public from deadly diseases, including the mosquito-borne EEE virus and rabies. Through State Budget funding, I was able to organize a series of waste tire disposal events that removed more than 60,000 used tires—which act as breeding ground for mosquitoes—from roadsides throughout our region. In addition, State Budget funding sought by the Committee was also used to fill gaps caused by federal budget cuts to a successful wildlife rabies program that has helped control the deadly disease.

Record state budget funding: As previously mentioned, this year we were able to secure record budget funding for programs that are key to New York's farming industry including, new and restored funding for ag-educators, support for marketing and promotion of NY-grown products, aid for critical research in animal and plant health, investments in farmer health and safety and more.

This is just a short look at the work we did in 2015 to strengthen our state's agriculture industry and position it for further growth. As the 2016 Legislative Session gets underway, I'm looking forward to continuing our efforts to support the tens of thousands of family farms across New York State and the work they do to ensure the success of our leading industry. For updates on the work we're doing, please be sure to visit my website, www.ritchie.nysenate.gov.