



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

“Planting Seeds” Initiative Will Help Grow New York's Agriculture Economy

CATHARINE YOUNG February 9, 2016

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ALBANY – With the state’s agriculture workforce employing more than 100,000 New Yorkers, and an annual economic impact of more than \$5.4 billion, enhancing the industry is central to job creation and economic development efforts across the state.

Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- 57th District) today unveiled the “*Planting Seeds*” initiative, a multifaceted proposal that would allocate research, education, and marketing assistance;

establish new tax and regulatory relief; advance efforts to expand markets; promote quality and increase food safety; and generate new job opportunities for veterans and others interested in farming.

“New York is known as the food state, because we produce such a variety of fresh, locally grown products. Agriculture is central to our way of life. Creating greater opportunities for family farms, local vineyards and others is paramount to expanding our upstate economy,” Senator Young said.

“With greater demand from consumers for local products, New York’s family farms have met this need and we should continue to help them reach the greatest audience. The Senate’s *‘Planting Seeds’* initiative will build on past successes, correct funding cuts proposed in the Executive Budget, increase our local farmer’s ability to produce their goods in the most cost effective manner, and encourage growth in the next generation of farmers,” she said.

The “*Planting Seeds*” initiative is made up of an array of proposals, including:

Restoring Funding Cuts

- Over the past four years, the Senate Republican Majority has restored more than \$32 million in budget cuts for agriculture funding. The 2016-17 Executive Budget proposes cuts in funding to 42 different programs, the largest single-year reduction in agriculture funding in five years. In response, Senator Young and her colleagues will prioritize full restoration of these funds, and work to achieve record levels of funding to support family farmers.
- Speed up the full phase-in of the Senate’s estate tax reform enacted in 2014 as part of the Senate’s Young Farmers initiative, allowing farmers to claim the federal exclusion amount; and

- Reducing taxes on family farms through the Farmer Personal Income Tax (PIT) Exemption by raising the PIT exemption for small and mid-sized family farms from the current 5 percent to 20 percent, and expanding eligibility for more farmers.

Supporting Research

- The plan restores cuts to the agriculture-related research and study programs at Cornell University, helping to maintain the state as the nation's premier center for agricultural learning and research; and
- Increasing state funding for Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to meet the growing demand from students for agriculture and veterinary instruction programs. Increasing support for education programs will help hold the line on rising college costs and student debt and builds on past Senate efforts.

Protecting Food and Human Health

- Increased funding for cutting edge research into the spread and prevention of avian disease, and supporting programs that aim to detect and prevent the spread of other diseases in plants and animals. Additional funding is also included to expand Cornell's research into the recent honeybee die-off, which is having a detrimental impact on crop pollination, and expanding programs that encourage farmers to reduce pesticide use;
- Providing state funds, that could be leveraged with additional USDA funds to support the replacement of aging and outdated lab facilities with a new lab continuing Cornell's food safety and research programs; and

- Greater funding to stop the spread of wildlife rabies from Canada, and providing reimbursement to local public health services for human post-exposure rabies treatments.

Encouraging Innovation

- The Senate's plan restores funding for a third round of Beginning Farmer grants, created as part of the Young Farmers initiative to encourage interest in agriculture and passing on family farming to future generations. Nearly two dozen farms have benefitted from the first round grants that provided \$15,000 - \$50,000 to help young farmers purchase seeds, equipment and supplies. The second round of Beginning Farmers grants will be announced soon to help even more businesses grow;
- New funding for established farmers to help them install innovative new technology, making their farms more efficient and profitable;
- Increased funding for local cooperative extensions, often the first point of contact for experienced and beginning farmers looking to find solutions to problems and challenges on the farm;
- Increased investment in FarmNet, which provides business and farm transition planning services, among other services to farmers; and
- Help for dairy farmers dealing with price volatility through increased funding for programs that help improve profits.

Supporting Agriculture Education

- “*Planting Seeds*” extends the Beginning Farmer Student Loan Forgiveness Program, which helps students pursuing degrees in agriculture education, encouraging more young people to consider careers in agriculture;
- Continued support for the locally based high-school FFA programs;
- Establishment of a new North Country Ag Academy, based on a similar program in use in Western New York, the Academy would provide hands-on learning experiences for aspiring young farmers, preparing them for future careers; and
- Developing an agriculture management program at SUNY’s Canton College to serve as a lower-cost alternative to four-year agriculture degree programs.

Assisting Our Veterans

- “*Planting Seeds*” would provide new funding for an innovative proposal by Cornell’s Small Farms Program to develop five veteran-owned small farms through a first-in-the-nation pilot program. Returning veterans and those seeking a career change could be encouraged to try agriculture, utilizing benefits they’ve earned under the GI Bill to gain training and expertise to begin their own successful small business. The sites would be available in the future to train additional veteran-farmers.

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