



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Weekly Column #4: Senate's 'Planting Seeds' initiative will help support our farmers

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO February 15, 2016

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Without the hard work and perseverance of our generations of farmers, New York State would not be the agricultural engine that it is today.

Historically, farming has long played a major role in regional stability and economic growth across our state, particularly in Central New York. That's why my Senate Republican colleagues and I continue to make it a priority to ensure that our farmers have the resources and support they need to remain a thriving industry in our state.

Recently I joined my Senate Republican Majority colleagues to unveil our legislative agenda for agriculture called "Planting Seeds." This plan recognizes the economic impact of the 100,000 people who currently make up New York's agricultural workforce, and it also includes proposals to help ensure that the state's leading industry continues to grow.

Here are a few of the goals the Senate's new "Planting Seeds" initiative will strive for:

Restore funding cuts: Since 2011, Senate Republicans have restored more than \$32 million in budget cuts for agriculture funding. The 2016-17 Executive Budget proposes to cut funding for 42 different programs – the largest single-year reduction in agriculture funding in five

years. Senate Republicans will prioritize full restoration of these cuts, and work to achieve record levels of funding to support family farmers.

Strengthen farmers' bottom lines: Our Estate Tax Reform will speed up the full phase-in of the estate tax reform, which was enacted in 2014 as part of the Senate's Young Farmers initiative to allow farmers to claim the federal exclusion amount. Also, the Farmer Personal Income Tax (PIT) Exemption will reduce taxes on family farmers by raising the PIT exemption for small and mid-sized family farms from the current 5 percent to 20 percent, and make even more farmers eligible for the exemption.

Protect food and human health: We'll support programs that aim to detect and prevent the spread of diseases in plants and animals. Additional funding would expand research into the recent honeybee die-off, which is critical to crop pollination, and expand programs that encourage farmers to reduce pesticide use.

Encourage innovation: We want to restore budget funding for a third round of "Beginning Farmer" grants to encourage interest in agriculture and help protect the future of family farming. Also, we'd increase funding for local cooperative extensions and provide new funding for established farmers to help them install innovative new technology that make their farms more efficient and profitable, as well as help dairy farmers cope with price volatility by increasing funding for programs that aim to improve profits.

Support agriculture education: We'd extend the Beginning Farmer Student Loan Forgiveness Program to include students who are pursuing degrees in agriculture education, plus continue support for the high-school based FFA programs (formerly known as "Future Farmers of America").

Assist our veterans: New funding for an innovative proposal by Cornell's Small Farms Program would help establish up to 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.

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