



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Drought Damage Surveyed by Ritchie, Agriculture Commissioner, State and Local Leaders During Tuesday Tour of Area Farms

PATTY RITCHIE September 6, 2016



In an effort to gauge the impact the summer drought has had on farmers, State Senator Patty Ritchie, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard Ball and other state and local leaders toured farms throughout Jefferson and Oswego Counties Tuesday and heard firsthand from farmers suggestions for what can be done to help them recover from the recent lack of rainfall.

Included on the tour organized by Senator Ritchie were stops at Eastman Dairy Farm in Ellisburg, Sheland Farms in Adams, Windsong Dairy in Adams Center and Hemlock Haven in Sandy Creek. At each location, farmers shared with the group how they have struggled with challenges caused by the dry weather, including increased costs incurred due to having to truck water into their farms and purchase feed, as well as expected losses in crop yields ranging from 30 to 50 percent.

"From corn to Christmas trees, today's tour provided another firsthand look at just how damaging the summer's hot, dry weather has been to the operations of our local farmers," said Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Senator Patty Ritchie. "I would like to thank Commissioner Ball for taking a personal interest in the situation agribusiness owners in our region are facing and look forward to working with him and other leaders to develop a plan that helps our hardworking farmers rebound."

State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, "Our State's farms are facing serious challenges with this year's extensive drought--from damaged crops to concerns with hauling water. Seeing these corn crops and tree farms in this condition in Jefferson and Oswego Counties is concerning and it's important we join together with our partners, Senator Ritchie, Farm Bureau, Cornell and the FSA, to better be able to assess the damage and assist our farmers access the resources available in the areas that are in need."

Joining Senator Ritchie and Commissioner Ball on the tour were Assemblyman Will Barclay, Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush, New York Farm Bureau President Dean Norton, representatives from the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA), Cornell Cooperative Extension, Jefferson County Economic Development and members of Senator Ritchie's Agriculture Advisory Council, which includes agribusiness owners from throughout Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Oswego Counties.

"While we will eventually see rain in the future, the effects of the summer's hot, dry weather are long lasting for our farmers," said Assemblyman Will Barclay. "Farmers are responsible not only for growing and producing fresh foods, but also for supporting the growth of New York's leading industry. As such, we have a responsibility to help them recover from this challenging time. I'd like to thank Senator Ritchie for bringing our farmers and state leaders together to talk about what we can do together to address this issue."

"There are few things more challenging for a farmer than getting Mother Nature to cooperate," said Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush. "Agriculture isn't just a vital part of our state's economy, it's a crucial piece of our local economy in Northern New York. I would like to thank Senator Ritchie and Commissioner Ball for organizing this tour and giving us a chance to talk directly with farmers about the impact of the drought."

"In recent months we have been hearing from farmers across the state about how damaging the dry, hot conditions have been to their operations," said Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau. "These conditions have complicated crop management for farmers and significantly increased costs. I would like to thank Senator Ritchie and Commissioner Ball for taking the time to talk directly with farmers about the effects the drought has had, and New York Farm Bureau looks forward to working with them to address some of the issues we heard about today."

"It goes without saying that rain is essential to crop growth," said Doug Shelmidine of Sheland Farms. "This summer's lack of rain has presented unprecedented challenges for us, and we appreciate Commissioner Ball, Senator Ritchie, Assemblyman Barclay, Assemblyman Blankenbush and other local leaders visiting our farm and listening to our suggestions for how the state can help us not only to recover, but also to continue to grow and produce the foods people across the globe depend on."

"On average it takes 8 years to grow a 7 to 8 foot Christmas tree we can sell," said Michele Forsyth of Hemlock Haven, a Christmas tree farm in Sandy Creek. "With this summer's drought we have seen severe damage to many of our young trees, which translates to lost profits for our operation. We appreciate Commissioner Ball, Senator Ritchie and our other leaders for taking the time to visit our farm and for listening to our concerns."

During the day-long tour, the group identified a number of ways to potentially provide relief to farmers, including tapping into assistance from organizations like the FSA, having a hydrogeologist visit the region and talk to local farmers about what can be done to improve water flow, as well as possible support in the next state budget to help farmers rebound. In addition, a hearing is planned for November that will afford farmers the opportunity to share with state leaders the overall impact the drought has had on their operations.

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Pictured in the above photo from left to right are Diesel Hitt of Windsong Dairy, Commissioner Ball, Senator Ritchie, Assemblyman Barclay and Assemblyman Blankenbush.

