



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Ortt, Colleagues: Why the Lack of Statewide Agriculture Hearings?

ROBERT G. ORTT April 9, 2019

| ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE, FARMWORKER FAIR LABOR PRACTICES ACT, FFLPA**

Today, **Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I,Ref-North Tonawanda)** and his Senate Republican colleagues raised concerns over the release of hearings surrounding the proposed Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act (FFLPA). In a letter to the respective Chairs of the Senate Agriculture Committee and Senate Labor Committee, they questioned the limited scope of only holding three hearings, which are set to take place in Nassau, Sullivan, and Madison Counties. The Capital Region, Hudson Valley, North Country, Southern Tier, and Western New York – along with farm industries specific to those regions – will be without input into the sweeping legislation.

“It’s disheartening to see that Senate Democrats ignored our request to host statewide hearings on the proposed farmworkers unionization legislation,” said **Sen. Ortt**. “This legislation will dramatically impact the leading industry across much of New York. Considering the grave harm it could have on our state’s small family farms, hard-working farm employees, and consumers, it’s unfathomable that entire geographic regions and sectors of agriculture are excluded from the discussion. Once again, I am calling on both Senators to expand their planned schedule and include hearings in the Capital Region, Hudson Valley, North Country, Southern Tier, and Western New York.”

Joining Sen. Ortt in signing the letter were Senators Pamela A. Helming, Robert E. Antonacci, Rich Funke, George A. Amedore Jr., Chris Jacobs, Sue Serino, James N. Tedisco, Daphne Jordan, Betty Little, Thomas F. O'Mara and Fred Akshar. Last month, Sen. Ortt and his Senate colleagues authored a letter to the Agriculture and Labor chairs requesting that community hearings be held across the entire state. In a study conducted by Farm Credit East, it is estimated that the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act would add at least \$299 million of costs on the backs of New York's farming community, which would reduce net farm income by a staggering 23 percent.

Sen. Betty Little (R,C,I-Queensbury) said, "This is an issue that could severely impact our agricultural industry causing a ripple effect throughout the state's economy. Most farmers I know don't have the time to travel a great distance to attend a public hearing, but they want to be heard. They deserve to be heard. That's why we're imploring our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to take the time to organize and hold hearings all across the state."

Sen. Robert E. Antonacci (R,I,C,UJP-Onondaga) said, "The significance of this legislation for farmers warrants additional Upstate public hearings. The failure to schedule these hearings limits the opportunity for Upstate farm owners to provide vital input regarding this initiative which could negatively impact the farm industry Statewide. Therefore, I ask my Senate Majority colleagues to please reconsider scheduling additional Upstate hearings on this issue."

Sen. Rich Funke (R,C,I-Fairport) said, "Holding hearings in upstate New York would force the Senate Majority to see first-hand the damage their policies are creating for upstate families and farmers. I can understand why they would prefer to stick their heads in the sand but we simply can't allow it. If they want to shut down farms in my district, I'm calling on the Senate Democrats to at least look my constituents in the eye while they're doing it. We need hearings on the Farm Labor Bill and we need them now."

Sen. Daphne Jordan (R,C,I,Ref-Halfmoon) said, “By refusing to hold statewide hearings on legislation that could impose \$299 million in new, crushing costs on our hard-working family farmers, Senate Democrats are sowing a bitter crop and demonstrating a shocking indifference for our farmers and the vital importance of agriculture to New York’s economy. Farmers across our Capital Region – and every region – deserve to have their voices heard on a proposal that may decrease net farm income by 23 percent. Senate Democrats know that their proposal would be disastrous, so they are trying to deny more farmers the opportunity to speak out and go on the record at a Senate public hearing. Since this legislation has been introduced, I’ve heard from some farmers in my Senate district saying they are either ceasing operations or strongly considering doing so because it is financially difficult for them to remain in business. There needs to be a public hearing in every region of New York State on the Democrats’ so-called Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act. Anything short of that is a disservice to democracy.”

Sen. Chris Jacobs (60th SD) said, “Any piece of legislation with ramifications as far-reaching on an industry as the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act should be thoroughly vetted across our state and throughout the agricultural industry. Agriculture is such an important piece of our state’s economy that I am imploring my colleagues who Chair the Agriculture and Labor Committees to reach out further into the diverse farming communities that will be severely impacted by this bill.”

Sen. Sue Serino (R,C,I-Hyde Park) said, "This legislation will undoubtedly have a drastic impact on farms of all sizes here in the Hudson Valley and our communities absolutely deserve to be heard. The current hearing schedule is hardly representative of the various farming communities across our state and I urge these Committee Chairs to drastically expand their planned schedule to include communities here in Dutchess and Putnam counties. So many involved in our local farms have dedicated their lives to the land and to

our communities. Cutting them out of this process is simply not right."

Sen. Pam Helming (R,C,I-Canandaigua) said, "Agriculture is the leading industry in our region and upstate New York State. Our local and state economy relies on our farmers and farm families. The Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act would have a devastating impact on the industry as a whole, especially our small family operations, and their hardworking employees. This is the busiest time of the year for the agricultural industry. Farmers and farmworkers are working tirelessly to get their fields ready for the upcoming season and to expect them to travel great distances to weigh in on the burdensome regulations that this legislation would enact is both disappointing and disrespectful. As State Senators, we should be more accommodating to our constituents' schedules and not to our own, especially when something this significant would negatively impact them. These regulations – unrealistic for our small farms and difficult even for our large farms – make no sense to any farmers I have spoken with and would only drive up production costs and food prices in New York State and drive more of our farms out of business. As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I urge Senator Metzger and Senator Ramos to reconsider the plan for these hearings and schedule more hearings in other parts of the state, especially upstate New York."

Sen. Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) said, "The profound consequences of this legislation to one of New York State's economic and cultural foundations demands a comprehensive series of statewide public hearings. Hearings need to be scheduled across every agricultural region of New York State, including the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions. Every voice that deserves to be heard should have the chance to provide direct input."

Sen. Fred Akshar (R,C,I-Endwell) said, "Before passing legislation that could drastically change the lives of thousands of Upstate farmers and their families, the New Senate Democrat leadership should at the very least agree to go out and meet with the people their proposals

would affect. The 52nd Senate District I represent contains more farms per capita than any senate district in the entire state, and I find it unconscionable that the Chairs of the Senate Agriculture Committee and Senate Labor Committee would refuse to set foot in our community and listen to our farmers' needs."

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RELATED LEGISLATION

2019-S2837

- Introduced

- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Enacts the farmworkers fair labor practices act, granting collective bargaining rights,
workers' compensation and unemployment benefits to farmworkers

January 29, 2019

In Senate Committee [Labor](#)

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