



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

## Senator Helming, Colleagues Host Agriculture Roundtable with Experts

SENATOR PAM HELMING May 6, 2019

| ISSUE: **FARMWORKER FAIR LABOR PRACTICES ACT**

BATAVIA – Senator Pam Helming, a member of the New York State Senate Agriculture Committee, and Senator Rob Ortt, the ranking member of the Agriculture Committee, hosted an agriculture roundtable discussion with several of their Senate colleagues. With a panel of agriculture and business experts from across Western New York, the discussion took place at Farm Credit East in Batavia. Senator Helming and Senator Ortt have spent the last few weeks speaking with farmers and farmworkers from across Western New York about newly proposed labor laws and wanted to bring together as many individuals from the agriculture community as possible. Participating on the panel was Mr. Kim Skellie, of El-Vi Farms in Newark, Wayne County.

“The Chairs of the Agriculture Committee and the Labor Committee scheduled just three hearings on the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act – the closest taking place at SUNY Morrisville in Madison County and the other two being held downstate in Nassau and Sullivan Counties. With approximately 2,068 farms in my district alone and certainly thousands more if you count up all of the farms in my colleagues’ districts, that means a wide swath of farmers and farmworkers are being excluded from having their voices heard on this legislation. In order to make their voices heard, our farmers would have to drive close

to two hours or more from my district to SUNY Morrisville. And they would have to do it during their busiest of the year, as they are trying to care for their animals and plant their crops. That is why my colleagues and I wanted to bring the discussion to upstate. We want to stand up for our farmers and farmworkers in Central and Western New York, and we want to make sure their voices are heard on this legislation that would devastate the agriculture industry in our region and our state. Thank to Senator Ortt and our colleagues for your willingness to listen, and thank you to our agriculture and business experts and local farmworkers for your willingness to speak,” Senator Helming said.

The Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act (S.2837), recently introduced by Senator Jessica Ramos, of Queens, would force farm owners to pay overtime to seasonal workers who surpass a daily hour limit, require mandatory days off, and allow workers to strike. A study by Farm Credit East indicates that this legislation would increase labor costs by an estimated 17 percent and decrease net farm income by approximately 23 percent. In total, the legislation is expected to cost the farming community a total of \$299 million. The bill currently resides in the Senate Labor Committee.

Senator Ortt said, “The purpose of this roundtable was to gain additional insight and inform our local residents and the media on how impactful pending labor legislation could be to our small family farms. We wanted to draw on these farm owners’ and farmworkers’ expertise, and we wanted to offer them an opportunity to voice their concerns and speak with their elected representatives about what can be done to stop newly proposed labor laws. The sponsor of this new labor legislation and the Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture have refused to hold any hearings in western New York, so we have taken it upon ourselves to give these farm owners, farm workers, farm bureaus, and elected officials an opportunity to voice their opinions. With so many small family farms struggling to survive, this legislation would put an end to local farming in New York as we know it. The farm closure rate in New York is currently three times the national average, and legislation like that

proposed by Senator Ramos would increase this farm closure number exponentially. It would also drive away our best workers who seek to work as many hours as possible. If capped at 40 hours per week, seasonal employees will look to other states for more work.”