



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Senate and Assembly Republicans Hold Listening Session With Local Farmers

ROBERT G. ORTT October 15, 2021

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Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt, along with members of the Senate and Assembly Republican Conferences today, held a listening session with local farmers and stakeholders to hear about the pressing issues facing the agriculture industry.

Discussions revolved around the potential impacts of lowering the 60-hour overtime

threshold. Later this year, the New York State Farm Labor Wage Board will revisit the threshold set in 2019 and make a determination on whether to lower the threshold to 40 hours. Lawmakers also heard from participants about the issues they'd like to see as priorities in the upcoming legislative session.

“The agriculture industry continues to struggle under burdensome state mandates and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to thank the farmers and stakeholders who shared their perspectives today, particularly regarding the negative consequences that will occur if the wage board further lowers the overtime threshold. My colleagues and I will continue to advocate on behalf of our farmers, and I urge the wage board to listen to those who will be directly affected by their actions,” **said Senator Ortt.**

Senator George Borrello said, “New York farmers are among the most hardworking and resilient individuals anywhere. They are the foundation of our state’s \$6 billion agriculture industry, which is known for producing some of the finest meat, dairy and produce in the world. However, the strength and viability of our farming community is threatened by burdensome mandates and misguided policies from Albany that are making it harder than ever to stay in business. At the top of the list of challenges are the Farm Labor Act and potential changes to the 60-hour overtime threshold. My conversations with farmers and farm workers in recent months have echoed the comments we heard today about how harmful this change would be for everyone. The agricultural community is united on this issue.”

Senator Edward Rath said, “The agriculture industry is critical to our state's economy and the character of our rural communities. Reducing the overtime threshold for farmworkers would have a devastating impact on the New York State agriculture industry at a time when many farms are struggling. To do so after so many farmers have stepped up and continue to

step up to donate products to those in need during the pandemic, is unacceptable. Now is not the time to play politics, we need to listen to stakeholders and industry experts. The future of New York State's agriculture industry depends on it. The evidence is clear; lowering the overtime threshold hurts farmers, workers and consumers."

Senator Patrick M. Gallivan said, "Agriculture is one of the state's most important industries, directly and in-directly employing thousands of hard-working residents. As we prepare for a new legislative session, it is important that we hear from farmers and others in the agriculture industry about the challenges they face, especially potential changes to the Farm Labor Act and other burdensome regulations that threaten the future of farming in New York. I look forward to working with those throughout the industry to improve the state's business climate."

Assemblyman Steve Hawley said, "In upstate New York, agriculture is more than an industry, it's a shared heritage and way of life. The proposal to lower the 60-hour overtime threshold for farm laborers jeopardizes farming in New York as we know it today. It makes it less feasible to grow labor-intensive crops that New Yorkers expect to see on grocery store shelves and in their farmers markets. While our farm workers are some of the hardest working people in our state, I fear the unintended consequences of this policy could limit their opportunities and weaken agriculture in New York entirely."

Assemblyman Mike Norris said, "Every farmer matters in New York State. Agriculture is a multibillion-dollar industry in New York, yet unfortunately, state regulations affecting our farms are far too often created by representatives who have never stepped foot on a farm. I have had the privilege of touring small, medium and large sized farms in various agricultural industries throughout Western New York, and I commend Minority Leader Ortt for hosting this roundtable because it is critical that we continue to gain valuable feedback on issues affecting our agriculture industry so we can ensure the future of farming in New York State

is bright.”

Assemblyman Angelo Morinello said, “We must be cognizant of the reality of farm work. Seasons, crop readiness for harvest and weather conditions cannot be scheduled in the same manner as traditional manufacturing. Farmers provide perishable goods that dictate their readiness for market. Remember if you ate today, thank a farmer.”

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