



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

## Annual Legislative Farm Tour Makes Western New York Debut

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CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY – To foster greater understanding and appreciation of New York State’s farms and agricultural economy, Senator George Borrello, ranking member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Legislative Agriculture Tour in partnership with fellow Agriculture Committee ranking member, Assemblyman Chris Tague. This was the first time the annual event has taken place in Western New York.

More than two dozen legislators traveled from their home districts in various parts of the state to participate in the two-day tour, which featured presentations at a range of farms and businesses, from dairy and crop farms to wineries, agritourism destinations and agriculture research facilities. Previous tours have featured farms and businesses in and around Assemblyman Tague’s district, which spans the Mohawk and Hudson valleys.

Ninety-eight percent of the 30,000 farms in New York State are family owned. Farming and agribusiness drive New York's economy, employing more than 55,000 people. Each year agriculture contributes nearly \$45 billion to the state's economy. New York's dairy farms alone account for \$2.7 billion in economic activity per year.

“When it comes to understanding agriculture, you get the truest perspective from a ‘boots on the ground’ experience and face-to-face dialogue with those who live and breathe farming,” **Senator Borrello said.** “As legislators representing largely rural districts, Assemblyman Tague and I are both passionate about supporting our farmers and the agricultural sector. Part of that commitment involves creating opportunities for our colleagues to connect with the farming and agribusiness community, which is what this tour is about.”

“This is a continuation of what we’ve been doing the last four years to connect the dots and educate our colleagues about the challenges our farmers face. It was fun to come out to a different part of the state I’m not that familiar with. I want to thank Senator Borrello for hosting us. George and his staff did a great job. I learned something at each stop on the tour,” **said Assemblyman Tague.** “New York should be the leader in the world in agriculture.”

“I enjoyed joining my colleagues in the Western Southern Tier of our state for this agriculture tour. It was great to learn about some of the challenges and struggles our farmers and agribusinesses face. It was also terrific to see some of the wonderful things they’ve accomplished despite those challenges,” said **Assembly Republican Leader Will Barclay.** “I would like to extend a ‘thank you’ to Senator Borrello and Assemblyman Tague for another informative, enjoyable tour and my Republican and Democratic colleagues who participated.”

Locations that the delegation visited included: Country Ayre Dairy Farms, Canticle Farm, Sprague's Maple Farms, Cuba Cheese Shoppe, Pumpkinville, Cornell Lake Erie Research Ext. Laboratory (CLEREL), 21 Brix Winery, Growers' Cooperative Grape Juice Company and Southern Tier Brewing Company.

Highlights from the tour:

- In the late 1800s, as a result of its numerous cheese factories and dairy farms, Cuba, N.Y., was known as the ‘cheese center of the world.’ The price for cheese was established at a meeting at the Kinney Hotel on West Main Street in Cuba each week and was accepted as the price in the nation and the world.
- The Lake Erie Grape Belt is the largest and oldest home for Concord grape growing in the world. It encompasses a narrow 60-mile band that runs along Lake Erie, stretching from Chautauqua County to Erie, Pa. The lake provides an ideal microclimate for the grapes, moderating temperatures to provide for a longer growing season.
- Cornell's College of Agriculture invented the first grape harvester in the 1960s. Today harvesters modeled after the Cornell invention are in use across the globe. Rising labor costs and increasing global competition are pushing the grape industry towards more mechanization. Mechanical

harvesting can save up to 50 percent of labor costs.

- Starting in 2002 in Lakewood, N.Y., the founders of Southern Tier Brewing were on the leading edge of the craft beer boom. Today the business is an industry leader and one of the top craft beer producers in the nation. The growth of craft breweries in the state has made New York the third-largest beer producer in the country, with much of that growth occurring in central and western New York.
- Echoing the comments of many farm and agribusiness owners visited on the tour, Country Ayre Farms owners Dick Kimball and his family explained that if the state lowers the farm worker overtime threshold, their employees will see a decrease in pay because farms will be forced to limit the hours of employees to prevent additional hits to their already-thin margins. They underscored that this will be an industrywide reality.

“At the end of the day, this tour offered my colleagues a glimpse into the unique attributes and challenges of farms and agribusinesses in this part of the state as well as firsthand experience and conversations with those whose lives and livelihoods are in agriculture,” said Senator Borrello. “Experiences like these make us all better legislators.”