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## **NEWS FROM NEW YORK FARM BUREAU**

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## **NY FARM BUREAU STATEMENT ON FARM LABOR**

New York's farmers value their employees. Their hard work and dedication does not go unnoticed. In fact, according to the USDA, farms in New York already pay an average agriculture wage rate of \$12.15. This is well above New York's minimum wage, a wage that is already one of the highest among competitive agricultural states. In addition, the state's farmers have never asked to be exempted from basic laws which govern all New York employees, such as health and safety standards, whistleblower protections, anti-human trafficking statutes and workplace harassment. New York Farm Bureau is also supportive of employees taking a voluntary day-of-rest each week. However, issues such as overtime beyond an eight-hour day in a 40-hour work week, collective bargaining rights and other mandates in the proposed omnibus farm worker legislation are not reasonable work rules on a farm.

Harvesting fruits and vegetables is completely weather dependent. A rainy period may keep a farmer and their employees out of the fields for a couple of days and then require longer days to catch up once things dry. Ripe food where time is of the essence will not wait for another eight-hour-shift to begin the following day. The same can be said for the work on a dairy farm where cows require regular milking. A traditional 40-hour work week may be suited for a factory but not on a farm. Everyone who chooses to work in agriculture understands the hard work and time involved.

If you ask a farmer about their employees, they often will tell you they are like family. Most have worked on the same farms for years. They stay year round or return for seasonal jobs because of the good workplace conditions and treatment they receive. What is often forgotten in the discussion is that on top of the full salary, housing may also be provided; housing that is inspected for health and safety standards by no less than four governmental agencies on an annual basis. This is in addition to transportation, utilities, and cable television that are also generally provided free of charge. It is clearly understood that if a worker is unhappy, for any reason, other opportunities are waiting for them literally down the road because of the high demand for agricultural labor. They have every right and ability to simply vote with their feet and leave employment, just like everyone else in today's work place.

New York currently is among the top states in the country when it comes to labor costs. Overtime would only add to the cost of production. Our farmers are competing in a global marketplace. Farmers can't pass along the increases to wholesalers, processors and grocery stores because of competition from farms in other states and countries. Passing this legislation would simply be bad for business, bad for agriculture, and ultimately bad for employees.

The proposed legislation will force serious change on New York's family farms, causing many of our members to turn from producing labor-intensive fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy products and towards row crops that can be grown more easily in this state. Those crops use much less labor and will not tie the hands of farmers with more regulatory burdens that would come with this legislation.

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*New York Farm Bureau is the State's largest agricultural lobbying/trade organization. Its members and the public know the organization as "The Voice of New York Agriculture." New York Farm Bureau is dedicated to solving the economic and public policy issues challenging the agricultural community.*