



NEWS FROM NEW YORK FARM BUREAU

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NY FARM BUREAU STATEMENT ON FARM LABOR LEGISLATION

Once again, activists and labor unions are pushing to expand their ranks by promoting more regulations and increased costs for New York's family farms. The farmworker labor bill ignores the unique nature of work on a farm, and looks to instead force farms in this state to be constrained by a set of additional requirements that will put them at a greater competitive disadvantage.

Just this month, Farm Credit East released its Northeast Dairy Farm Summary. It found that the average dairy farm made only \$5,236 dollars in net earnings in 2015 because of low milk prices. Farmers are making far less than their employees and still must provide for their own families. The outlook for dairy farms in 2016 isn't any better, and commodity prices are also low. Farms simply can't afford additional labor costs, especially combined with the higher minimum wage rollout over the next five years. Farmers also can't pass along the increases to wholesalers, processors and grocery stores either because of competition from farms in other states and countries.

New York's family farms understand the importance of providing safe working conditions and competitive wages for all of their employees. It is a necessity to have a stable workforce and maintain quality workers. On average, farmworkers earn \$12.39/hour in New York. This is in addition to free housing that is routinely inspected for health and safety standards, transportation and utilities that also may be provided. Most employees have chosen to work 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. The mere suggestion otherwise may fit the activists' narrative, but is not a fair and accurate portrayal of life on farms in this state.

The state's farm labor laws were enacted for one reason only. Rules meant to govern manufacturing simply don't work on farms. If unionized farmworkers choose to walk off the job in the middle of harvest season or as the dairy cows need to be milked, what is the alternative for the farmer? They immediately run the risk of losing a season's harvest or putting the health and safety of their animals in jeopardy. The same reasoning goes for overtime or a mandatory day of rest. Mother nature doesn't work by a time clock and that means neither do farmers or their employees who work side-by-side.

It should also be noted that New York Farm Bureau is supportive of farmworkers having the voluntary choice to take a day off every week. This protects seasonal workers, who may only work a few months out of the year, to earn as much income as they choose.

The new minimum wage increases enacted earlier this year already have farms looking at alternatives when it comes to their labor. From increased automation to changing what and how they grow certain crops, the farmworker labor bill will only expedite that further. That in the end will change the landscape of agriculture in New York towards more row crops and reduce the number of jobs available for farmworkers. Because of the many notable reasons, New York Farm Bureau urges lawmakers to oppose 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.