

RURAL FUTURES



News of Interest about Rural New York

SUMMER 2010 NEWSLETTER

Buying local: Fresh NY Farm Products Boost Economy and Health

Buying local is more than a trend among socially conscious shoppers. Purchasing high quality, New York-grown products is a simple step all of us can take to eat healthier and improve our local, regional and state economy. In rural New York, we don't have to look far to find the freshest and best locally produced items right in our own community.

At farmers' markets and road side stands throughout rural New York, fresh, high-quality local foods are readily available—fruits, vegetables, honey, jams, baked goods and more. Frequenting these venues adds healthy foods to your family's diet and keeps your hard earned dollars in the community.

The local selection, however, isn't limited to what can be sold outside on a sunny summer day. Many farmers will sell direct and offer a wide range of delicious, farm fresh foods including: beef, bison, lamb, goat, pork, chicken, turkey, rabbit,

eggs, cheeses, herbs, vegetables, berries, fruits, wines and more. In many counties, including Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, and St. Lawrence counties, local food guides are available to direct customers to farmers. In Madison and Chenango counties, Central New York Bounty offers on-line ordering and home delivery of local farm products.

A strong agricultural industry supports our rural economy, supports small business and will help the economy grow as a whole. Buying local can also support New York producers year round. Many grocery stores carry products with the "Pride of New York" label, along with many others that come from New York-based companies. To further stimulate rural economies and support our farmers, Senator Aubertine, Chair of the Rural Resources Commission, has been working to help schools, hospitals

and other institutions or organizations buy local, while also helping our State's urban markets set up sites to sell New York produce.

Buying local from New York State farms and companies is a simple step we can all take to help improve our economy, benefit our neighbors and give ourselves the freshest and best foods available. Take the opportunity to enjoy some fresh, quality New York produce. You'll be glad you did.

In this Issue

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Economic Development | 2 |
| Education | 3 |
| Broadband | 4 |
| Agriculture | 5 |
| New York Wineries | 6 |
| Canal System | 7 |
| Legislative Update | 8 |
| New York State Parks | 9 |
| Tax Benefits | 10 |
| DOT Truck Ban | 11 |
| Medicare Scam Warning | 12 |

RURAL FUTURES

The NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources is a joint bipartisan commission of the NYS Legislature. Senate and Assembly members include:

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

North Country Grants Website

In January 2010, Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine and SUNY Canton launched the North Country Grant Search website, a working database of public and private grants designed to provide access to available funding for non-profits, municipalities and economic developers.

“This new website is a new and powerful tool for local governments and nonprofits,” Sen. Aubertine said. “Now more than ever our Central and Northern New York municipalities and nonprofits need the best tools at their disposal to take advantage of whatever state, federal and private funding is available. This site brings together on one site the contact information for hundreds of foundations and agencies. The work SUNY Canton has done to make this site easy to use and accessible will go a long way toward ensuring that key projects and initiatives in our region have the funding they need to move forward.”

“SUNY Canton is extremely excited to be working directly with Senator Aubertine and his office on the North Country Grant Search Website,” SUNY Canton President Joseph L. Kennedy said. “It is extremely important, especially during these difficult times, that everyone has access to the tools and resources available to locate additional funding sources. The website presents that opportunity.”

More than 100 representatives from non-profit organizations and municipalities, along with development experts and the general public observed demonstrations and engaged in a question and answer period at the launch of the new website. The web-based grant locator was designed and developed by SUNY Canton Web Designer Travis Smith, with grant-data collected and researched with assistance from Grant Coordinator Joanne Fassinger and Chief of Staff Ryan Deuel, who oversaw the project. The website was made possible through a \$50,000 grant secured by Sen. Aubertine in 2006 while a member of the Assembly. The site is accessible through the SUNY Canton website: www.canton.edu/grants/search/index.php.

RURAL FUTURES



Distance Learning in North Country Schools Boosted by Federal Funds

A fiber-optic network in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties has given rural and smaller school districts the ability to offer college-level courses and a variety of other instructional opportunities through distance learning. Many such opportunities are not your typical classroom instruction, including virtual field trips, attending meetings from remote locations and even training for local fire companies whose members are not able to travel great distances.

School districts in the Jefferson-Lewis and St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES territories received nearly \$1 million each in the 2008-2009 school year, which covered most of the cost of accessing a fiber optic network operated by the Development Authority of the North Country (DANC). The funding came from the Universal Service Administrative Co., a not-for-profit organization that administers the federal Universal Service Fund, supported by service fees charged to telecommunications companies that provide interstate communication services.

Rural Students Grow Green Garden Project

Students, their parent advisor, and staff from Mt. Markham Central School District in Herkimer County visited Albany to show legislators their school-based organic garden project, which was funded by the legislature through the Rural Education Advisory Committee (REAC) mini-grants program. The students and teachers cultivated gardens to grow fresh, nutritious food that was actually consumed in school. Each grade developed their own theme-based garden that tied in to their curriculum. The students not only learned about nutrition and agriculture but incorporated environmentally sustainable practices into their gardens by composting waste, using worms, and recycling. The outdoor activities such as weeding and harvesting energized the students and Wellness Team and led to healthier eating habits, a better understanding of the food cycle, respect for the earth and our farmers—all while providing a fun learning experience.

REAC, created in 1990 through efforts of the Rural Resources Commission, advances rural education. One of its activities is awarding mini-grants to rural schools for innovative projects such as this. The mini-grants were funded in the State budget through the initiative of the legislators who make up the Commission.

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Edward Reinfurt, Senator Aubertine and Assemblyman Koon at June 16 Commission Meeting.

Rural Resources Commission Gets Broadband Update

NYSTAR Director cites broadband as key to economic growth

Much of rural New York lacks access to broadband internet service, which can play a significant role in stimulating economic development. The Legislative Commission on Rural Resources welcomed Ed Reinfurt, the Executive Director of the New York State Foundation for Science, Technology and Innovation (NYSTAR) to its June 16, 2010 meeting to discuss this.

Mr. Reinfurt spoke about the importance of establishing partnerships between rural communities and regional technology centers to promote economic growth. He highlighted the fundamental role expanded high-speed broadband coverage will have in improving the state's agriculture, manufacturing and tourism industries, and the importance of federal stimulus funding as a means of getting broadband service to currently underserved areas of the state—particularly in the North Country and Southern Tier.

Senator Darrel Aubertine, Commission Chair, said, "We are committed to facilitating partnerships between rural businesses and existing technology assets. We hope that a partnership between the Commission and NYSTAR will help provide the impetus for collaboration with upstate industries to create jobs and be even more competitive in the future."

Assemblyman David Koon, Commission Co-Chair, added, "We have enormous potential for economic growth in rural upstate NY, and technology is the key to tapping it. The partnerships the Senator mentioned are what our rural economies need to tap that potential and compete in today's and tomorrow's economy."



New York State Broadband Development

Here in New York there has been a lack of information about where broadband service is available—but that is about to change.

In October 2009, the New York State Office of Cyber Security & Critical Infrastructure Coordination (cscic) was awarded \$2.5 million in federal stimulus money for broadband mapping and planning activities, which will be used to identify and map New York's broadband-underserved areas.

With a planned summer 2010 launch, cscic is creating an online, publicly accessible and searchable map of broadband service areas. The map will allow anyone to locate where each type and speed of broadband service exists and where service is not available. These new broadband mapping and planning efforts will benefit regional high-tech economic development by laying the groundwork for a communication revival, and helping to level the playing field by giving rural businesses, including farmers and other entrepreneurs, access to the information necessary to grow and compete in the global economy.

RURAL FUTURES



Agriculture Energy Efficiency Program

PSC and NYSERDA team up to assist farmers

As part of its Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard, the NYS Public Service Commission (PSC) has approved the Agriculture Energy Efficiency Program (AEEP). The AEEP will be administered by the New York Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). It is designed to provide funding for energy efficiency improvements to the State's farmers and agriculture industry. This initiative will provide funding assistance of up to 75 percent of the cost of approved equipment installations and upgrades to existing electrical or natural gas powered systems.

According to the PSC, annual funding for the AEEP includes \$3 million per year for electric energy efficiency measures and \$300,000 for natural gas efficiency measures. Site-specific energy efficiency audits will be used to determine what steps can be taken to reduce both electricity and natural gas use on farms. New York's dairy farms stand to benefit the most from this program as they are the largest energy consumers in the agriculture sector. For more information about the AEEP call 1-866-NYSERDA, or go to the NYSERDA website at www.nyserdera.org.



Sweet Success

New logo, new markets, and supporting legislation—signs of good things to come

In what can only be seen as great news for New York's maple industry, the Wegmans chain of grocery stores has begun stocking pure maple syrup made in New York State using the new "New York Maple—Taste the Tradition" logo. According to the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York maple syrup bearing the new logo is now available at each of the 75 stores in the Wegman's chain. This is the first major chain of grocery stores in the State to carry the newly-branded syrup.

"New York is a leading producer of maple syrup and Wegmans has been a long-time leader in the retail food industry for carrying and promoting locally grown and processed food," said Ag and Markets Commissioner Patrick Hooker. "Wegmans is once again leading the way by being the first major food retailer to support our new New York Maple—Taste the Tradition logo and carry the product in every one of its stores."

Two new laws, sponsored by Senator Aubertine and introduced at the request of the Rural Resources Commission, will help promote maple production, expanding the definition of agricultural commodity to include maple sap and including it in the definition of agricultural tourism. More information on Commission legislation can be found on our website.

RURAL FUTURES



New York Wineries—Great Expectations

New York is one of America's oldest commercial wine regions, with wineries dating back to the 1800's, and is one of the most diverse wine-growing regions in the world. Our wine industry has grown and expanded from only seven wineries in 1969 to nearly 300 today.

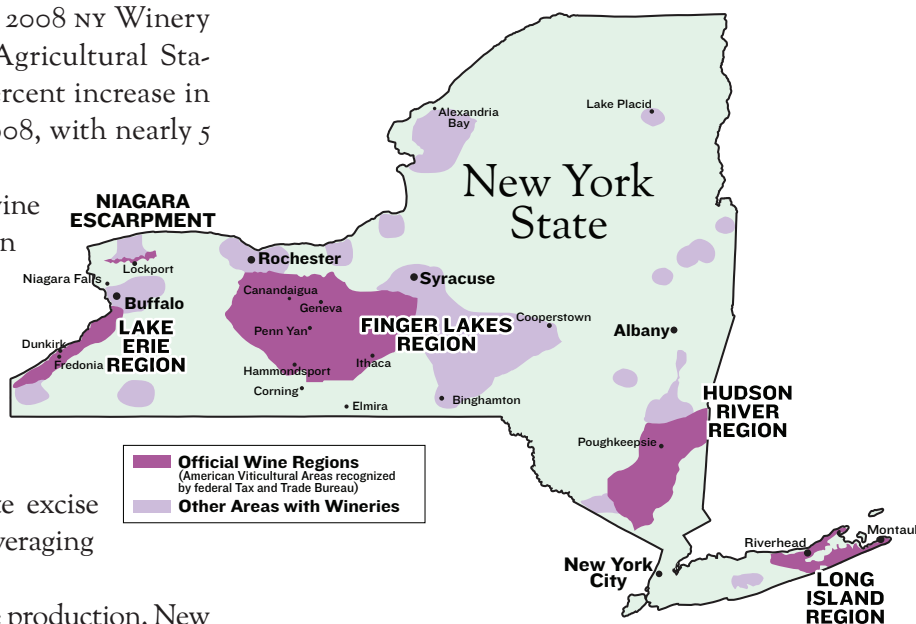
Today, New York's Wine Country spans the breadth of the State—from Long Island to Lake Erie, and north to Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Wine trails dot New York's landscape and are vacation destinations in themselves. The 2008 NY Winery Survey, compiled by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), showed a 21 percent increase in visits to NY wineries from 2003 to 2008, with nearly 5 million visitors in 2008.

New York's grape, grape juice and wine industries contributed over \$3.76 billion to the economy of New York State in 2008. This is an increase of over 10 percent from \$3.4 billion documented in 2004, and represents over 17,000 jobs here in New York State. Commercial wineries paid an average of \$1,788,300 in federal and State excise and sales taxes, with farm wineries averaging \$34,600.

Ranked third in the nation in grape production, New York wines are world class and diverse. New York wine,

like its geography and people, includes something for everyone—Riesling, Seyval, Vidal Blanc, Vidal Ice Wine, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Niagara, Gewurztraminer, Cabernet Sauvignon and sparkling wines. So, when looking for wines, and for vacation destinations, think New York! For more information, and for maps to NY wineries, contact the nys Wine and Grape foundation at: www.newyorkwines.org



RURAL FUTURES

Protection Enhanced for the New York State Canal System



For years, boaters have discharged treated wastewater directly into the waters of the State's canal system. Often however, even treated wastewater contains levels of contaminants that may be harmful to the environment or people who come into contact with canal water or fish. On May 27, 2010 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the State designated the New York State canal system a "Vessel Waste No-Discharge Zone" (NDZ).

The New York State canal system is a network of canals, rivers, lakes, wetlands and marshes covering more than 524 miles from Albany to Lake Erie, Lake Champlain, the Finger Lakes and Lake Ontario.

To bolster its case for the NDZ designation, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) cited what many rural New Yorkers already know: The State's canal system is a valuable resource for tourism, transportation and economic development.

Since its completion in 1825 the Erie Canal has been recognized as an engineering marvel. For many years it was a major commercial transportation route and played a key role in shaping the nation's westward migration. In more recent years, the commercial traffic on the canals has given way to recreational boaters, sightseers and tourists, but the canal system remains an integral part of New York's economy, particularly in rural areas of the State.

Given its importance as a recreational resource, the canal system must remain attractive to recreational boaters and tourists, and the designation as a no-discharge zone will help to ensure a healthy future for the canal system.



Robert Simpson, President of the Jefferson County Fair, and Jessica Underberg, President of the NYS Association of Agricultural Fairs, present award to Senator Darrel Aubertine.

Rural Resources Chair Recognized by Rural Schools and State Association of Agricultural Fairs

As Chair of the Rural Resources Commission, Senator Aubertine has stressed the importance of rural education and agriculture to the future of New York State. Commission staff has worked diligently to support the Senator in his efforts to protect and enhance these important anchors of life in Rural New York.

This spring, the New York State Rural Schools Association honored the Senator with its annual Appreciation Award for his work on behalf of rural schools, and the New York State Association of Agricultural Fairs presented him with an appreciation award at the opening ceremony of the Jefferson County Fair.

Senator Aubertine was recognized for his work on behalf of rural schools, and for his role in ensuring state funding for fairs, which is used to award prizes for the best in local livestock and produce.

Senator Aubertine recognizes the importance of County agricultural fairs both as tourist destinations for recreation and "for their role in educating those who may not be familiar with agriculture, providing a bit of what goes on at our farms right in their own back yards."

RURAL FUTURES



Legislative Update

SIGNED INTO LAW

S.6443-A/A.9814-A (Aubertine/Reilly)

Agricultural Tourism

Chapter 87, Laws of 2010

Includes the production of maple sap and pure maple products in the definition of Agricultural Tourism.

S.6317-A/A.9520-A (Aubertine/Reilly)

Maple as an Agricultural Commodity

Chapter 78, Laws of 2010

Expands the definition of agricultural commodity to include maple sap.

S.5486/A.8256 (Aubertine/Koon)

Environmental Impact Statements

Chapter 122, Laws of 2010

Relates to the requirement for environmental impact statements.

S.7145/A.10216 (Aubertine/Cahill)

Kinetic Energy Storage Device

Chapter 212, Laws of 2010

Includes a kinetic energy storage device utilizing flywheels or compressed air in the definition of an alternative energy production facility.

PASSED BOTH HOUSES

S.2813-C/A.6694-D (Aubertine/Russell)

North Country Power Authority

Establishes the North Country Power Authority to provide electric power to 24 municipalities in St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties.

Awaiting action of Governor

PASSED SENATE

S.5426/A.7834 (Aubertine/Koon)

County Highway Superintendents

Authorizes county highway superintendents to rent road machinery from any city, town or village.

Passed Senate/Assembly Transportation

S.6318/A.9521 (Aubertine/Reilly)

Sugar Houses/Building Code

Directs state fire prevention and building code councils to implement rules and regulations regarding the maple industry.

Passed Senate/Assembly Gov. Ops

S.7181-B/A.10377-B (Aubertine/Destito)

Low Volume Roads

Relates to the maintenance, improvement and repair of certain town highways.

Passed Senate/Assembly Transportation

S.8061/A.11457 (Aubertine/Magee)

Outdoor Wood Boilers

Restricts the sale of outdoor wood boilers after January 1, 2011 that do not meet EPA emission standards and clarifies statutory authority regarding the use of such as a heating source.

Passed Senate/Assembly EnCon Committee

PASSED ASSEMBLY

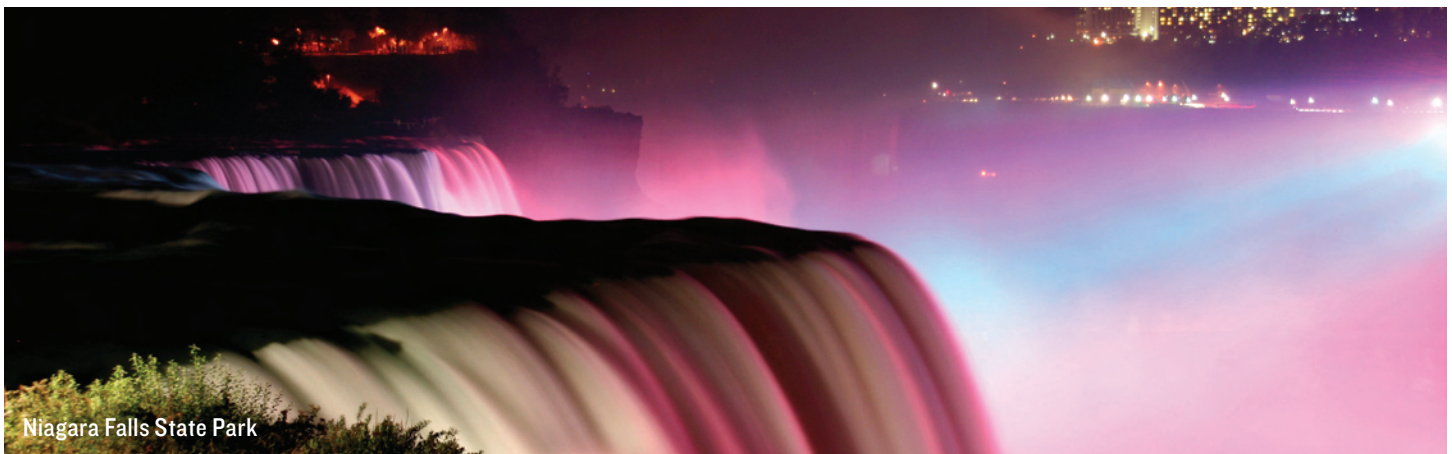
S.7704/A.10955 (Aubertine/Koon)

Rural Electric Cooperatives

Includes rural electric cooperatives in the definition of distribution utility for green jobs funding.

Passed Assembly/3rd reading in Senate

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Niagara Falls State Park

New York State Parks are Open

New York State Parks offer unmatched opportunities for recreation and cultural activities. They are close to home, affordable, and provide the opportunity to improve our physical and mental well being. Although the Governor's proposed budget would have closed or cut back many State parks and historic sites for the Summer, a deal negotiated by the State Senate and Assembly, and supported by Senator Aubertine and Assemblyman Koon, kept all of our Parks and historic sites open. Our State Parks are the perfect setting for relaxing, rejuvenating and reconnecting with the natural environment—all within a short drive for most New Yorkers and many out-of-state visitors.

Each year more than 55 million people visit New York's State Parks. In addition to paying admission at certain parks, visitors stock up on supplies at local stores, eat in nearby restaurants and take in other tourist attractions outside the parks—all of which helps our local communities thrive. In many regions, our State Parks are significant drivers of the local economy.

All told, the State Park system accounts for nearly \$2 billion in economic activity statewide—a nearly five to one return on the State's investment—and nearly 20,000 jobs are directly related to the State Park system, according to a 2009 study.

Whether it's the near wilderness experience of Allegany, exploring the canyon at Letchworth, golfing at Green Lakes, or the tranquility of a St. Lawrence River campsite at Wellesley Island, New York's 178 State Parks offer something for everyone at a reasonable price. So, the next time you're looking for endless hours of enjoyment, close to home without spending a fortune, look no further than your nearby State Park.

To find a park close to you with the activities and amenities you're interested in, or for information on historic sites or camping opportunities, check out the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation website at: www.nysparks.state.ny.us. *Make New York part of your vacation plans!*



Olana State Historic Site



Lake Taghkanic State Park



Letchworth State Park

RURAL FUTURES

New Tax Benefits for Employers



Businesses everywhere could use a helping hand, particularly in rural New York. New tax benefits enacted recently should help a bit.

The Unemployed Worker Tax Credit

Employers hiring workers who were previously unemployed or working only part time may be eligible for two new tax credits, which are part of the Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment (HIRE) Act enacted into law March 18, 2010.

- ▶ Employers who hire unemployed workers between Feb. 3, 2010 and December 31, 2010 may qualify for a 6.2-percent payroll tax incentive (their share of Social Security taxes on wages); and
- ▶ For each worker retained for at least a year, an additional general business tax credit of up to \$1,000 per worker may be available.

Health Insurance Tax Credit

Many small businesses and tax-exempt organizations that provide health insurance coverage to their employees now qualify for a special tax credit, according to the Internal Revenue Service. The credit is designed to encourage small employers to offer health insurance coverage for the first time or maintain coverage they already have. In general, the credit is available to small employers that pay at least half the cost of single coverage for their employees.

- ▶ The maximum credit is 35 percent of premiums paid in 2010 by eligible small business employers and 25 percent of premiums paid by eligible employers that are tax-exempt organizations.
- ▶ In 2014, this maximum credit increases to 50 percent of premiums paid by eligible small business employers and 35 percent of premiums paid by eligible employers that are tax-exempt organizations.
- ▶ The credit is specifically targeted to help small businesses and tax-exempt organizations that primarily employ low and moderate income workers. It is generally available to employers that have fewer than 25 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees paying wages averaging less than \$50,000 per employee per year. Because the eligibility formula is based in part on the number of FTEs, not the number of employees, many businesses will qualify even if they employ more than 25 individual workers.
- ▶ The maximum credit goes to smaller employers —those with 10 or fewer FTEs —paying annual average wages of \$25,000 or less.
- ▶ Eligible small businesses can claim the credit as part of the general business credit starting with the 2010 income tax return they file in 2011. For tax-exempt employers, the IRS will provide further information on how to claim the credit.

More information on these tax credits is available online at www.irs.gov or by contacting your local IRS office 1-800-829-4933.

RURAL FUTURES



Senator Aubertine and DOT Acting Commissioner Stanley Gee

NYS DOT Withdraws Proposed Finger Lakes Region Truck Ban

Agriculture industry would have been hard-hit

Senator Darrel Aubertine, Chair of both the Senate standing Committee on Agriculture and the Commission on Rural Resources, has been serving on a Governor's task force to review regulations proposed by the Department of Transportation (DOT) to restrict large trucks from select roads in the Finger Lakes region. The regulations, intended to remove large trash trucks from local roads on their way to landfills near the Finger Lakes, were cited by many as an unreasonable burden on farmers, the trucking industry and commerce in general.

Senator Aubertine pointed to the increased costs for fuel and tolls that would be incurred by farmers and business owners if longer transportation routes were mandated, as well as the environmental damage caused by increased emissions of air pollutants, as reasons why the DOT should abandon the proposed regulation. He also questioned whether the regulation could even be enforced.

In his comments to the DOT, Senator Aubertine stated, "Now is not the time to implement regulations that

are counter to economic recovery. The proposed rules will increase the costs of doing business for the agriculture industry, which will in turn increase the cost of agriculture products, negatively impacting New York State's already ailing economy."

Following receipt of comments from Senator Aubertine and others, DOT re-evaluated their proposed big truck ban and realized that the true effect would be to move the undesired big trucks from one set of local roads to others. As a result, the DOT has, for now, removed the proposed trucking ban from consideration. It appears, however, that the administration has not completely given up on the idea. Recent statements from the Governor's staff indicate that they are continuing to collect data and may reconsider implementing some restrictions in the future. Depending on how such a ban is crafted, it could have the potential to cause serious harm to New York's agriculture industry and small businesses in affected areas. Senator Aubertine and the Rural Resource Commission will continue to follow this issue closely.

Aubertine warns seniors of Medicare insurance scammers

State Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine and the New York State Insurance Department are advising senior citizens not to give out personal information to anyone claiming they can deliver or speed up \$250 rebates for Medicare Part D now available through federal health care reforms. The Senator is urging senior citizens to take heed of scammers trying to profit from Medicare rebates.

There are reports of seniors being contacted and asked for personal information such as their Social Security and bank account numbers. Others have been told that they can get their rebates faster by paying an upfront fee. This is not true.

“Too often we see con artists trying to take advantage of our senior citizens by stealing personal information,” Sen. Aubertine said. “Our seniors need to be aware that in other states there have been reports of people asking for personal information or an upfront fee to expedite these rebate checks. It’s important to remember never

to give out bank account information, social security numbers or any other personal information. There is a one-time, tax-free rebate being sent to eligible senior citizens to help them pay for the “doughnut hole”—the gap above the initial prescription drug coverage limit but below the point where catastrophic coverage begins. Rebate checks will be coming directly from the federal government and not through a third party.

Any seniors who suspect fraud should contact the Insurance Department’s Consumer Services Bureau between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday toll-free at 800-342-3736. Information is also available on the Department’s website, www.ins.state.ny.us.

Detailed information about the \$250 rebate may be obtained directly from Medicare by contacting 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), or visiting www.medicare.gov.

