



Niagara County  
Public Information Office  
**MEDIA RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: CHRISTIAN W. PECK  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
TEL: (716) 439-7241  
FAX: (716) 439-7058

**COUNTY LAWMAKERS SET TO OPPOSE EXTREME FARM BILL**  
**PROPOSED LAW SETS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, 8-HOUR WORKDAYS FOR SHORT-TERM HELP**

LOCKPORT—Niagara County lawmakers will take up a resolution tonight opposing a state law proposed by a pair of Queens Democrats that would require small family farms to enter into collective bargaining agreements with day laborers, many of whom spend fewer than two weeks at local farms.

The bill, which several county lawmakers have termed “radical,” would also impose eight-hour workdays and shortened workweeks—conditions that would likely drive many small, family-owned farms under. Equally vexing for county lawmakers, however, was that the sponsors of the bill in both the New York State Assembly and the State Senate represent districts in Queens that don’t have a single farm.

**[CLICK HERE TO VIEW VIDEO OF COUNTY LEGISLATORS OPPOSING RADICAL FARM BILL IN STATE ASSEMBLY](#)**

“I’m a farmer. I know what it is to work in the fields, to rush to harvest a crop before it goes to seed or the frost comes or it rains, to work from sunup to sundown. And I’m proud of it,” said Legislator Gerald K. Farnham, R-Pendleton, one of the two chief sponsors of a resolution opposing the bill. “This bill was clearly written by someone whose only knowledge of farming comes from watching Green Acres on TV.”

Farnham and Legislator John D. Ceretto, R-Lewiston, the resolution’s other sponsor, said they became increasingly concerned about the bill, A.1867B, which passed the Assembly by an overwhelming margin, when it did not immediately die in the State Senate. In recent weeks, the Senate majority has held hearings on their version of the bill, S.2247B, and moved it closer to a floor vote.

“This bill has nothing to do with unions and the right of workers to organize, and everything to do with typical Albany dysfunction and downstate politicians advocating positions that would cripple our local economies,” Ceretto said after he and Farnham introduced the resolution, which both predicted would pass by a wide margin. “As someone who has worked

closely with unions in the past, let me tell you, this bill is insulting because it trivializes everything local organized labor has fought for.”

“Anyone who understands growing seasons and the burdens placed on our farmers to harvest their crop in a narrow window understands the bad thinking behind this bill,” Ceretto added.

The pair aren’t alone in their opposition to the bill, either. The Farm Bureau and the Business Council of New York State have both taken strong positions against the bill, as have several other county and municipal governments throughout Upstate New York. The bill, meanwhile, has received the support of the New York chapter of the ACLU.

“Only the dysfunctional and derelict leadership of the New York State Assembly could actually advance a bill that is so bad for agriculture in a state where agriculture is such an important industry,” said Farnham, noting that Niagara County, which ranks eighth in the state in total crop production—and first in the state in peaches, fourth in the state in apples, and among the top cabbage producers in the nation—would be particularly hard-hit.

“To put things in perspective, our own state government—the Department of Agriculture and Markets—tells us that the total agriculture receipts for our county in 2004 were \$68.1 million,” Farnham said. “This legislation would take a \$68 million bite out of our county’s economy. Maybe we’re a bit sensitive about this topic here.”

Ceretto said he and Farnham hoped that the state Legislature would reject a bill written by Downstate interests without input from Upstate lawmakers and the individuals that would be impacted.

“No one wants, more than us, for farm workers to be treated with dignity,” Ceretto said. “But if the Assembly and Senate want to regulate farm labor, maybe they should ask someone who’s actually been on a farm for some advice on how best to do it.”