

DRAFT LEGISLATIVE LETTER TO THE FARM LABOR WAGE BOARD

Ms. Brenda McDuffie, Chair
New York Farm Labor Wage Board

Roberta Reardon, Commissioner
New York State Department of Labor

New York State Department of Labor
Building 12
W. A. Harriman Campus
Albany, NY 12240

Dear Ms. McDuffie and Commissioner Reardon:

I understand New York's newly instituted Farm Labor Wage Board is holding a series of public hearings in February, March and April as mandated in the recently enacted Farm Laborer Fair Labor Practices Act. During the Wage Board hearings, the board will consider whether to lower the overtime threshold for farm workers from the current 60-hour workweek.

I share farmers' concerns that it is far too early to even begin to consider lowering the threshold, as New York is only weeks into the implementation of the new law. Farms have not experienced even one planting or harvest season under the new overtime rate.

It could take several years to have a true understanding of the overtime repercussions on farmers. There are too many unknown variables, including extreme weather events and large swings in commodity prices, that could impact labor costs and employee schedules on a year-to-year basis.

I ask the Farm Labor Wage Board to hold off on making any recommendations to lower the overtime threshold below 60 hours a week until the proper data is collected on a comprehensive basis and can be appropriately analyzed for impacts on the farm community.

Sincerely,