



LONG ISLAND AGRICULTURE: BIG BUSINESS

New York State does not provide basic worker protections to farmers such as minimum wage, overtime or the right to join a union. One reason farmers say they oppose the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act is that they are small, family businesses who cannot afford to comply with this law. Joe Gergela, the Executive Director of the Long Island Farm Bureau has led LI opposition to the law, using what environmentalist Richard Amper called a description of farmers as "an 'aw shucks,' unassuming bunch of folks...." In fact, Amper said, *LI farmers are "a big industry with a lot of clout."* (Newsday, April 20, 2014) Here are just a few facts about Long Island's prosperous agricultural industry:

The State of LI Agriculture

In 2007, Long Island had agricultural sales of **\$258.7 million**, which is the highest of any County in the State. Suffolk County has 585 farms and 34,400 acres of farmland.¹ "Suffolk is New York's top producer of greenhouse, nursery, floriculture, and sod, and is home to one-quarter of the State's wineries."² A 1997 report found that Suffolk County's total crop market value was \$160,784,000.³ Suffolk County agriculture sales per farm is **three times the state average**⁴ - farms averaged \$276,993 in sales a year, with a return over \$68,000 per farm.⁵ The wine industry alone provides \$30 million a year to the local economy.⁶ In fact, Outside of California, Suffolk County has the largest premium wine industry.⁷ Suffolk's access to the greater Long Island and NYC market gives the County's farmers' a competitive advantage.

Employment on Long Island Farms

East End farmers employ around 7,000 people, 4,000 of whom are seasonal. The wine industry hires approximately 1,500 workers.⁸ A 2013 survey distributed to 143 east end growers indicates that on average agriculture producers hire 10 full-time and 16 part-time employees, and the median was 3 full-time and 6 part-time farmhands. One producer hires an astounding 150 full-time and 300 part-time workers.⁹ The same survey finds "Nearly three-quarters of our survey respondents have reached gross sales equal to or exceeding pre-recession levels and incumbent farmers are expecting to increase, rather than decrease, the size of their operation by a 2 to 1 margin."¹⁰

¹ Office of New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli. *The Role of Agriculture in the New York State Economy* (February 2010): pg. 4, available at <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/other/agriculture21-2010.pdf>

² Ibid

³ Town of Riverhead Planning Board, Land Ethics, Inc., Dunn Engineering Associates. "Agriculture Element" *Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan* (NOV 2003): pg. 3-3, available at http://www.townofriverheadny.gov/files/documents/Ch03_Agriculture.pdf

⁴ Ibid, 3-5

⁵ Ibid, 3-5

⁶ Ibid, 3-3

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Harrington, Mark. "Frigid Weather Stalls Work on East End Grapevines - Newsday." *Newsday*. 16 Feb. 2014.

⁹ Ruckdeschel, August. *The State of The Suffolk County Agriculture Industry*. (December 2013): pg. 7, available at <http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/0/ecodev/Suffolk%20County%20Agriculture%20Industry%20Report%202013.pdf>

¹⁰ Ruckdeschel, August. *The State of The Suffolk County Agriculture Industry*. (December 2013) pg. 3, available at <http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/0/ecodev/Suffolk%20County%20Agriculture%20Industry%20Report%202013.pdf>