

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
from Assembly Speaker  
Stanley Steingut

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 3, 1975

STEINGUT CALLS FOR NEW STATE AGRICULTURE POLICY;  
APPOINTS TASK FORCE TO AID FARMERS AND CONSUMERS

Norwich, N.Y., Oct. 3--Assembly Speaker Stanley Steingut today called for a state policy to help farmers and to "restore vitality to the farming industry."

The Speaker announced the appointment of a task force composed of four Assembly Committee chairmen, Agriculture, Consumer Protection, Education and Real Property Tax, "to formulate such a farm and food policy for the state." The task force, he said, will focus on developing programs to help farmers and the food industry within the state and to protect consumers from higher food prices.

"New York State agriculture is in deep trouble," Steingut said. "The number of family farms has declined to 60 per cent of those in existence in 1950. I am most interested in assuring our food producers of a state policy aimed at restoring vitality to this critical industry."

"The problems of the farmer faced with high tax assessments and low income, high estate taxes and red tape paper work after a long day of physical labor, have not fallen on deaf ears," the Speaker said. "We are determined to give him help and ease his burden."

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Steingut's task force announcement was made during a dinner address to Chenango County Democratic leaders. He praised Governor Carey and Agriculture Commissioner John Dyson for addressing the farming issue in a recent report called "Feeding our People." The report contains many recommendations the Assembly is considering, he said.

Steingut also criticized federal farm policies for favoring large midwestern grain, corn and soybean operations at the expense of farmers and consumers in the northeast.

Steingut told his audience that the task force, which will be "headed by one of your neighbors and a man who knows farms and farmers, Assemblyman Dan Walsh of Cattaraugus County, the Agriculture Committee chairman, will have as its prime objective the preservation of the family farm, and to do so, we must make farming in New York State attractive to our young people. We want to keep them here at home, not drive them away by a hostile or apathetic attitude on the part of state government."

Task Force on Farm, Food and Nutrition Policy  
for Discussion Purposes

I. Goals of the Task Force

- 1) The Foremost Goal of the Task Force is to promote activities which assure nutritional health for all New Yorkers.

The link between nutrition and health has been amply demonstrated. The role of government in encouraging activities leading to nutritional well-being is developing in a piecemeal manner in the federal governments and in some states. Some of the values in furthering nutritional well-being are the potential reduction in health care costs stemming from the prevention of illness, not merely by early diagnosis of problems, but by an increase in the incidence of health. The relationship between diet and disease has to be emphasized to accomplish this goal.

Nutritional health is also linked to academic performance and a stable, productive work force. Moreover, success in school and on the job have emerged as the two conditions necessary for obtaining adequate income and the reduction of the attendant pathologies of crime and anti-social behavior. While many other factors bear on all these social and economic issues, nutritional health is regarded as a prime target of opportunity for governmental intervention to promote these ends which are shared by most of the population.

The basic criterion by which Task Force activities are to be judged is whether or not they further, directly or less directly, the goal of nutritional well-being for the citizens of the state.

- 2) The second goal of the Task Force is to make the most efficient use of publicly funded food programs for the benefit of their target populations and the economy of the state.

The most nutritionally vulnerable populations in the state are the young, the old, the poor and the ill. Nearly one billion dollars is spent directly on programs which furnish food or food purchasing power to these groups. Criticism of the manner in which these programs operate has been growing for several years. For example it has been charged that some of the programs are underutilized because of obstacles to participation of a financial or bureaucratic nature. Some of the programs which involve direct feeding have been criticized because of the quality of the food, its nutritive value and appeal to the consumer. Some of the programs are unavailable to people who need and want them because of limited financing.

The value of these programs is not only to the consumer, but to the business sector and the economy of the state. Programs which are underutilized or underfunded reduce the amount of money being spent on food related activities in the state. Since most of the program funds are from the federal government, unused money is spent elsewhere in the nation.

- 3) The third goal of the Task Force is to expand opportunities for New Yorkers to obtain nutritionally adequate diets at reasonable costs.

There are four parts to this goal:

The first is the expansion of direct marketing programs and adjunct activities to enable people to purchase food at a lower cost through buying clubs, co-ops, and by growing their own food. It is particularly important to review food availability in poor rural and urban areas of the state.

The second is the expansion of nutrition education in all spheres of government and government supported food programming. A lack of money is not the only reason for poor nutrition. The curricula of our schools, from elementary through graduate, are notably deficient in prompting sound nutritional practices. Insufficient use is made of channels of Public Information to inform the general public of the value of good nutritional habits.

The third is scrutiny of trends in the pricing of food items. While food is not a utility, the price of which is regulated by the state, its value to the public health and welfare is at least the equal of telephone, oil and electric service. Factors and practices which inflate the cost of food, deny people the opportunity to make the best use of their food dollar. It is in the public interest to ensure that food is available at the lowest possible cost.

The fourth is regulating the quality and quantity of information on food products. The food industry speaks to the public through advertising and the packaging of their products. Misleading statements, omission of facts, appeals to children and inadequate labeling of ingredients and nutritive values constitute threats to health and well-being. Food information, like health information, must be accurate and reasonable.

- 4) The fourth goal of the Task Force is to strengthen the capability of the agricultural industry to meet the challenges of the future.

There are five parts to this goal:

The first is assuring the financial viability of farmers. It is in the public interest to assist farmers to meet their financial needs in the face of rising prices for grain and capital equipment, losses caused by marketing problems, losses caused by climatic conditions and higher costs of doing business. Federal programs must be reviewed for gaps in coverage and banking practices reviewed for dysfunctional loan policies.

The second is establishing tax, fiscal and land use policies enabling farmers to stay in farming and providing incentives for the growth of farming. State policy in taxing farm and in mortgage practices, sometimes results in farm land being removed from farming and in discouraging the establishment of farms. Retention of efficient farmland and the continued development of farms are necessary to assure the health of our agricultural community.

The third is developing regulations which expedite sound farming and marketing activities. Farming and marketing are complex activities involving a large number of statutory and regulatory procedures.

Updating existing rules which tend to make it unnecessarily difficult for the farmer to operate his farming business would improve the production and distribution of farm products.

The fourth is developing programs which reduce energy costs for farmers in the production and distribution of food. Petroleum based products are utilized by farmers in the growing and transportation of farm products. High energy consumption activities, while increasing productivity rely on sources of energy about which future availability is problematic. Alternatives to petroleum based products for future utilization have to be further developed in state research programs and tested under actual conditions. Marketing programs, which lessen the distance goods have to travel before sale also should be expanded.

The fifth is expanding education and research programs to benefit the agricultural industry and the consumer. Progress in food policy involves the capability of the farmer to use his land in the most efficient manner commensurate with the demand for his produce. Developing new technology for farming, developing new markets for the sale of goods, utilizing existing information through farmer and consumer education programs, all serve the interests of the people of the state.

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THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

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Committee  
on  
Agriculture  
Subcommittee  
on  
Food, Farm & Nutrition  
Policy  
Assemblywoman Estella Diggs  
Chairwoman

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DATE: September 26, 1979

TO: Assemblywoman Estella B. Diggs

FROM: Change Parker

RE: Formation of Assembly Subcommittee on Food, Farm & Nutrition  
Policy and Its Goals

Assembly Speaker Stanley Steingut created the Assembly Task Force on Farm and Food Policy on October 3, 1975. This was due, in large part, to the efforts of four people: David Langdon, Barbara Mark, Frank Mauro and Mabel Gil. Assemblyman Dan Walsh, Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, became the first Chairman, with the Task Force composed of the chairmen of the Agriculture, Consumer Protection, Education and Real Property Tax Committees. Its original purpose was twofold: preserve and revitalize the family farm and food industry within the state and to protect consumers from high food prices.

Chairman Walsh held a series of meetings around the state on farm problems in early 1976. This generated many legislative bills which subsequently became law. After January, 1977, when Assemblyman Walsh became Assistant Majority Leader, his last official action with the Task Force was to sponsor a major symposium on "Kids, Food and Television."

Although the succeeding Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, Assemblyman Bianchi, was not directly involved enough with the issues to carry on the Task Force, Mabel Gil, as Program Analyst with the Task Force and Agriculture Committee, carried on the Task Force's legislative bill drafting and research.

Subsequently, Speaker Steingut was invited to sponsor a conference on June 6th, 1977, on "Are There Food Shortages in Our Future." This conference was initiated by the Commission on Peace and Justice of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, the Schenectady Inner-City Ministry, and Otsego Urban Rural Self-Development Associates.

Assemblywoman E. Diggs  
September 26, 1979  
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The Conference voted to establish a Food and Farm Policy for the Northeast Region, and a Task Force to work on these issues. Speaker Steingut was requested to provide office space for this "Northeast Task Force" in the legislature--which he did.

As a result of the issues raised and shared in regional conferences (Boston) and meetings by the Northeast Task Force, Speaker Steingut appointed Assemblyman Maurice Hinchey as the official Chairman of a revitalized Task Force on Food and Farm Policy in September, 1977. Assemblyman Hinchey, as Chairman, appointed Mabel Gil as Administrative Director.

With the Task Force members still the chairmen of the Agriculture, Education, Consumer Protection and Real Property Tax Committees, in January, 1978, Arthur Schiff was appointed Staff Director and Mabel Gil, Associate Director, with Janet Kestenbaum as Senior Research Associate.

In January, 1979, Assembly Speaker Stanley Fink appointed you Chairwoman and designated the Task Force as a Subcommittee on Food, Farm and Nutrition Policy within the Committee on Agriculture.

During 1977 and 1978, the Task Force allocated its resources to understand better the interconnected dimensions of the food issue in New York and throughout the Northeast Region. In December, 1978, a series of three public hearings were held, in conjunction with the Committee on Education, on School Lunch Programs.

Overall, it became apparent that despite the number of state and Federal agencies concerned with food issues, there was no planned policy aimed at assuring New Yorkers an adequate supply of quality food at affordable prices, nor a mechanism for establishing one.

Thus, the goal of the Subcommittee is to develop a comprehensive state food policy whose goal will be to assure every consumer in New York informed access to quality food at affordable prices. To accomplish this goal, it will be necessary to revitalize the agricultural industry, increase the viability of productive family farms and crop lands, improve the in-state food distribution and marketing network, operate Federal food programs at a maximum degree of effectiveness, and encourage greater consumer nutrition and food policy education and community participation programs.

CP/pep