

## **From The Office of Senator Kenneth P. LaValle**

As I reflect on my years as representative of the First Senate District, one of the issues of greatest concern has been the preservation of open space and the East End's agricultural way of life. While the Farmland Preservation Program I sponsored has been a tremendous resource in this effort, I realize when drafting this initiative that it would be only the beginning. Keeping farmers on their land and Suffolk County the top-producing agricultural county in New York State would require continued perseverance and determination.

In the last few years, development pressure and strong competition from foreign producers has greatly intensified. I sponsored the Peconic Bay Community Preservation Fund to help towns maintain their agricultural industries through the purchase of development rights to local farmland. In less than three years of its existence, this fund has helped preserve thousands of acres of valuable space in the Peconic Bay region. I am pleased to report that, this session, legislation I sponsored providing towns the ability to extend the Preservation Fund an additional ten years, from 2010 to 2020, was signed into law.

I see this as a win-win situation. It offers both local and regional benefits for economies deeply rooted in agriculture and tourism. The towns now have the resources needed to move forward with plans that enable farm families to remain in agriculture and enables farm stands and wineries to keep local produce close to the people. In addition, safeguarding open space from development will ensure that the character for the East End, with scenic vistas and tranquil rural atmosphere, continues to attract visitors and that the quality of life local residents cherish is preserved for generations to come.

While it can be a challenge to secure sufficient funding for farmland preservation programs, this year, \$4.4 million in New York State funding was made available for the preservation of targeted farms in the Towns of Riverhead, Southold and Southampton, as well as Suffolk County. The Long Island Farm Bureau has done an excellent job in gaining federal support which, when combined with state and local partnerships, will provide for a future of even greater accomplishments in farmland protection.

My wish for the East End is to grow crops, not houses! The time is right for a concerted push to reach our goal of preserving 11,000 more acres of prime agricultural land over the next five years. I am happy to be part of the First Senate District's farmland protection team and remain committed to supporting the Farm Bureau's efforts. Together, we can accomplish great things.