

Washingtonians get taste of New York state's bounty

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Denizens of Capitol Hill dined on veggie-stuffed spring rolls from Freshwise Farms in Penfield and washed it down with ice wine from Casa Larga Vineyards in Perinton on Tuesday as part of U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's annual New York Farm Day.

The annual luncheon featuring New York foods and beverages draws about 1,000 visitors to the Kennedy Caucus Room of the Russell Building in Washington, D.C. The visitors enjoy offerings of growers, processors and retailers from around New York. Long Island seafood, maple syrup from around the state, and grape juice grown and processed in the Chautauqua region were all highlighted.

Gillibrand said the event draws attention to the bounty of New York and highlights how im-

portant agriculture is to the state's economy.

It also provided a forum for the junior senator — a Democrat facing an election challenge from Republican Joseph DioGuardi — to promote three of her agriculture bills.

One would tighten standards for milk in the United States, in reaction to the European Union's threat to ban U.S. dairy imports starting in December as long as it fails to meet the European standard.

"If we lose our ability to export to the EU, it would have disastrous consequences to the Northeast dairy industry," Gillibrand said in a telephone news conference Tuesday. Europe requires no more than 400,000 somatic cells per milliliter, while the United States allows up to 750,000. High somatic cell counts by themselves are not detrimental to consumers, but can be an indicator of poor hy-

giene on farms, according to Gillibrand.

The senator said U.S. producers should have no trouble meeting the new standard as the average U.S. count is 262,000. The New York average is even lower, at about 250,000, she said.

Gillibrand said she also is asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture to make an immediate rule change even before legislation can be passed.

Gillibrand's other agriculture bills focus on changing a technicality preventing many farmers from qualifying for Farm Credit loans, and providing federal payments to muck farmers who employ certain conservation measures.

The senator adopted New York Farm Day, started by her predecessor, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. □

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