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LONG ISLAND

# State pollution bill worries LI farmers

BY JENNIFER BARRIOS

[jennifer.barrios@newsday.com](mailto:jennifer.barrios@newsday.com)

Suffolk County farmers and their advocates yesterday spoke out against an island-wide pollution-control bill that they say will harm the agriculture industry.

The Melville meeting marked National Agriculture Day, but the Long Island Water Pollution Control Act — introduced in the State Legislature last year — was on the minds of the farmers gathered there.

Joseph Gergela, executive director of the Long Island Farm Bureau, voiced concerns about some of the bill's proposed water pollution regulations, which he said would restrict use of fertilizers and pesticides.

"We want to do the right thing, but we also want to make sure our business remains viable," Gergela said.

Vito Minei, executive director of the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, said an "adverse regulatory environment" could keep young farmers from entering the industry and older ones from staying in it.

"The obvious concern by farmers, young and old, is that new legislation might impose untenable requirements," he said.

The measure aims to create a water quality commission with an eye toward reducing



BARRY SLOAN

Long Island Farm Bureau executive director Joe Gergela speaks at a news conference at Schmitt's Family Farm in Melville.

■ **Video:** [newsday.com/suffolk](http://newsday.com/suffolk)

levels of nitrogen and pesticides in groundwater. Nitrogen is an ingredient in many fertilizers.

But the bill's authors, Assemb. Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst) and Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson), say they will revise the measure after the state budget is passed, based partly on feedback from farmers, environ-

mental groups and others.

"We want to help farmers in a way that protects our drinking water and continues to grow our farming industry," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

"We believe that's possible," she said. "We shouldn't choose between growing food and poisoning groundwater."