



## PORTRAITS OF THE OTTAWA VALLEY SEED GROWERS

### SENATOR CLINTON AND THE CUCHI-CUCHI GIRL

By [Tom Van Dusen](#)

I just came back from the aptly-named Great New York State Fair and my head is still spinning! So much to see and do! So little time! Two days, to be exact. I thought that would be plenty. In fact, never having been before, I thought one day would be plenty. I was sorely mistaken.

My visit was part of a bus tour organized by the Ottawa Valley Seed Growers Association, a fact-finding mission to be precise. Association directors wanted to see if there were any novel ideas which could be incorporated into their annual Ottawa Valley Farm Show.

On the way to Syracuse, the tour company representative who accompanied us opined that you could take both Ottawa's Central Canada Exhibition and Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition, stick them into one corner of the GNYSF, and promptly lose them. While that might have been an exaggeration, there certainly was a lot to see and do at America's original state fair, established in 1841 to promote agriculture and household manufacturing.

Spread over 375 acres with 21 permanent buildings, the fair draws more than 1 million visitors a year. It encompasses a racetrack, grandstand, several other performance spaces, and competitions in everything from apple pies to rooster crowing... more than 37,320 entries in various categories last year. The diversity of attractions is startling. After watching dairy judging for awhile, the visitor can turn a corner on the midway and suddenly discover a live sea lion show. That gullible visitor - no names please - may end up paying \$10 for a picture of himself with a sea lion's bushy face resting on his shoulder.

The Great New York State Fair is a place of extremes. One minute you can watch zany blond comedienne and singer Charo, the so-called cuchi-cuchi girl, delightfully mugging it up on stage; the next minute, you can digest zany blond Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's delightful agricultural positions.



For a farm crowd from Eastern Ontario, the beauty of the Great New York State Fair is that it has remained completely true to its agricultural roots. There's a thick underlay of agriculture right across the grounds, with all livestock sectors amply represented and various farm-related organizations in broad evidence.

And what an accent on youth! The 4-H display at the State Fair left us awestruck. Never before had my companions seen so many 4-H projects gathered under one massive roof. As N.Y. Senator Clinton boasted in a booklet created especially for the occasion: "Since that first fair and through more than a century and a half, agriculture was - and remains - New York's number one industry." That industry contributes \$4 billion annually to the state's economy and employs 1.2 million people. Dairy alone is responsible for close to half of those receipts.



Like everyone else in New York State with something to sell, Clinton had a booth at the fair. She wasn't manning it when I walked by, but the literature her staff was handing out provided a good opportunity to assess the high-profile senator's agricultural policies. A possible presidential contender, Clinton portrays herself as a champion of agriculture, annually hosting New York Farm Day on Capitol Hill, promoting a farm-to-fork initiative connecting producers with distributors, retailers and consumers, advocating expansion of farmers' markets throughout the state, and hosting organic workshops to provide farmers with more information about value-added options.

Earlier this year, Senator Clinton opposed the Administration's budget proposals to cut the Milk Income Loss Contract by five per cent and to tax every dairy farmer in America three cents per hundredweight which would have amounted to a \$3.5 million cost to New York State producers. Congress ended up extending the MILC until September, 2007, and sidelining the controversial tax.

Clinton is working to build a strong regional food system in N.Y. State, to strengthen the distribution infrastructure and expand markets for locally produced agricultural products while improving access to healthy food for children and communities.



In her material, Clinton said she looks forward to an "exuberant" visit to the fair every year to discuss the concerns and hopes of her constituents first hand. Live and in person, exuberant Charo told her audience she too loves returning to the Great New York State Fair every year where she can get up close and entertain her fans.

Often at the Great New York State Fair, there are closer similarities between salespeople and their products than it first appears. Cuchi-cuchi!

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