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Sen. Corzine gets feel for county

Saturday, August 07, 2004

By **MARTIN C. BRICKETTO**
 Staff Writer

PILESGROVE TWP. -- U.S. Senator Jon S. Corzine, D-NJ, was in the area Friday getting in touch with some of the Garden State's southern agricultural gems.

Himself the product of a small family farm in central Illinois, Corzine toured the bustling buildings and stables of the Salem County Fair in the company of New Jersey Farm Bureau Executive Director Peter J. Furey, state Sen. Stephen Sweeney, D-3rd Dist., Assemblyman Doug Fisher and several county Democrats.

"To me, it's reminiscent of the strength of America," he said of the county's biggest farm-related event. "It's about community and people coming together."

"I hope he takes away the rural, agricultural character of the county and how important it is to support it in any way we can," said Freeholder Beth Timberman.

Before Corzine came to the fairgrounds, Wm. Schober Sons farm in Monroeville, roughly a mile from Upper Pittsgrove Township over the Gloucester County border, hosted him and more than 20 other guests for peach cobbler and vanilla ice cream. All in all, he said the day was a chance to show support for agriculture in southern New Jersey.

"He's doing his homework and reaching out to his constituents," said Furey.

Corzine, who has made three visits to past fairs, began his visit here with a stop by the Salem County Democrats' table in the main building, posing for a

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picture with Democratic freeholder candidates William "Rex" Cobb and Lee Ware and clerk candidate James Kates.

Following the snapshot, Corzine headed to the fair's stables to press palms and chat with southern New Jersey dairy farmers like Travis Eachus and Frank Laughin. Eachus -- nephew of Pilesgrove resident and new state Board of Agriculture member Milton "Woody" Eachus -- is the owner of GlenElla Farms in Cumberland County, and Laughin was at the fair representing Bayside Dairy Department of Agriculture Industries.

The two fielded questions from Corzine regarding dairy subsidies.

"I want to be supportive of all the communities in New Jersey," said Corzine. "Rural and agricultural sectors need our attention."

The pre-fair visit to the Wm. Schober Sons Farm took place in conjunction with national Community Farmers' Market Week. The Hurff family owns the Schober Farm's 250 acres of peaches, applies and nectarines, and bring their products to several area farmers markets including Salem.

"We're trying to survive by selling direct," said Myron Hurff.

An increasing number of New Jersey farmers are selling products directly to consumers via homegrown markets to gain more control over prices. In 2002, the value of agricultural products sold directly to consumers -- rather than through a supermarket -- reached almost \$20 million statewide and topped the \$1 million mark in Salem County.

Corzine thinks the federal government can do more to help agriculture in the Garden State, especially in terms of specialty crops.

"We need to make sure that national programs take into account specialty aspects of our agricultural life in America," he said. "It can't just be grains, cotton and tobacco."

When Corzine left for the Salem County Fair (with a crate of Schober peaches), the Hurffs couldn't go with him. They had to get ready for two farmers' markets they planned to sell at on Saturday.

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