



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara's weekly column 'From the Capitol' -- for the week of July 28, 2025 -- 'One of New York's greatest success stories'

THOMAS F. O'MARA July 28, 2025

| ISSUE: **NYS WINE AND GRAPE INDUSTRY**



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Senator O'Mara offers his weekly perspective on many of the key challenges and issues facing the Legislature, as well as on legislative actions, local initiatives, state programs and policies, and more. Stop back every Monday for Senator O'Mara's latest column...

This week, "One of New York's greatest success stories"

The rebirth and spectacular rise of New York State’s wine and grape industry over the past generation – joined by, especially over the past decade, the burgeoning industry surrounding craft breweries, cideries, and distilleries – stands as one of our state’s greatest success stories.

Especially right here in the Finger Lakes region.

The New York Wine and Grape Foundation has noted this success in past annual reports, “The State’s investment in the wine and grape industry provides sound economic returns in the form of tax revenue, jobs, and rural economic development. This public-private partnership drives the grape and wine industry’s growth and makes it a major state economic engine that generates more than \$6.65 billion in direct economic impact, supports 71,950 jobs, contributes \$1.12 billion in state and local taxes, and attracts over 4.71 million tourists to wineries every year who spend \$1.33 billion.”

Those are remarkable numbers and a testament to the commitment, excellence, hard work, innovation, and quality of New York’s wine producers and grape growers.

Earlier this month, the 39th annual New York Wine Classic, a nationally recognized competition, announced this year’s winners. For the second consecutive year and the third time overall, one of the Finger Lakes region’s premier wineries, Weis Vineyards of Hammondsport, received the prestigious “Winery of the Year” award, which is presented to the winery with the best overall showing based on the level and number of awards in relation to entries.

Weis Vineyards Winemaker and Owners Peter and Ashlee Weis said, “We’re incredibly honored, and still a little shocked, to be named Winery of the Year for the third time. It’s a true privilege to be recognized among so many outstanding New York producers. This award is a nod to the passion and hustle of our amazing team and grape growers; none of this would be possible without them. And to our community: thank you for cheering us on every step of the way. Zum Wohl!”

In addition to Weis Vineyards, which also received “Best in Category” recognition for Best White Wine (2024 Grüner Veltliner) and Best Pink Wine (2024 Dry Rosé), numerous other Finger Lakes wineries were also recognized, including “Best in Category” winners Billsboro Winery (2023 Après, Best Dessert Wine) and Montezuma Winery (Crimson Queen Cranberry & Rhubarb, Best Specialty Wine).

In short, it was once again a great showing overall for the Finger Lakes region!

New York State Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, “Our wine makers are gaining fast recognition across the globe for something we’ve long known: New York is a premier wine making region with some of the highest quality producers in the world. The prestigious New York Wine Classic helps us shine the spotlight on our industry and our producers, who are incredibly important to our agricultural industry, supporting our grape growers and helping to fuel our economy. Congratulations to all of the wineries who entered into this competition and who continue to set themselves apart by producing some of the very best wines in the world.”

For a full list of Best in Class and medal winners, visit <https://newyorkwines.org/new-york-wine-classic-2025/>.

Congratulations to all of you and thank you for your amazing contributions to our region and the quality, strength, and pride of so many of our communities!

Read and find out more about Finger Lakes Wine Country – the region’s wine trails, nearly 150 wineries, and over 9,000 acres of vineyards -- at: <https://newyorkwines.org/avas/finger-lakes/>.

The same goes for the exciting future of the craft beverage industry. At this moment, there are more licensed breweries in New York than at any other time in the state’s history. According to the New York State Brewers Association (NYSBA, newyorkcraftbeer.com), the number of New York State breweries grew from 95 in 2012 to more than 535 in 2023. New York State craft beer is currently fourth in the nation, generating an economic impact of \$5.4 billion. Over a decade from 2011 to 2021, the state’s craft breweries increased production from 557,436 in 2011 to 1,257,395 barrels.

I have welcomed numerous opportunities to help develop, sponsor, and strongly support bipartisan efforts to solidify our world-class wine and craft beverage industries, as well as agriculture, small business, and tourism throughout the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide.

Most importantly, New York government must continue to take commonsense steps and regulatory reforms that recognize the ongoing need to support these vibrant industries and help them continue to grow, create more jobs, and spark regional growth through the unlimited economic spin-off opportunities they offer.

One thing is certain: These industries are economic engines throughout this region and New York State overall, providing good, sustainable livelihoods for thousands of New Yorkers and serving as steady foundations for so many local communities.