



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Legislature gives go-ahead to O'Mara-sponsored legislation to encourage growth of industrial hemp; Cornell University, Farm Bureau, others support move to strengthen ag industry, create jobs

THOMAS F. O'MARA June 12, 2014

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Albany, N.Y., June 11 —The New York State Legislature today gave final approval to legislation sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C-Big Flats) and Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (D-Endwell) to make New York the 16th state in the nation to set the framework for growing industrial hemp as a way to diversify and strengthen New York's leading agricultural industry.

The legislation (S.7047/A.8297) now goes to Governor Andrew Cuomo to be signed into law.

“The New York Farm Bureau, Cornell University researchers and other agricultural leaders and farm advocates recognize industrial hemp as a potentially lucrative way to provide new economic opportunities for our farmers,” said O’Mara (R,C-Big Flats), a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and the Legislature’s joint, bipartisan Commission on Rural Resources. “This proposed pilot program would help New York State secure a strong position at the forefront of a future industry that can diversify and strengthen our agricultural industry, generate revenue and create jobs.”

Lupardo said, “This bill positions New York State to take advantage of what will certainly become a new industry. Not only will this allow us to begin researching potential uses for this lucrative crop, but also the potential for new manufacturing and markets across the state.”

The legislators said that a provision in the recently enacted federal Farm Bill permits the research of industrial hemp. Section 7606 of the Agriculture Act of 2014, signed into law by President Obama on February 7th, legalizes the growth of hemp for research by state departments of agriculture or institutions of higher education in states where it has been approved by law.

Fifteen states already have laws in place that allow them to begin producing hemp. The O’Mara-Lupardo bill would establish procedures for New York to begin taking advantage of this research and economic opportunity.

Hemp is used around the world to produce fabric, rope, paper, oil, soap, lotion and even food. It also is rich in Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids, which gives it numerous health benefits to both humans and animals. Its value as a rotation crop and biofuel has also been recognized. Both the stalk and seed from hemp can be used in the production of a variety of goods including textiles, building materials, paper, food, body products and environmental products such as biofuels.

In 2012, retail sales from imported hemp products were estimated at \$500 million.

The New York Farm Bureau supports the new legislation, which it says would position the state as a leader in hemp production.

“Industrial hemp production would offer New York’s farmers new economic opportunities. Diversification is important as farms look to remain successful in a global marketplace, and industrial hemp could be another profitable alternative for agriculture, which in turn, would help boost the state’s rural economy,” said Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau. “This legislation would put New York growers in a position to take advantage of changing federal regulations,”

If it's signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo, the O'Mara-Lupardo measure would authorize a pilot program to allow hemp production for research to begin immediately by the state Department of Agriculture and Markets, and state colleges and universities.

Cornell University's College Agriculture and Life Sciences has already expressed interest in participating in the pilot program.

"Industrial hemp is an excellent candidate from a biomass standpoint, with high yield as well as multiple potential value-added uses," said Jerry Cherney, Professor of Agriculture at Cornell. "Alternative markets allow farmers to minimize their risk and maximize profits."