



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara: New budget includes support for Tier farmers, continues Senate's 'Grown in NY' strategy

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Albany, N.Y., March 31—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats), a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said that the new 2015-2016 state budget will include important support for farmers and the agricultural industry across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, and statewide.

"This budget keeps taking actions that can help keep our next generation of farmers competitive for the long haul. We can't risk New York State's young farmers being taxed, regulated and priced out of business, and we're hopeful that we can enact even more pieces of our 'Grown in New York' strategy this session," said O'Mara, who also serves as one of 10 members on the Legislature's joint, bipartisan Commission on Rural Resources.

Over the past few years, O'Mara and other senators have pushed and updated from year to year a comprehensive "Grown in New York" legislative strategy aimed at keeping New York State's leading industry competitive for the next generation.

Grown in NY has helped initiate critical new laws and programs to assist farmers and the entire agricultural industry, including a new program last year to provide start-up grants to beginning farmers and begin a college education loan forgiveness program.

O'Mara said that the new state budget, among other provisions, will include additional funding to enhance the Young Farmers Student Loan Forgiveness Program established last year.

The budget will also provide \$30 million targeted for farmers in 11 counties across the Southern Tier, including Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Tompkins counties in O'Mara's 58th Senate District. The new "Southern Tier On-Farm Enhancement

Program” will allow eligible farmers to apply for state grants to help cover the costs of on-farm construction projects including barns, silos, fencing, greenhouses or processing facilities. Projects involving the renovation of existing facilities would also be permitted under the new program, as well as environmental improvements such as irrigation and drainage.

O’Mara said this year’s agriculture budget will also:

- > expand the existing exemption from the state sales and use tax provided to wineries at tastings to include the beer, cider and spirits industries;
- > allow petroleum business tax refunds for farm use of highway diesel motor fuel;
- > provide additional support for school-based agricultural education, including Future Farmers of America;
- > increase funding for the New York Wine and Grape Foundation;
- > initiate a statewide expansion of Cornell Cooperative Extension’s successful Harvest NY program to increase access to locally grown foods;
- > create up to five local transportation cooperatives where farmers can arrange to move their products to New York City and other major metropolitan areas; and
- > expand the United States Department of Agriculture’s “Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program” to reach more senior consumers across the state.

New York is home to 36,000 family farms that contribute to the state’s more than \$5.7-billion agricultural industry.