



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara hosts 'Drought Forum' for regional farmers on Tuesday, September 13 ~ Forum brings together top state and local officials to provide information, answer questions on drought assistance, tour area farms (UPDATED, September 20: Video Available)

THOMAS F. O'MARA September 14, 2016

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of the season's drought on local farmers, as well as the local, state and federal assistance that will be available to farmers impacted by the drought. I appreciate the participation and input from local farmers. We need to and we will stay focused on the federal-state-local response.

Prattsburgh, N.Y., September 13—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today sponsored an "Agriculture Roundtable: The Impact of the 2016 Drought on Southern Tier and Finger Lakes Farmers" in Prattsburgh.

The public forum earlier today was held at the Prattsburgh Central School Main Building on 2 Naples Hill Road in Prattsburgh.

O'Mara was joined at today's forum by New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball and State Senator Patty Ritchie (R,C,IP-Watertown), Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. State Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Alison M. Hunt, District Director for Rep. Tom Reed (R-Corning), will also be in attendance.

Following the forum, O'Mara, Ball, Ritchie, Palmesano and other officials toured several area farms to see and hear firsthand from local farmers on the drought's impact (see below for additional details on the farm tours).

[UPDATE, September 14: Read and watch more from *Time Warner Cable News*, "**It's Heartbreaking': Drought Has Severe Impact On Southern Tier Farmers**"; *The Leader*, "**Discussing Drought**"; *WETM-TV*, "**Lawmakers, Ag Officials, and Farmers Discuss Drought's Impact**", and see the attached article above from *The Evening Tribune* in Hornell]

Senator O'Mara, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said, "I commend New York State and the federal government for declaring 26 counties in Upstate New York as natural disaster areas due to drought conditions. The declaration includes all of the counties within the 58th Senate District I represent. As I drive across this district, it's clear how this year's drought has negatively impacted many farms. Although we've welcomed some rain recently,

the majority of the growing season has passed and a number of farmers are left with low-performing crops. This disaster declaration is the first step in getting farmers the help they need and deserve. Yesterday's informational forum provided an opportunity to discuss the potential short- and long-term impacts of the season's drought on local farmers, as well as the local, state and federal assistance that will be available to farmers impacted by the drought. I appreciate the participation and input from local farmers. We need to and we will stay focused on the federal-state-local response. This informational forum provided an opportunity to discuss the short- and long-term impacts of the season's drought on local farmers, as well as the local, state and federal assistance that will be available to farmers impacted by the drought. I also appreciate Commissioner Ball and Senator Ritchie for joining us to personally tour several farms in Steuben and Yates counties to see and hear firsthand what farmers are facing."

State Agriculture Commissioner Ball said, "The toll of this summer's drought is significant and it can be seen all across the Southern Tier. Farmers are not just struggling with devastating crop loss, they are also faced with the added costs of bringing in outside water sources for their crops and their animals. It is important that we work together with our federal, state and local partners to identify the immediate and long term needs of our farmers and help guide them to the best available resources to get back on their feet. I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this roundtable and tour these farms as we try to better understand extent of the drought damage in the Southern Tier and the outlook for recovery."

Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Ritchie said, "Right now, farmers across our state are facing tremendous challenges due to the recent drought. People depend on the fresh foods they grow and produce, and New York State sees significant economic benefits from their hard work. As such, we owe it to our farmers to find ways to help them rebound from the dry

weather. I'm looking forward to this week's round table and farm tour, both of which will offer additional insights into ways we can support our farmers as they continue to deal with the drought."

The forum's other panelists on Tuesday were: Jamie Earl, Executive Director of the Steuben County Farm Service Agency; Ashur Terwilliger, President of the Chemung County Farm Bureau and District 4 State Director of the New York Farm Bureau; Tom Eskilden, District Technician, Yates County Soil and Water Conservation District; James C. Johnson, Executive Director of the Steuben County Industrial Development Agency; David Van Lieshout, Manager, Farm Credit East; Stephanie Mehlenbacher, Horticulture Home Ground & Gardens Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Steuben County; Jeffrey Parker, District Manager, Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District; Larkin Podsiedlik, Executive Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Steuben County; and Christopher C. Wager, Farm Loan Manager, Steuben County Farm Service Agency.

On August 31, the governor announced the federal government's 24-county drought disaster declaration, which has subsequently been increased to 26 counties. Counties included in the designation include all of the counties O'Mara represents: Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates. As a result of the designations, farmers in these areas could be eligible for assistance, including emergency loans, from the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency. Additionally, Ball has been joining state lawmakers and other farm leaders to conduct on-site assessments throughout the state and is working with Cornell University experts to study the outlook for recovery.

Recently, Reed encouraged regional farmers to find out more about their eligibility for federal assistance.

O'Mara said that was exactly the goal of Tuesday's forum and he added that anyone who's unable to attend the informational event in Prattsburgh should not hesitate to contact his offices for assistance and information.

The following farm tours followed Tuesday's round table:

- 1.) John R. Wallace Farms, a Steuben County potato farm located at 61279 Route 415 in Avoca. This stop is scheduled to take place from 1:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.;
- 2.) From 2:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m., officials will visit Damin Farms, LLC, a large family dairy and corn farm in Steuben County located at 10926 Fairgrounds Road in Prattsburgh; and
- 3.) From 3:15 p.m. to 3:45 p.m., officials will visit Clearview Farms, one of the largest vineyards in the Finger Lakes region, located at 4019 Stever Hill Road in Branchport (Yates County).

[WATCH A VIDEO REPLAY OF SENATOR O'MARA'S SEPTEMBER 13TH FORUM]