



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara criticizes Cuomo for vetoing 'Farm to Food Bank' legislation: O'Mara joined Food Bank of the Southern Tier in early November to rally support urging Cuomo to sign new law (UPDATED, November 30)

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 29, 2016

| ISSUE: **FOOD BANKS**



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the very best of them.

Elmira, N.Y., November 29—For the second year in a row, legislation co-sponsored by New York State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) to provide a tax credit of up to \$5,000 to farmers who donate fresh produce to food banks and other emergency food providers has been vetoed by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

O'Mara was highly critical of the governor's ongoing rejection of the legislation, which was unanimously approved by the Senate and Assembly in June. Cuomo vetoed similar legislation last year, but after addressing the administration's concerns sponsors and supporters of the tax credit, including O'Mara and anti-hunger organizations like the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, have been hopeful that the legislation would become law this year. **The New York Farm Bureau also weighed in today with its disappointment in the Cuomo veto.**

O'Mara, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said, "I'm proud to co-sponsor and strongly support this commonsense 'Farm to Food Bank' legislation to support food banks and farmers, and combat hunger. It's hard to understand the governor's continued rejection of this action in the face of unanimous, bipartisan legislative support. New York State provides tax credits to encourage a lot of worthwhile initiatives, and this one would rank among the very best of them. It would enhance and strengthen the ability of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier and their counterparts statewide to access nutritious, fresh, high quality, locally produced food. Our farmers are already extremely supportive of our food banks, and this additional tax credit would provide another worthwhile incentive for farmers to donate even more. Equally important, it would help provide this healthy food for more and more children and families in need. It would have been a meaningful addition to the goal of hunger-free communities. We are grateful to everyone at the Food Bank of the Southern Tier for their leadership in trying to achieve this goal and we'll get back to work again next year to try to convince Governor Cuomo to take a different view. This veto is

incredibly disappointing and frustrating."

In early November, O'Mara and Southern Tier Senator Fred Akshar (R,C,IP-Binghamton) visited the Food Bank of the Southern Tier to urge Cuomo to sign the measure into law. Akshar is also a co-sponsor along with area Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning).

Commonly known as the "Farm to Food Bank" legislation (**S7833/A10854**), the measure was unanimously approved by the Senate and Assembly in June.

To raise awareness of the legislation's importance, on November 3rd O'Mara and Akshar participated in a volunteer repack activity where they packed New York State produce to be distributed to people in need through the Food Bank of the Southern Tier's 167 member agencies. They also toured the Food Bank warehouse with Food Bank staff and representatives from member food pantries throughout the Southern Tier.

In the Southern Tier, 72,650 people live below the poverty line, including one in four children. For many people living in poverty, fresh fruits and vegetables are difficult to afford.

The Farm to Food Bank law will fill a critical need by increasing the amount of produce available to people struggling with hunger. At the same time, it supports local agriculture and reduce food waste by re-distributing food that might otherwise go uneaten.

Last year, the Food Bank distributed more than 10 million pounds of food, including 1.5 million pounds of fresh produce, throughout six counties in the Southern Tier. Still, the Food Bank would need to distribute an additional 4.7 million meals to feed everyone who is hungry. The Farm to Food Bank bill would allow the Food Bank to distribute more healthy food to those in need.

[UPDATE, November 30: Read and watch more from *WETM-TV*, "**Gov. Cuomo Vetoes Farm to Food Bank Tax Bill**"; Read and watch more from *WENY-TV*, "**Farm Bureau, Food Bank Weigh in**

on Gov. Cuomo 'Farm to Food Bank' Bill Veto"; Read more from the *Odessa File of Schuyler County*, "**O'Mara, Palmesano blast Cuomo ag veto**". And see the attached article above from *The Evening Tribune* in Hornell.]