



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara, Senate colleagues renew effort to enact 'Farm to Food Bank' legislation and give measure unanimous approval (UPDATED)

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 30, 2017

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I'm proud to co-sponsor and continue to 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 many worthwhile initiatives and this one would rank among the very best of them.

Albany, N.Y., January 30—The State Senate today unanimously approved legislation co-sponsored by 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, commonly known as the "Farm to Food Bank" legislation.

The legislation (**S1606**), which the Senate is advancing for the third straight year, was vetoed for the second time late last year by Governor Andrew Cuomo. The legislation was approved by a vote of 61 to 0.

O'Mara has been highly critical of the governor's ongoing rejection of the legislation, which the Senate and Assembly have consistently approved. Sponsors and supporters of the tax credit, including O'Mara and anti-hunger organizations like the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, are hopeful that the legislation will become law in 2017.

O'Mara, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said, "I'm proud to co-sponsor and continue to 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 many 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 already are supportive of our food banks. 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 be 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're getting back to work today to try to convince Governor Cuomo to take a different view."

Last 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 (SEE ATTACHED PHOTO). Akshar is also a co-sponsor of the legislation.

To raise awareness of the legislation's importance, on November 3, 2016 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.

[UPDATED: See attached article above in the January 31 Corning Leader, "O'Mara, Senate colleagues renew effort"]

The Farm to Food Bank law would 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 reduces food waste by re-distributing food that might otherwise go uneaten.

In 2015, the Food Bank of the Southern Tier distributed more than 10 million pounds of food, including 1.5 million pounds of fresh produce, throughout six counties across the region. 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.