



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara and Palmesano call for statewide public hearings on 'Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act': In a letter to legislative leaders, they say legislation would wipe out many family farms and farm communities

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 15, 2019

| ISSUE: **FAMILY FARMS**



**Albany, N.Y., March 15**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) today called on the state's Democratic legislative leaders to hold statewide public hearings on legislation that they believe could drive many family farms in New York State out of business and decimate local farm economies.

The controversial legislation (**S.2837/A.2750**) is known as the “Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.”

In a letter today to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, and the chairs of the agriculture and labor committees in the Senate and Assembly, O'Mara and Palmesano wrote, “First, the profound consequences of this legislation to one of New York State’s economic and cultural cornerstones demands, at the very least, a series of statewide public hearings. We urge you to schedule hearings across every agricultural region of New York State. Every voice that deserves to be heard should have the chance to provide direct input: every farmer, every fruit and vegetable grower, every agribusiness, small business owners, representatives of the hospitality and tourism industry, local government officials, community leaders, and all others for whom the Act stands as a threat to short- and long-term quality, strength, and sustainability. It is critical that you receive firsthand testimony that we believe will dispel the falsehoods and myths underlying the purported justification for the ‘Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.’”

[see a copy of today's letter attached above]

The legislation is sponsored by Senator Jessica Ramos (D-East Elmhurst), chair of the Senate Labor Committee, and Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan (D-Long Island City). The measure is currently in the Labor Committee in each house.

If enacted, the Act’s opponents, led by the **New York Farm Bureau**, argue that it would increase already exorbitant farm labor costs in New York State by nearly \$300 million or close to 20%, resulting in an across-the-board drop in net farm income of 23% and driving many farmers out of business. For many specific agricultural sectors, including the dairy industry, and vegetable and fruit growers, the increased costs would be unsustainable. According to a 2016 economic analysis from Farm Credit East, an agricultural credit and

financial organization, total farm labor costs in New York State were 63 percent of net cash farm income, compared to 36 percent nationally. [[view the latest analysis from Farm Credit East](#)]

Mandatory overtime pay as called for under S.2837/A.2750 would greatly exacerbate the impact of farm labor costs on farm income at a time when the farm economy is already struggling. Over the past five years, for example, New York State has lost 20 percent of its dairy farms.

In their letter to legislative leaders, O'Mara and Palmesano wrote, "The misguided and misrepresented Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act poses an extreme action at a time of already severe economic struggle for New York State farmers. Worse, the Act's consequences would produce a nightmare of a ripple effect across local communities in every region of this state and profoundly diminish the future of high quality, local food production. In short, S.2837/A.2750, far from implementing fair labor practices, would in reality spark an enormous loss of family farms and the thousands of livelihoods these farms support across the industry and throughout hundreds of local economies statewide."