



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara joins Senate GOP colleagues calling for additional public hearings on proposed 'Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act'

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 9, 2019

| ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE ECONOMY**



In a follow-up letter released today, members of the Senate GOP criticize the limited scope of the scheduled hearings.

**Albany, N.Y., April 9**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and others members of the Senate Republican conference today called for additional public hearings, including in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions, on legislation they believe could drive many of New York's family farms out of business and decimate local farm economies.

The controversial legislation ([S.2837/A.2750](#)) is known as the “Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.” Following requests earlier this year by O’Mara and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning), and other legislators, to hold statewide public hearings on the proposal, the respective chairs of the Senate Agriculture and Labor Committees announced hearings only in Madison, Nassau, and Sullivan counties.

In a follow-up letter released today, O’Mara and his Senate GOP colleagues criticize the limited scope of the scheduled hearings. In addition to O’Mara and Senator Robert Ortt, the other senators included on the letter are Senators Pamela A. Helming, Robert E. Antonacci, Rich Funke, George A. Amedore Jr., Chris Jacobs, Sue Serino, James N. Tedisco, Daphne Jordan, Betty Little, and Fred Akshar.

In the letter, O’Mara and his colleagues state, “Although hearings in Madison, Sullivan, and Suffolk Counties are a good start, the proposed initial schedule ignores large portions of the state. The Capitol Region, the Hudson Valley, the Southern Tier, the North County, and Western New York are all robust, diverse agricultural communities; farms and farmworkers in those regions deserve input. As you are aware, agriculture is the leading industry across much of our state and works to directly support approximately 200,000 jobs across 35,000 farms — many of them small and family-owned. With such a dramatic overhaul proposed to this industry and our state’s economy, it is essential to maximize participation across our state’s diverse regions and agricultural sectors.”

O’Mara said, “The profound consequences of this legislation to a foundation of New York State’s economy and culture demands a comprehensive series of statewide public hearings. There should be hearings in every agricultural region, including the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions. Every voice that deserves to be heard should have the chance to provide direct input.”

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 ([www.farmcrediteast.com](http://www.farmcrediteast.com)), 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.

Mandatory overtime pay alone, 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.