



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senator O'Mara, colleagues call on federal government to deliver immediate farm aid

THOMAS F. O'MARA April 14, 2020

| ISSUE: **FARM AID**

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Elmira, N.Y., April 14—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats) today joined his Senate Republican colleagues in a letter to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue calling on the federal Department of Agriculture (USDA) to begin delivering immediate, direct payments to state farmers to help them survive the COVID-19 economic shutdown.

O'Mara said, "The COVID-19 pandemic is an across-the-board emergency for every sector of the economy and many farmers are among the hardest hit. It threatens the future of family farms regionally and statewide, many of whom were already struggling under high costs and overregulation in New York State before the pandemic hit. Family farms need immediate assistance and, moving forward, other actions at the federal and state levels will be needed to help the industry begin finding solid ground again."

O'Mara and his Senate GOP colleagues echo recent calls from the New York Farm Bureau and other farming advocates for immediate, direct federal assistance to struggling farmers,

including the hard-hit dairy industry.

The letter from O'Mara and his fellow lawmakers reads, in part, "The COVID-19 outbreak is the latest threat in what's been a very difficult decade for New York dairy. With the government-mandated closure of restaurants, schools, and other vendors, dairy farmers have lost most of their clientele. With consistent supply but drastically-reduced demand, milk prices and futures have plummeted, forcing some New York farmers to dump their product to balance supply and demand...New York dairy farmers need urgent assistance. To be clear, they are not looking for a handout, and they are not in this grim position because of their own failure. Government action to respond to COVID-19 — while necessary — has artificially eliminated the natural demand for dairy products, so it is the duty of government to rectify the situation and help dairy farmers remain financially viable in this difficult time."

The letter further stresses the need for across-the-board relief for the farmers and the agricultural industry, "Of course, dairy is not the only agricultural subsector being harmed by COVID-19. Fresh produce growers, livestock farms, horticulturalists, craft distilleries, maple producers, and many others are all financially strained, and we urge you to take similar actions to bolster their businesses, too. Agriculture is the cornerstone of our society, and making sure our food supply chain remains strong should be a top priority throughout this pandemic. We urge you to take action to protect farms in New York and across the United States."

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

The NY Farm Bureau notes that the recently enacted federal CARES Act included \$9.5 billion for the USDA, which the Farm Bureau said could be used immediately for direct payments to struggling farms and help offset the fact that most farms may not meet the eligibility

requirements for assistance from the Small Business Administration (SBA).

The Farm Bureau, in addition to direct payments, is also urging other federal actions including:

- > that the USDA should immediately make purchases of dairy products including but not limited to fluid milk, butter, cheeses and dry milk powders. Additional support could be provided through export assistance programs and direct commodity support;
- > the creation of a voucher program for people in need through the Milk Donation Program, as authorized under the 2018 Farm Bill, to facilitate the distribution of donated milk through grocery stores and other venues since some food banks and food pantries often do not have enough cold storage to accept large quantities of highly perishable products;
- > with the steep decline in purchases in the food service sector, USDA should consider developing a purchase program that would quickly provide stability to all impacted fresh produce growers through the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency; and
- > that provisions should be made for livestock, equine, horticulture, craft distilleries, maple producers and more who are facing closures and a significant loss of business.