



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Critical state programs supporting farming put at risk under Cuomo's proposed budget for agriculture: O'Mara warns that proposed cuts leave ongoing state support up in the air

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Governor Cuomo's proposed budget does not protect critical state funding for specifically vital agricultural programs and services that have long made a difference for our farmers.

**Albany, N.Y., February 10**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today warned that Governor Andrew Cuomo's 2021-2022 proposed state budget puts at risk millions of dollars in state funding for long-standing and critical programs supporting farmers and New York's

agricultural industry.

O'Mara, Ranking Member on the Senate Finance Committee, said, "Governor Cuomo's proposed budget does not protect critical state funding for specifically vital agricultural programs and services that have long made a difference for our farmers. Putting the fate of this funding and these successful programs in the hands of Democratic majorities in the Senate and Assembly makes no sense in a year like this one when farmers are already overburdened yet have been fundamental to the hard work that has kept communities together and moving forward. It's unthinkable, to say the least during this pandemic, that Governor Cuomo decided to leave the future of funding for FarmNet and so many other key programs up in the air. If the Cuomo budget stands, it once again spells trouble for upstate localities and upstate agriculture."

**In an interview with Spectrum News this week, New York Farm Bureau Director of Public Policy Jeff Williams** said that Cuomo's proposed budget cuts 75 to 85 percent of the agricultural programs critical to farmers. That includes a significant funding cut for the Farm Family Assistance program, commonly known as FarmNet, which in addition to business development assistance has long provided a lifeline of invaluable mental health counseling to struggling farmers.

Williams told Spectrum News, "There's not a lot of hope at the end of the day. We've got increasing labor costs. We've got 60-hour overtime now which is the biggest change in agriculture in a hundred years. Labor costs go up and profit margins go below the cost of production. That causes any business owner to become extremely stressed."

O'Mara called on the Legislature's Democratic leaders in the Senate and Assembly to immediately reject the elimination of approximately \$4.4 million for specific, successful and long-standing agricultural programs and services.

In addition to FarmNet, key programs slated for funding cuts, according to an analysis by the Senate Republican Finance Committee staff, include the Agriculture Child Development Program, Farm Viability Institute, Apple Growers Association, Harvest New York, Tractor Rollover Prevention Program, Maple Producers, Organic Farmers Database, and the Cornell Diagnostic Lab. Other vital Cornell research and study programs are also impacted including those invaluable to food safety research and study, disease detection and prevention, and rabies prevention and treatment.

Between 2011 and 2018 during the Cuomo administration, O'Mara said that the Senate GOP was responsible for budget restorations totaling more than \$50 million.

O'Mara said, "Senate Republicans will continue to stand up and speak out for farmers and the entire agricultural industry. We will continue to oppose any state government actions that put them at risk. We will continue to wage the fight on their behalf that New York State government cannot go on taxing, spending and regulating this industry and our farmers out of business."