



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara, colleagues unveil 'Young Farmers NY' to encourage next generation of farmers

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 5, 2014

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[UPDATED, OCTOBER 14, 2014: "Key planks of Senate's 'Young Farmers NY' strategy take effect: new grant fund and college loan forgiveness"]

[UPDATED, SEPTEMBER 19, 2014: See the *National Geographic* article, "American farmers are growing old, with spiraling costs keeping out young"]

**Albany, N.Y., March 4**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats), a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and his Senate Republican colleagues today unveiled "Young Farmers NY," a comprehensive legislative strategy combining financial and educational

initiatives and incentives aimed at keeping New York State's leading industry competitive for the next generation.

"We need to keep taking actions that can help keep our next generation of farmers on the farm and competitive for the long haul. We can't risk New York State's young farmers being taxed, regulated or priced off the farm. The 'Young Farmers NY' plan is a common sense blueprint that recognizes the changing demographics of today's family farms and focuses on many of the key challenges facing the future of agriculture locally, regionally and statewide," said O'Mara, who also serves as one of 10 members on the Legislature's joint, bipartisan Commission on Rural Resources.

[Read more in today's *Corning Leader* and *Star-Gazette*]

O'Mara and his Senate Republican colleagues were joined at a news conference to promote the plan today in Albany by statewide farming advocates, including [New York Farm Bureau](#) President Dean Norton. New York's 36,000 farm families help make New York's \$5.2 billion agricultural industry a national leader.

Norton said, "As the average age of farmers grows each year, it is imperative that we encourage and promote the development of our young farmer community. This plan is designed to not only help young farmers that are already involved in agriculture, but to get more young people involved in farming."

O'Mara said that the state's aging farmer population poses one of the most serious threats to the future of New York's family farms. The average age of farmers in both the United States and New York is approximately 57 years old. A growing percentage of all farmers are aged 65 and above.

To encourage younger people who want to pursue careers in farming, O'Mara and his colleagues are advancing a legislative program blending tax incentives, low-interest loans and grants, a new student loan forgiveness program and other educational initiatives to help existing young farmers stay on the land and encourage more young people to consider careers in agriculture. They said that their plan includes new ideas as well as programs that have worked in other states, and acknowledges the nation's goal of attracting 100,000 new farmers over the next five years.

Cornerstones of the Senate Republican "Young Farmers NY" plan, which they hope to get underway as part of the 2014-15 state budget, include a:

- **Farm Preservation Tax Credit** of up to 10 percent for farmers who sell or lease land or equipment to a new farmer, as a way to preserve farmland and lower the cost of a farm and farming equipment for beginning farmers;
- **Young Farmer Revolving Loan Fund** to create a \$5-million revolving loan fund to provide low-interest, start-up loans for land and equipment purchases by new farmers;
- **Young Farm Innovation Grants** through the creation of a "Young Farmers NY Fund" that will award grants of up to \$50,000 for new farmers for purchasing land, equipment and supplies;
- **Farm Savings Accounts** to allow first-time farmers to establish special, tax-free savings accounts that can be used for the purchase of a farm or to help meet other expenses related to farm sustainability;
- **Estate tax reform.** Farming is a land and capital intensive business, and the value of even an average-sized farm can easily exceed the current \$1 million estate tax threshold. That makes it more difficult to keep generations-old farms in the family, and forces many farmers to make the difficult choice of subdividing or selling off farmland in order to pay tax bills. Senate Republicans have long been supportive of a proposal finally included as part of Governor Andrew Cuomo's 2014-15 proposed state budget to increase the estate tax threshold from \$1 million to \$5.25 million, and lower the top estate tax rate from 16% to 10%;
- **Young Farmer Student Loan Forgiveness Program** for students who earn an agricultural degree from a State University of New York (SUNY) college or university, including the [College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University](#), and work in New York State agriculture for at least five years after they graduate;
- **Young Farmer Apprenticeship Program**, in partnership with local BOCES and the New York Farm Bureau, to provide hands-on training opportunities for young farmers under the tutelage of experienced farmers; and
- increased state support for the highly successful **Future Farmers of America (FFA)** in-school program to encourage high school students in rural communities to learn about farming and explore career opportunities.

The new Senate plan builds on last year's ["Grown in New York"](#) strategy.