



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara: Key planks of Senate's 'Young Farmers NY' strategy take effect, new grant fund and college loan forgiveness

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 14, 2014

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**Elmira, N.Y., October 14**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats), a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said today that two key provisions of a comprehensive “Young Farmers NY” program that he and his Senate colleagues unveiled earlier this year, which were enacted as part of the 2014-15 state budget, are now in effect.

The “Young Farmers NY” strategy, which O'Mara co-sponsored, combined financial and educational initiatives and incentives aimed at keeping New York State’s leading industry competitive for the next generation.

Applications are now being accepted for two of the enacted programs: the New York State New Farmers Grant Fund, and the Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program.

“This year’s state budget started to enact key elements of our ‘Young Farmers NY’ plan,” said O’Mara, who also serves as one of 10 members on the Legislature’s joint, bipartisan Commission on Rural Resources. “This year’s budget acknowledges that we need to take steps to 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. ‘Young Farmers NY’ offered a common sense blueprint. We’re starting to enact some of it, and we’ll keep focusing on other key challenges facing the future of agriculture locally, regionally and statewide.”

O’Mara said that starting today, applications are available for the following new programs:

1.) the New York State New Farmers Grant Fund, which offers grants of up to \$50,000 for eligible beginning farmers participating in the production of an agricultural product at commercial farm operations statewide. Eligible project costs include leasing or purchasing farm machinery and equipment; constructing or expanding farm buildings or systems; and purchasing supplies such as root stock, seed or fertilizer. The new grant fund is being administered by Empire State Development (ESD).

More information and the application for the New York State New Farmers Grant Fund are available on the ESD website at

<http://esd.ny.gov/BusinessPrograms/NewFarmersGrantFund.html>.

The deadline for submission is January 28, 2015; and

2.) the “Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program” to provide loan forgiveness awards 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 graduation.

More information and the application for the Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Program are available from the state Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) at

<http://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/nys-grants-scholarships-awards/new-york-state-young-farmers-loan-forgiveness-incentive-program.html>.

The deadline for submission is December 15, 2014.

O'Mara said that this year's budget included critical estate tax reform. Farming is a land and capital intensive business, and the value of even an average-sized farm could easily exceed New York's previous \$1 million estate tax threshold, which made it more difficult to keep generations-old farms in the family and forced many farmers to make the difficult choice of subdividing or selling off farmland in order to pay tax bills. The estate tax threshold was increased from \$1 million to \$5.25 million this year – a move that's long been a priority of the state Farm Bureau and other farming advocates, as well as O'Mara and many other state legislators representing heavily agricultural districts.

New York's 36,000 farm families help make New York's \$5.2 billion agricultural industry a national leader. 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.