NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senate approves legislation to expand farm workforce tax credit, other actions; NY Farm Bureau identifies legislation as top priority in 2017

THOMAS F. O'MARA March 22, 2017

ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE ECONOMY**

Various studies continue to recognize New York as the state with the highest tax burden in the nation. It remains an unfair and unreasonable burden on farmers as well as individual taxpayers, families, employers and workers.

Albany, N.Y., March 22—The New York State Senate has approved legislation, co-sponsored by Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), to substantially increase the state's current Farm

Workforce Retention Credit.

The New York Farm Bureau has identified the legislation (**S2905**) as a top priority in 2017, noting that the latest figures from the National Agricultural Statistics Service show the value of farm production in New York dropped from $6.33 billion in 2014 to $5.33 billion in 2015.

O'Mara, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said, "Various studies continue to recognize New York as the state with the highest tax burden in the nation. It remains an unfair and unreasonable burden on farmers as well as individual taxpayers, families, employers and workers. Even with the tax relief we successfully achieved as part of the current state budget, we have to keep taking actions like this one for family farmers continuing to struggle with high costs and an overall tough economy."

Farm Bureau President David Fisher said, "The 16% drop in farm income highlights why it is imperative that New York Farm Bureau advocate for common sense laws, regulations, and tax policies that support the state's family farms."

O'Mara was very outspoken with his concerns over last year's enactment of an across-the-board higher, statewide minimum wage as part of the 2016-17 state budget. He continually pointed to the negative and potentially devastating impact the higher wage will have on New York State farms, small businesses, school districts, not-for-profits, human services providers and others.

The legislation O'Mara co-sponsors would significantly increase the Farm Workforce Retention Credit approved as part of the 2016-17 state budget that allows eligible farm employers to claim a refundable tax credit for each farm employee that is employed for 500 or more hours each year. Under the legislation, the phased-in tax credit would be doubled to

$500 per eligible farm employee in 2017; $600 in 2018; $800 in 2019; $1,000 in 2020; and $1,200 in 2021.

The Senate approved the legislation as part of a comprehensive legislative package aimed at building on the Senate's "Grown in New York" strategy. O'Mara and his Senate Republican colleagues have advanced the strategy over the past several years to enhance farm workforce retention and expansion, create new tax credits for farmland preservation, promote the availability and use of local produce in schools, and help prepare new farmers for successful careers, among other initiatives. Other Senate actions this week include the approval of legislation to:

> allow school districts offering bids for food services to include language that favors local or regional farm producers (**S1430**);

> direct the state Department of Agriculture and Markets to enhance access to viable agricultural land for new and beginning farmers (**S4900**);

> create a statewide blueprint for conserving productive land and maintaining the vitality of agricultural production in New York State (**S2479**);

> encourage farmers - particularly those located in areas of the state with greater development pressure - to participate in farmland preservation efforts and remain stewards of their land for future generations by changing the maximum acreage for agricultural assessment of farm woodlands from 50 acres to 100 acres (**S4535**); and

> expand products sold by farm cideries and authorize cideries to sell cider to other licensees for resale (**S1078**).