



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Senate and Assembly Environmental Conservation Committees host round table on soil health and resiliency: Agriculture and government reps, conservationists and researchers discuss strategies ~ WATCH MORE HERE

THOMAS F. O'MARA May 23, 2017

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Soil health is becoming an increasing challenge and crisis for New York State agriculture.

Albany, N.Y., May 23—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats), chairman of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee, and Assemblyman Steve Englebright (D-Setauket), chairman of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, today hosted "From the

Ground Up: Why Soil Health is Key to Sustainable Food Production” -- a round table to discuss the challenge of soil health and resiliency across New York State.

Tuesday’s discussion featured New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (Ag and Markets) Commissioner Richard Ball and a panel of experts in soil health and resiliency from Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS), state soil and water conservation district representatives, and other agriculture and conservation educators and researchers (see list below).

The round table was held in the Legislative Office Building and was open to the public.

[\[Watch Senator O'Mara's opening remarks at today's forum\]](#)

[\[Watch a replay of today's entire forum\]](#)

O’Mara, who also serves on the Senate Agriculture Committee, said, “Soil health is becoming an increasing challenge and crisis for New York State agriculture. I have witnessed firsthand in my legislative district over the past several years how severe weather, like last year’s drought, threatens the soil and the future of farming. The sooner the better on developing and implementing a comprehensive state-level Soil Health Management Network. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has been at the forefront of the emerging research and response strategies. We continue to be grateful for the college’s leadership and appreciate this opportunity to hear from experts across the spectrum of soil health and resiliency on how best to move forward.”

Englebright said, “By protecting the health and viability of soil, we are in turn protecting the many species of flora that depend on it. If we are careful stewards of the land, we can prevent any dangerous runoff contamination of our water supplies, avoid erosion, and sustainably manage growth for generations to come. We have a collective responsibility to

conserve our state's natural resources, and these types of practices will help us do just that."

Soil health and resiliency have significant effects on the state's agricultural industry, particularly farm productivity, profitability and sustainability. The ability of soils to resist drought, flooding and other impacts continues to emerge as a critical conservation, economic growth, environmental protection and food quality challenge in New York State and across the nation.

O'Mara and Englebright hope the forum will continue to assist and spur action on the development of a New York State Soil Health Management Network modeled after the successful federal Soil Health Network. This year's state budget included \$400,000 from the state's Environmental Protection Fund for a "Soil Health Initiative" at Cornell University. The initiative will facilitate additional, ongoing soil-related research and guide additional efforts toward the establishment of a state-level Soil Health Management Network. The envisioned network would be a public-private extension and education consortium.

Dr. David Wolfe, Professor of Plant and Soil Ecology at Cornell CALS, said, "Everyone appreciates an abundant and healthy food supply, and that requires maintaining healthy and resilient soils. This support from the state will help us link cutting-edge soil health research with on-farm innovations to meet today's food production and environmental challenges. The forum organized by Senator O'Mara and Assemblyman Englebright will be a great way to launch our new initiative with input from policy-makers and other stakeholders."

In addition to O'Mara and Englebright, panelists included:

Assemblywoman Didi Barrett (D-Columbia, Dutchess)

Assemblyman Carrie Woerner (D-Round Lake)

Assemblyman Bill Magee (D-Nelson)

NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard Ball

Geoff Palmer, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Ag and Markets

Brian Steinmuller, NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee

Jessica Ottney, Policy Director, The Nature Conservancy in New York

Dr. Rebecca Benner, NYS Science Director, The Nature Conservancy in New York

Julie Suarez, Associate Dean for Governmental & Community Relations, Cornell CALS

Dr. David Wolfe, Professor of Plant and Soil Ecology, Cornell CALS

Dr. Matt Ryan, Assistant Professor, Soil and Crop Sciences Section, Cornell CALS

Aaron Ristow, Extension Associate, Soil and Crop Sciences Section, Cornell CALS

Amber Paice, Executive Director, New York Association of Conservation Districts

Jeff Williams, Director of Public Policy, New York Farm Bureau

Barbara Ahern, New York State Agribusiness Association

Rick Zimmerman, New York State Vegetable Growers Association

Nathan Rudgers, Director of Business Development, Farm Credit East

Greg Levow, President & COO, Agronomic Technology Corporation