



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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State Senator George Borrello and State Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz Introduce Bill Aimed at Stabilizing the Food Supply Chain Disrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

GEORGE M. BORRELLO January 13, 2021

| ISSUE: [COVID-19](#), [AGRICULTURE](#), [FOOD INSECURITY](#), [NOURISH NY](#)



CORONA, Queens — With the pandemic creating levels of food insecurity not seen since the Great Recession, Western New York State Senator George Borrello (R-57th S.D.) and Queens Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz (D-39th A.D.) have joined forces on a [measure](#) that would establish a permanent program for distributing surplus agricultural products to food banks, similar to the Nourish New York model.

The Nourish New York initiative was launched in April of 2020, in response to the surge of people in need at food banks across the state, as well as the hardships facing farmers affected by supply chain disruptions. With an initial \$25 million in state funding, the program directed the purchase of food and products from upstate farms and food producers for distribution to food banks across the state. Another \$10 million was allocated to the program in late October to sustain the program through the end of the year. One such beneficiary of the program, an interfaith human service agency named Chautauqua Rural Ministry, reported that their organization alone served approximately 4,000 meals weekly using agricultural products through the Nourish New York program.

The legislators announced the bipartisan initiative today in Corona, Queens, after volunteering at a weekly food distribution site, sponsored by community organizations La Jornada and the Queens Museum. Since last June, the organizations have paired up to serve up to 1,000 families every Wednesday, distributing fresh and nonperishable food items. La Jornada, which has been supported by Nourish New York and other federal funding sources, recently received notice their USDA grant would be discontinued. The news has caused great uncertainty as to how the organization will address the needs of the thousands of families they support in the area.

The legislation directs the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to provide financial and technical support for the development of a permanent initiative to provide surplus New York agricultural products to communities in need. This distribution will be effectuated through a network of food banks and other emergency food providers statewide. The measure envisions an expansion of the current, pandemic-specific program and would also complement related efforts, such as the Farm-to-School program.

“The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us that many families are just a paycheck or two away from food insecurity. [Data](#) indicates that since the pandemic, approximately one in ten state

residents have become food insecure, with a quarter of those reporting this was a new problem for their households," **said Senator Borrello.** "The economic recovery for many of these struggling New Yorkers will extend beyond the pandemic, which is why it is critical that we commit now, to permanently establish and expand through **legislation**, food relief programs like Nourish New York, which benefit both our farmers and those in need. One of my starkest memories from earlier in the pandemic was footage of despondent farmers dumping milk and leaving crops unharvested in their fields, as desperate New Yorkers waited in lines for hours at food pantries. We need to ensure that doesn't happen again and this bill is the first step forward."

"As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits and government entities alike have been left scrambling for resources to ensure that the basic needs of our constituents are met. At the height of the pandemic, food lines stretched for miles with no end in sight and without a permanent or sustainable product source. As the crisis continues and food insecurity becomes more severe, this bill aims to provide a state pipeline to put food on the table to those who need it most. While the districts that Senator Borrello and I represent are hundreds of miles apart, our constituents share commonality in their dependence on each other for survival," **said Assemblywoman Cruz.**

"Nourish New York has proven to be a valuable relief program in New York State, connecting the food our farmers produce with people in need. The New York Farm Bureau supports expanding the concept, making it a permanent program that will assist farmers in moving excess product while also looking to help every New Yorker put food on their table. This has been a challenging year, and we thank Senator Borrello and Assembly Member Cruz for their response as we move forward working together," **said David Fisher, New York Farm Bureau President.**

“We know that 2020 was a year of historic challenges, particularly for the most vulnerable among us who were affected by the pandemic. In response to increased food insecurity, the State of New York has provided tremendous support through Nourish New York, a program that helps New Yorkers obtain fresh fruits and vegetables grown right here in New York State. Ensuring the program becomes permanent will provide much-needed relief to our struggling neighbors. On behalf of our more than 10,000 clients, we want to thank State Senator George Borrello and Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz for pushing to continue a program that is helping thousands of New Yorkers, and for being a beacon of hope at our most darkest time,” **said Pedro Rodriguez, Executive Director of La Jornada**

“While hunger has been a longstanding problem in Western New York, the COVID-19 crisis has greatly exacerbated the need for food assistance in our community. Currently as many as one in six people in FeedMore WNY’s four-county service area may be struggling with hunger due to the pandemic,” **said Tara A. Ellis, president and CEO of FeedMore WNY.**

“Initiatives such as the Nourish New York Program have been a lifeline for local farmers and producers as well as for hunger-relief organizations and the community members we serve. Through Nourish NY, FeedMore WNY was able to procure nearly 1.3 million pounds of nutritious food for distribution to our neighbors in need. We are grateful to Senator George Borrello and Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz for their commitment to fighting food insecurity through this critical legislation.”

“The impact of the program has been phenomenal. It gave us the ability to not only help people in need, including many newly unemployed and first-time recipients, but to also help the small scale farmers, food processors and producers who were devastated by the loss of business and supply chain issues that resulted from the COVID crisis. It is hard to overstate how profoundly helpful this initiative has been and the gratitude that was expressed by

both the farmers and local residents who benefitted,” said **Kathy Pederson, Executive Director of Chautauqua Rural Ministry**. “A permanent version of this program would be wonderful.”

"Since the Queens Museum began hosting a food distribution initiative in June, the food pantry has been a tremendous success, feeding and caring for thousands of Queens residents," said **Sally Tallant, President and Executive Director of the Queens Museum**. "One of the most impactful aspects of this collaborative initiative has been our ability to put fresh fruits and vegetables in the hands of constituents on a weekly basis. State-supported food relief programs will play a critical role in sustaining this essential service and ensuring that the basic needs of Corona families as well as small-scale food producers are permanently met throughout the duration of this health crisis."

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State Senator George Borrello represents the 57th Senatorial District, encompassing all of Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, and Allegany Counties, as well as a part of Livingston County. He is the Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and has over 3,000 farms in his district that serve New Yorkers statewide. For more information, please visit Senator Borrello's [Official Website](#).

Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz represents the 39th Assembly District, encompassing the neighborhoods of Jackson Heights, Corona, and Elmhurst, Queens. The district is one of the only districts in New York City without a permanent food pantry. For more information, visit Assemblywoman Cruz's [Official Website](#).