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COALITION ASKS GOVERNOR CUOMO TO FUND FARM TO FOOD BANK BILL

The bill would encourage greater donations of fresh, local food to New Yorkers in need across the state

A broad coalition of New York legislators, farmers, anti-hunger and environmental advocates asked Governor Cuomo today to step up to the dinner plate and fund the Farm to Food Bank bill (S.1606/A.6192) in the final New York State budget. The group held a joint press conference on the bill at the Capitol in Albany. The bipartisan legislation, which has tremendous support in the legislature, would provide a refundable tax credit to farmers of 25% of the wholesale value of donated food up to \$5,000 annually. The money would partially offset the costs of labor, packaging and transportation needed to get fresh food from the fields to regional food banks and pantries across the state to benefit New Yorkers in need.

The legislation has twice passed both chambers of the legislature, led by the bill's sponsors, Senator Funke and Assemblyman Moya, only to see it vetoed by the Governor. While he expressed support for the intent of the bill, the Governor's main objection was that it was passed outside of the budget process. This year, the bill has once again passed the Senate in a bipartisan fashion, and it was included in both the Senate and Assembly's one-house budget resolutions. Now, there is nothing standing in the Governor's way of agreeing to fund this important piece of legislation.

In 2016, New York farmers donated 13.2 million pounds of food, the equivalent of more than 10 million meals, to regional food banks in New York through Harvest for All, a Feeding America program. New York's total was second highest in the country, and it demonstrates the generosity and willingness of farmers to help low-income New Yorkers have greater access to healthy food.

However, there are still barriers that this legislation must address. Farmers often have fruits and vegetables they cannot sell. Either they had higher yields than they have a market for or the food has a blemish that the average consumer will reject, despite the fact that the food is just as fresh and nutritious as a picture-perfect piece of fruit. But because of the costs associated with donating, farmers may choose to leave the food to rot in the field or a landfill. That in turn can have a negative environmental impact. Instead, the coalition is asking Governor Cuomo to help our growers move that fresh food from the farm to the food banks to feed New York families, senior citizens, and others who rely on local pantries in times of need.

"Our Farm to Food Bank program is a win-win for local farmers and at-risk families, yet the Governor has twice vetoed this common-sense solution to help feed our hungry," said Senator Rich Funke, the bill's Senate sponsor. "We do agree with the Governor that a proposal like this really belongs in the State Budget, which is why we worked hard to include it in the Senate budget proposal passed last week. In the

spirit of March Madness, the ball's now in the Governor's court, and we hope he joins us to support local farmers and hungry families this year."

"Hard times should not mean making hard choices about the food you put on the family dinner table. Not in New York; not when New York's farmers have an abundance of extra food they're willing to donate. The costs of bringing these crops to our food banks and pantries have needlessly stood in the way of feeding families in need, and until we help farmers cover some of these costs, we'll continue to allow good food to go to waste. This year I've managed to include the Farm to Food Bank bill in the Assembly budget bill, hopefully making it the first year that this legislation passes not only both chambers, but also gets signed into law. I thank Senator Funke for his leadership in the Senate and urge all my colleagues from both sides of the aisle in both houses to express their support for this proposal to be included in the final budget. Let us finally do right by New York's less fortunate and give every man woman and child access to fresh, healthy produce," said Assemblymember Francisco P. Moya.

"This bill is a common-sense, community-oriented initiative. This legislation helps food banks access nutritious, fresh food and incentivizes farmers to donate food that would otherwise be discarded. This is a very important bill and is a win-win for everyone involved. I would like to thank Assemblyman Moya and Senator Funke for their leadership on this important issue," said Assemblyman Phil Palmesano.

"The Farm to Food Bank bill is a simple way for the state of New York to get an excellent return on its investment to help feed low-income New Yorkers. For every dollar that supports a portion of a farm's cost to pick, package and deliver the food, food banks will receive four dollars' worth of fresh, local fruits and vegetables. Farmers have long demonstrated their generosity by collaborating with their regional food banks, but this bill will support even greater donations and help New Yorkers who can least afford local food to feed their families a nutritious meal. We greatly appreciate the support of the bill's sponsors, Sen. Funke and Assemblyman Moya, and we encourage Governor Cuomo to do the right thing for New York families, on and off the farm," said Chris Kelder, owner of Kelder's Farms in Kerhonkson, NY and a state director of New York Farm Bureau.

"Governor Cuomo has proposed opportunities to support healthy communities in NYS. It is our hope, he will include funds in the budget to support farmers to feed NYS in a deeper way. Our member food banks have longstanding relationships with their local farmers and the donations we receive now are helping us feed NYS. There is no doubt in our minds, if the Governor funds Farm to Food Bank, it will only encourage an increase in the same quality donations to benefit those who are unable to afford fresh, healthy food. We are most grateful to the farmers who have worked to seek a solution to do what they can to feed their hungry neighbor and to Senator Funke and Assemblyman Moya for their dedicated leadership," said Anita Paley, Food Bank Association of New York State Executive Director.

"Thanks to Senator Funke and Assembly Moya, with the help of Assemblymen Crespo and Palmesano, the Farm to Food Bank bill has been included in the one-house budget resolution bills of the Senate and the Assembly. With nearly 3 million New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity every month, it is clear our state government needs to do more to combat hunger. When we have so many hungry, including children, seniors, veterans, and the working poor, it is not right to allow fresh vegetables and fruits to go to waste in farm fields. Access to these nutritious foods is important to the health and well-being of those facing poverty, especially in light of possible federal cuts to Medicaid," stated Susan Zimet, Executive Director of Hunger Action Network of NYS. "The Governor has stated over and over that no one 'should go hungry in the state of New York.' We hope he will take his words to heart and work with the Legislature to include the Farm to Food Bank bill in the final 2017-2018 State Budget."

