NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Agriculture and Markets

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Good morning Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, Senator Ritchie, Assemblyman Magee, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am pleased to offer my testimony on the 2017-18 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The Executive Budget recommends $207 million for the Department, a nearly $37 million increase from last year. This budget will allow us to maintain our core functions while implementing strategic new initiatives to support the agricultural industry.

New York State has nearly 36,000 farms that produce some of the best food and beverage products in the world. Our producers rank high among the major agricultural states in the nation, ranking in the Top 10 in 30 commodities. Despite the challenges the industry has faced recently—both weather and market-related—and because of Governor Cuomo's commitment to this sector of the economy and close partnerships with all of you, we continue to reach new milestones and move in a positive direction.

I am proud to say there is no other program in the country like New York State Grown & Certified, the program launched in August by the Governor. Grown & Certified helps consumers identify New York agricultural producers who are certified for safe food-handling practices of food and for best practices in environmental farm management. The Department, working with Empire State Development, recently launched a marketing campaign highlighting the program and our partnerships with retail stores such as Tops Friendly Markets to promote New York State Grown & Certified products.

The Governor proposes a $5 million grant program to help agricultural producers with capital costs needed to meet the program's requirements. In 2017, the Department will continue to expand participation and plans to reach new commodity groups, like maple, horticulture, and dairy, helping them also meet the high standards of the Grown & Certified program.

Taste NY continues to grow. Sales have almost tripled from $4.5 million in 2015 to more than $13 million in 2016. Taste NY products are now available in more than 60 retail locations statewide. The Executive Budget proposes to build on the success of the program and support Taste NY through new welcome centers.

The industrial hemp industry has great potential in New York State. Governor Cuomo proposes to build on our pilot program this year, opening the program to more farmers who will work with us to research, grow, and process hemp as an agricultural commodity. The Governor will also

host the first-ever Industrial Hemp Summit in the Southern Tier to bring together manufacturers, farmers, researchers and stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities in the industry.

The transformation of the Great New York State Fair will get a boost with a proposed investment of $70 million to finance Phase 2 of the State Fair modernization effort. This includes $50 million to develop a multi-use expo building and exciting new transportation options for visitors and concertgoers. An additional $20 million will be used for parking and highway improvements, establishing the State Fair as a major, year-round tourism attraction and economic driver for the region.

I am very proud of our Farm-to-School Program in New York. We continue to increase the amount of fresh, local foods served in schools and to connect our farmers to new markets. Since 2015, the State has invested $850,000 for farm-to-school projects, benefiting tens of thousands of students in New York. With $750,000 proposed in the budget for the Farm-to-School program this year – triple last year's budget – we will predict extraordinary success in getting more good foods to our schoolchildren.

The Governor is also once again proposing a $300 million investment in the Environmental Protection Fund, which funds several vital agricultural programs. Additionally, the proposed $2 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Fund provides $50 million for on-farm source water quality protection projects.

We at the Department focus on agricultural education and our next generation of farmers. The Executive Budget includes funding to increase the number of FFA chapters in the State, and funding to increase the capacity of the New York Association of Agricultural Educators to hire and train certified teachers to meet the backlog demand for new agricultural education programs.

This year's budget is great news for our farmers, our farm communities, and the next generation of farmers, as well as for our specialty food and craft beverage producers. I am confident that all of the proposals laid out today will leverage the good work of the industry, building an even stronger agricultural economy. As the development of a State budget is a partnership with the Legislature, we look forward to hearing what your priorities will be.

Thank you.