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Testimony from Jeff Williams, New York Farm Bureau
Joint Legislative Hearing on the Governor's 2017-2018 Executive Budget
For Agriculture/Environmental Conservation
February 13, 2017

On behalf of New York Farm Bureau, thank you for providing our organization the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Jeff Williams and I serve as the Director of Public Policy. New York Farm Bureau is the state's largest general agricultural advocacy organization with almost 22,000 family farm members representing all size farms, all production methods and all commodities.

We are pleased to see that the Governor's proposed Department of Agriculture and Markets budget includes funding for critical statewide programs relating to animal and public health. The agricultural community and consumers across the state depend on these critical programs as the foundation of a healthy and safe food supply in the state.

We are concerned, however, that industry promotional and research programs for the many commodities in the budget that serve as the economic development engine for the farm industry were either partially funded or not funded at all in the Governor's proposal.

For a minimal amount of state investment, these programs help to market New York products to our own New York consumers, as well as nationally and internationally. For instance, the Christmas Tree Growers Association collaborated with the Green Markets in New York City this past year and trees grown here in New York State are actually replacing trees that are sold from North Carolina and Canada. Maple producers are developing new products each year and appealing to new customers. In the fall, consumers are specifically looking for New York's apple varieties at farm stands and in grocery stores. And our wineries are attracting 5 million tourists a year to locations all over the state.

Similarly, the research funded in the Agriculture and Markets budget is essential to making sure our growers continue to meet the new challenges they face, whether it is developing the next value-added product to better sell what they grow, finding ways to grow products better, or dealing with emerging threats to what they raise. For example, the berry industry is developing what look to be promising methods to exclude the spotted wing drosophila, which can devastate a fruit crop. I cannot overemphasize how critical research funding is to our dairy, apple, berry, maple, corn, vegetable, honey bee, onion and turfgrass growers in the state.

However, we are concerned by the Governor's plans for the FFA program in his budget. These programs provide agricultural education on the secondary level and serve as a great training ground for the next generation of farmers and agricultural professionals. It is a bridge to our agricultural colleges at Cornell University, Cobleskill, Morrisville and Alfred, as well as high-tech careers at other state schools.

We applaud the Governor's efforts to identify funding to help new high schools engage in agricultural programs, such as FFA. As there are almost fifty schools hoping to establish FFA's across the state. This has been a longstanding priority of our organization. However, he earmarks funding for new FFA programs, but ties the hands of the program by using some of their operating funding for the grant program. So, the current status is that new schools would have funding to create FFA programs, but the state FFA organization would not have funding to administratively support existing programs, let alone new programs. As a result, we are asking the legislature to restore base funding for the program with the Governor's added funding to establish new FFA programs across the state.

New York Farm Bureau was very pleased to see the Governor maintain last year's significant expansion of the Environmental Protection Fund at $300 million. We encourage the Legislature to support this proposal, especially for farm programs that support environmental health. As you know, the EPF champions the partnership between agriculture and the environment by funding farm environmental programs and protecting working lands.

The funding for the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement Program and Soil and Water Conservation District services is key this year as our livestock farmers look at further enhancing environmental stewardship to meet compliance with new Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permits that go into effect this year. Increases to the Farmland Protection Program will help ensure that we have resources to protect irreplaceable farmland from encroaching development statewide. The funding for Invasive Species eradication protects our natural resources from the pests that could wipe out the native species and diversity of species that our state enjoys. The Agricultural Waste Management Program remains important to farmers as well.

In addition, in the EPF proposal is the Integrated Pest Management program for $1 million and we support this continued funding amount. This program has been underfunded in past years and provides valuable information to farmers so they can better manage pesticide applications to limit frequency, best target the specific threat and decrease input costs.

The Environmental Protection Fund also provides $500,000 for implementation of the State's Pollinator Protection Plan. The Plan is a vital component in protecting the state's pollinators and helps to fund research and education on the state's pollinator populations including bees, butterflies, and pollinating flies. The research conducted at colleges, like Cornell University, ensure that bee keepers have best management practices (BMPs) on how to optimally raise their bees and produce honey but also provides information to farmers on pollinator habits and how best to protect them. Pollinators play an essential role in agriculture by providing $344 million annually in pollination services to crops like apples, berries, vegetables, and melons, just to name a few.

Continuing to fund implementation of the Pollinator Protection Plan will not only ensure the security of our pollinator population but the security of New York's food system as well.

We are also encouraged that the EPF has a new line to fund DEC's Clean Sweep program. This program, funded in the past through dwindling consent settlement funds, helps farmers, municipalities and school districts safely dispose of unwanted, unregistered or expired pesticide products. I know many farmers that were able to remove dozens of expired pesticide product from their farms, making their farms safer for the environment and for their workers and families.

We are also extremely supportive of the Governor's proposal to spend $2 billion to improve water quality for residents of New York State. As part of the Governor's proposal, he includes at least $50 million for hundreds of dairy farmers enrolled in the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) program in the state. These farms must comply with very strict regulations governing water quality and will take very careful steps to ensure that manure they spread on fields, as a nutrient, does not end up instreams, lakes or rivers in their communities. This effort will require each farm to construct new, larger manure storage facilities that can store manure until conditions are right for land application. These facilities can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and with the dairy economy struggling for the third straight year, this funding will help farmers cost share these construction projects. It is truly critical that a final agreement between the Executive and Legislature on where to direct water quality funding includes this investment for our state's dairy farms.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have today or at any later time.