



Agriculture and Markets

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

**Richard A. Ball, Commissioner
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Fiscal Year 2018-19 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony
Wednesday, February 27, 2018**

Good morning Chairwoman Young, Chairwoman Weinstein, Senator Ritchie, Assemblyman Magee, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am happy to offer my testimony on the 2018-19 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The Executive Budget recommends \$162 million for the Department. This will allow us to maintain our core functions while advancing key initiatives that support the agricultural industry and grow our food and beverage sectors.

Even with federal uncertainty, we have one of the strongest grower communities in the nation. Our nearly 36,000 farms not only increased production in 2017 for several commodities, but also implemented major environmental protections. With the Governor's support and partnerships with all of you, we have a great foundation to build on our progress.

I am very proud of our support of the Governor's No Student Goes Hungry initiative. A big part of that effort is doubling funding for our Farm-to-School program, which ensures healthy, local food access to our young people. The Executive Budget provides even greater resources, allowing us to expand our reach to hundreds of thousands of additional students.

The Governor has also proposed a significant increase in reimbursements for schools that source at least 30 percent of their food from New York farms. That will have a big impact on our schools, our children and our farmers.

Thanks to the record funding for agricultural education that you approved last year, thousands of students now have access to in-class edible gardens and hands-on agricultural lessons. In addition, 84 schools were awarded grants to start or advance agricultural education programs across the state.

The New York State Grown & Certified program now has more than 100 producers participating, who together operate nearly 50,000 acres. In addition, nine major dairy processors also represent nearly 1,400 New York dairy farms. We have expanded the program to include many new commodities and partnered with several large retailers to showcase these products in stores.

The Governor's Taste NY program continues to grow. Sales topped \$16 million last year and we are on track to do even better in 2018. The Executive Budget further expands opportunities to connect local entrepreneurs with consumers and to increase visibility of their products in major transportation hubs.

Our Industrial Hemp program boasts over 2,000 acres dedicated to innovative research. Tomorrow, we are hosting an Industrial Hemp Research Forum, connecting researchers, academics, businesses, and processors to improve and broaden the program. In addition, a \$2 million investment in seed certification and breeding will support the development of unique hemp varieties best suited for New York's growing conditions.

We also look forward to hosting two new summits: one focused on wood products and the other focused on Concord grapes. The goal is to bring stakeholders together to identify challenges and develop solutions to support these commodities.

Investments in the Great New York State Fair led to new attendance records and more sales of New York milk, maple and potatoes than ever before. Construction of the new 136,000 square foot expo center is underway and on track to be completed for this year's Fair.

Protecting the environment remains a top priority of the Governor's. This year's EPF includes \$20 million for farmland protection, \$17 million for agricultural water quality projects, and \$10 million for our Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

From preserving our natural resources to supporting economic development through the promotion of our high-quality agricultural products, the Executive Budget moves our agricultural industry forward. I understand developing the final State Budget is a collaboration with the Legislature, and we look forward to hearing your priorities as well.

Thank you.