



Agriculture and Markets

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Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony Wednesday, January 23, 2019

Richard A. Ball, Commissioner New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

Good afternoon Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, Senator Metzger, Assemblywoman Lupardo, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am pleased to offer my testimony regarding the 2019-20 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The Executive Budget recommends over \$175 million for the Department. This will allow us to maintain our core functions while executing strategic new endeavors that support the agricultural industry.

Despite continuing federal uncertainties and ongoing challenges to our industry – both climate and market-related – we continue to progress, thanks to the Governor’s commitment to the agricultural sector and to our partnerships with all of you.

First, we are excited that the Governor’s Executive Budget proposes a multi-million-dollar increase in aid to localities to ensure that the agriculture industry remains steadfast during this time of change. These dollars will support key programs, like Pro-Dairy, which helps our dairy farmers to increase profitability and competitiveness. The funding will also support robust programming for fruits and vegetables, maple, honey, Christmas trees, animal disease control, wine and craft beverages, migrant child care and more, and provides for crucial marketing and promotion efforts within the sector.

The Budget fortifies our communities through continued investment in our Farm-to-School program. This program allows children to have access to fresh, local foods, and connects our farmers to new markets. This year, we began a groundbreaking commitment: school districts purchasing at least 30% of their ingredients from New York farms and producers will receive a 25-cent reimbursement for lunches – up from just 5.9 cents.

To reach the goal of reducing food insecurity in New York by 10 percent by 2024, the Executive Budget includes several new initiatives that build on the work of the Hunger and Food Policy Council and increases access to food in underserved communities.

Combating climate change through sustainable agriculture remains a priority. This year, agricultural programming within the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) will see a \$4 million increase. These resources will support several critical initiatives, including an innovative, brand-new Healthy Soils NY program. This, along with increases for our Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program and our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, will help our farms to continue their good work in preserving soil health and water quality.

This past December the Regional Economic Development Councils awarded more than \$42 million to projects that will help grow and expand our farms and food businesses across New York State. Expanding on that strategic investment approach, the Governor has proposed a new \$15 million New

York Food and Agriculture Challenge this year, which will spur innovation by awarding prize money to food and agriculture firms that show promising, high-impact business growth.

Our Taste NY and NYS Grown & Certified programs continue to grow, providing unparalleled promotion of our homegrown products. The Executive Budget includes funding for the Taste NY program to further boost our local food and farm businesses and encourage tourism. New York State Grown & Certified will also continue to connect our world-class growers and producers to consumers and the growing demand for foods that are safely-handled and grown in an environmentally responsible manner.

Ensuring food safety in New York is more important than ever, and the extraordinary growth within the food and beverage industries coupled with new food safety regulations are increasing our Department's workload. I am pleased that the Executive Budget provides support in this area with additional full-time employees to assist with the Department's food safety responsibilities. This will allow staff to remain vigilant to food safety issues and continue to protect public health.

Finally, our New York State Fair shattered attendance records this past year as it welcomed a total of 1.26 million guests and set the seven highest single-day attendance records in the Fair's long history. The proposed \$5 million in the Budget for the State Fair will fund strategic renovation projects at some of the Fair's older structures, ensuring we continue to draw visitors and showcase the bounty of New York agriculture.

This year's Executive Budget is great news for our farmers and farm communities, our entrepreneurs, our environment, and our children. As the development of a State budget is a partnership with the Legislature, we look forward to hearing what your priorities will be and working with you in the year to come.

Thank you.