



2019 Joint Legislative Hearing

Environmental Conservation Hearing on FY2020 State Budget

Wednesday January 23rd, 2019
Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building, 2nd Floor
Albany, NY

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY:

SAMANTHA LEVY
AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

“The policy of the state shall be to conserve and protect its natural resources and scenic beauty
and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural lands
for the production of food and other agricultural products.”

- Article XIV, Section 4, New York State Constitution

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Thank you very much for holding today’s hearing, and for the New York State Legislature’s support for state programs that enhance farm viability and help farmers steward and protect the irreplaceable natural resource that is New York’s farmland.

I am pleased to present testimony on behalf of American Farmland Trust (AFT). AFT is the nation’s leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Since its founding in 1980 by farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped protect five million acres of farmland and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more. Established in 1990, AFT’s New York State Office works to save the land that sustains us across the state.

AGRICULTURE FORMS THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE ECONOMY

The production, processing, buying and selling of food has traditionally formed the foundation of all economies, and New York is no different. Recent studies by Farm Credit East have shown that New York’s 35,537 farms generated \$5.4 billion from direct sales, creating an economic impact of \$9.5 billion dollars and jobs for 77,000 New Yorkers. Farms also create business opportunities for farm support services such as electricians, feed and seed dealers, carpenters, farm equipment dealers, truckers, mechanics, bankers, veterinarians and many others. Because of this, they are often considered “anchor businesses”—keeping rural economies strong—while also providing fresh, healthy food for surrounding urban and suburban areas.

In addition, farms serve as the cornerstone of the state’s \$39.4 billion farm and food economy and are closely tied to New York’s food processing sector. Processing milk, fruits, vegetables and grains into cheese, yogurt, baked goods, wine, beer, spirits and other food products creates another 83,000 jobs for a total of over 160,000 steady jobs for residents across New York State.¹ Looking to the future, agricultural products that are newer to New York State, like hemp and potentially marijuana, will undoubtedly grow farming’s impact on the state’s economy as well.

ENSURING A STRONG FUTURE FOR FARMING IN NEW YORK STATE

Over seven million acres of land form the essential infrastructure underlying the state’s robust farm and food economy, yet this irreplaceable land is often taken for granted. Despite the importance of farms to all New Yorkers, roughly half a million acres of farmland in New York have been converted to real estate development since the 1980s—the equivalent of nearly 5,000 farms.

¹ Lopez, Rigoberto, Nataliya Plesha, Benjamin Campbell, and Chris Laughton. *Northeast Economic Engine: Agriculture, Forest Products, and Commercial Fishing*. Farm Credit East, 2015. The report uses data from 2012, which is the most recent available.

The loss of farms and farmland impacts not only the state’s farm economy but also the ability of New York farmers to meet state residents’ burgeoning demand for healthy fresh locally-grown food. In New York we have sufficient water and productive soils to grow “the full plate”—meat, dairy, fruits, grains, and vegetables. However, over 80 percent of the fruits, vegetables, and dairy products produced in New York State are grown on farmland immediately surrounding urban areas which lie directly in the path of suburban sprawl.² This is one of the reasons the Farmland Protection Program, which has been investing in protecting productive farmland in the path of development in New York State since 1996, is so critical to the future of agriculture, and our ability to produce healthy fresh local food, in New York.

Climate change also poses a significant threat to the future of our farms. But there are a number of ways that the state can incorporate farms and farmers into state climate policy to both invest in their ability to be more resilient in the face of extreme weather—and also increase their ability to mitigate climate change and be an important part of the solution.

There is also growing evidence of an emerging threat to farmland in New York due to the number of aging farmers in the state, and the challenges new and young farmers face accessing land. The 2012 Census of Agriculture reports that 30 percent of New York’s farmers are age 65 or older³. These farmers cultivate over 2 million acres of land, and AFT’s research shows that 92 percent are doing so without a young farmer-operator involved in the ownership or management of the farm. At the same time, one of the biggest challenges new and beginning farmers face is finding affordable farmland in New York with the right conditions that will enable them to succeed such as good market access, the right soil types, or housing for their families. According to the USDA census of Agriculture, there were nearly 30% fewer young farm operators (under 45) in 2012 than in 2002. Prices for land are often driven out of reach for new and young farmers as they find themselves competing with real estate developers, non-farming landowners, and established farmers. Yet to have a strong future for agriculture in New York, it is critical that more farmers are able to successfully enter and establish themselves in farming.

As senior farmers continue to retire over the next decade, their farms and the 2 million acres of land associated with them, will be vulnerable to being lost to development as farm families grapple with the challenges of successfully transferring their land and businesses, and new farmers struggle to find and afford land in New York State. Programs funded in the FY2019 budget like the Farmland Protection Program in the Environmental Protection Fund, and Farmland for a New Generation-New York, which connects farmers who need land with available properties or retiring farmers, are important ways to address these problems.

THE STATE OF NEW YORK’S COMMITMENT TO FARMLAND PROTECTION FUNDING

² Calculations based on the 2012 Census of Agriculture and the Economic Research Service’s Urban Influence Codes.

³ Another 30 percent of New York’s farmers are between the ages of 55 and 64, and they farm an additional 2 million acres of land.

In 1996, the State of New York began to invest funds through the Farmland Protection Program to permanently protect viable working farms. To date, the Farmland Protection Program has spent and dedicated nearly \$190 million to permanently protect just under 300 farms encompassing 75,000 acres of farmland. Starting in the FY2017 budget, the New York State Legislature and Governor Andrew Cuomo made an historically significant increase in funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, critical to protecting our natural resources, and raised the funding level to \$300 million. That same year, the annual budget for the Farmland Protection Program was raised from \$15 to \$20 million. In FY2018, this funding level of \$20 million for the Farmland Protection Program was maintained, but in last year's enacted budget, it was reduced to \$18 million.

Historically, farmers have been enthusiastic about permanently protecting their farmland—past demand for this funding has outstripped available Farmland Protection Program funds at well over 3:1. Between 1996 and 2015, \$689 million in applications were submitted for FPIG funds, with 72 percent or \$497 million being rejected largely due to a lack of state funding.⁴ The Department of Agriculture and Markets has decided to release Farmland Protection funds on a biennial timeline, therefore in May of 2018 the Department of Agriculture and Markets released a competitive RFP for \$38 million, two years' worth of appropriated funding, to protect farmland across New York State. Then, in June of 2018 in response to the dairy crisis, the Department made an additional \$30 million available, this time just for our struggling dairy farmers to permanently protect their farmland while transitioning ownership or converting to more profitable types of farming. The department again received an overwhelming response to these programs, and in December 2018, \$35 million was awarded to 40 farms in 19 counties to protect 13,000 acres of agricultural land. The Dairy Farmland Protection Program will accept applications until the full \$30 million is expended, but to date over \$8.5 million in funding has been publicly awarded to protect five farms in Western, Central, and Eastern New York.

In the Governor's FY2020 Executive Budget Proposal, he proposed \$17 million for farmland protection, relocating the \$1 million Tug Hill Fort Drum ACUB subline to the open space line, which would enable Tug Hill to protect wildlife habitats in the property surrounding Fort Drum.

As part of the FY2020 Enacted Budget, the Alliance for New York's Farmland, a statewide coalition of land trusts, agricultural organizations, and environmental organizations led by American Farmland Trust, asks that funding for the Farmland Protection Program be restored to \$20 million. The farmland protection program's popularity and benefits cannot be overstated—it bolsters the state's rural economy, secures our local food supply, helps to mitigate climate change, aids the transition of farmland to the next generation, and provides capital for farm businesses to expand and adapt to new markets while permanently protecting this irreplaceable fertile soil for our next generation of farmers. It is critical to maintain a strong level of funding in order to continue to realize program benefits and provide the Department of

⁴ "NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Farmland Protection Program History." Unpublished raw data, September 2015.

Agriculture and Markets creative ways to respond to current needs like they did with the Dairy Transitions Program. It is also critical to ensure that these funds get spent quickly to help the farmers that need them.

FARMLAND FOR A NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS

Funding offered by the state Farmland Protection Implementation Grants Program makes a significant contribution to helping new farmers access farmland—these funds can facilitate the retirement of established farmers, enabling them to sell their land to the next generation at a more affordable price without sacrificing their retirement funds.

In addition to affordable land, beginning farmers often need active support and guidance from a cadre of experts to help them find and evaluate farms, clarify their personal and business goals, evaluate lease or purchase options, and to find programs that can help them access land. In 2014, AFT coordinated the development of the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network (HVFN), a partnership of 16 organizations that offers a farmland finder website both for farmers seeking land and for landowners looking to make their land available to farmers, as well as trainings and one-on-one assistance for farmers and landowners on how to find or make their land available.

AFT has used private funds to provide over \$260,000 in HVFN Partner Grants to support partner organizations in their work to help beginning farmers find land, and farmers looking to transfer their farms. Together, these partners have provided one on one assistance to more than 2,000 farmers and landowners, and collectively, the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network has helped more than 150 farmers find land. This collaborative model combines easy access to information through a ‘farmland finder’ website with one-on-one services to successfully help farmers secure land.

As a part of the FY2019 state budget, the State of New York invested \$400,000 to expand the HVFN model statewide, creating the Farmland for a New Generation-NY (FNG-NY) program. FNG-NY has been regarded as one of the most progressive solutions in the nation to help new and existing farmers find land, assist landowners in making their land available for farming, and to support retiring farmers in successfully transferring their farms to the next generation. This program includes two components each funded at \$200,000:

- 1) A Statewide Resource Center coordinated by AFT to offer a statewide farmland finder website and first point of contact to support farmers searching for land and landowners with available land across New York; and
- 2) Funding to support a network of Regional Navigators within Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, land trusts, and other organizations across New York to provide one on one regional support for farmers in identifying, evaluating, and securing access to farmland.

On October 22nd, 2018 AFT launched the Farmland for a New Generation-NY Statewide Resource Center and land-linking website at nyfarmlandfinder.org. Since then, nearly 1,000 users have visited the website to browse farm/farmer listings and find resources and events. As of last week, there were 200 farmers seeking land and 137 properties available for farming listed on the site. In addition, FNG-NY staff has provided one-on-one guidance to 61 farmers and landowners on how to use the Resource Center and next steps they should consider in their search for a farm/farmer. AFT also assembled a Farmland for a New Generation Advisory Committee comprised of farmers, landowners, and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets staff to guide the roll out of the program, ensure relevance, and review Regional Navigator applications.

As part of the Resource Center, AFT also held two 3-part workshops in collaboration with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm Credit East, and the National Young Farmer's Coalition in Erie and Ulster Counties last fall called "Putting Down Roots" to train farm seekers on the specific legal, financial, and planning steps they must take to find land to farm. The 23 farmers who participated in this workshop series were given hard to find resources and one-on-one guidance and support from land access, finance, and legal experts to help them find farms, clarify their business and financial goals, and take action to secure land and start successful businesses in New York. Participants ranged in age and experience from young, first time farmers to older, more experienced farmers, and included three refugees from Bhutan (translator provided) who farmed in their home country before being forced to seek asylum in America, now residing in Buffalo, NY. FNG-NY staff will provide one-on-one follow up support on an ongoing basis to these 23 farmers to answer questions and help evaluate properties.

As mentioned above, a critical component of Farmland for a New Generation New York is in the one-on-one assistance provided by AFT staff and Regional Navigators to farmers and landowners to complement the Resource Center. These Regional Navigators will serve as coaches or advisors, applying knowledge of regional conditions and local networks to offer support tailored to address regional needs. That could include:

- Advising farmers and landowners on topics such as farm leasing, determining farm rental rates, preparing to secure farm financing, using conservation easements to facilitate farm transfers and access to farmland, and farm transfer planning;
- Providing technical assistance to beginning farmers in assessing their personal and business goals and financial readiness to secure access to farmland;
- Supporting farmers and non-farming landowners in evaluating properties and their appropriateness for different agricultural enterprises;
- Offering in-person trainings on these and similar topics for farmers and landowners;
- Participating in professional development trainings regarding helping beginning farmers secure access to farmland and related issues; and
- Tracking services provided to farmers and landowners, assisting in evaluating their effectiveness and contributing to reports on overall program impacts.

Applications to become a Regional Navigator were submitted by 20 organizations in all regions across New York State, requesting a total of \$373,000 for \$170,000 in available State funds. Applicants included organizations such as GrowNYC in New York City—which specializes in helping immigrant farmers find land and establish successful farm businesses in New York, as well as Cornell Cooperative Extension offices in counties across the state, other non-profit organizations, and land trusts. Regional Navigators will be supported by state funds to help not only existing farmers and people who grew up in farm families find land, but also people who haven't had easy access to land to farm: people of color, refugees, indigenous people, veterans, women and immigrants. American Farmland Trust will provide active support to Regional Navigators, and will help facilitate communication and information sharing while also providing professional development trainings, networking opportunities, and guidance and resources in response to farmer and landowner needs. For instance, this will include a Land Access Training in March 2019, teaching Regional Navigators how to hold their own "Putting Down Roots" workshops for farm seekers in their region in order to build up the number of potential farmers poised to take over when senior farmers retire. With \$170,000 in dedicated State Funding, AFT expects to be able to fund all 20 Regional Navigators, though at lower levels than requested in their applications. Public announcements of Regional Navigators selections will be made in early February 2019.

In a short time, AFT has seen the strength of demand for, and potential impact of, this program on the future of farming in New York. In order to continue our ability to provide these essential services to bring a new generation of farmers onto the land in New York, we ask that the State of New York fund Farmland for a New Generation New York in the FY2020 budget at \$500,000: \$200,000 to sustain the Resource Center, and \$300,000 to grow the network of Regional Navigators across New York State. (see attached proposal)

STRENGTHENING FARMLAND PROTECTION BY PROTECTING FARMS MORE QUICKLY

In 2018, the Department of Agriculture and Markets made an historic level of farmland protection funding available to New York farmers, but the success of this funding will hinge on the ability of the State and conservation organizations to work together to quickly deliver these grants to the farmers who need them most—particularly our dairy farmers. Great strides have been made in recent years by the Department of Agriculture and Markets to reduce the time it takes to complete Farmland Protection projects from, in some cases, 6 years down to a current reported average of 21 months from the contract date. But due to retirements and the ongoing difficulty of hiring new staff at the agency there is now only one full time staff member working to complete projects—less than in recent years. With over 30 projects from past rounds still working their way towards completion, and an influx of nearly \$70 million in new projects expected, changes must be made to ensure the Department of Agriculture is able to maintain its ability to complete projects quickly.

The Alliance for New York's Farmland recommends ensuring there are at least two full time employees working to fulfill the commitments that the State has made to farmers in connection with the Farmland Protection Program, and we encourage the legislature to demand more staff to do so. We also encourage the legislature to ensure that Department staff prioritize purchasing permanent agriculture conservation easements with EPF Farmland Protection funds. Permanent conservation easements are highly popular with farmers, have been proven effective, and should continue to be the priority until the overwhelming demand for state funds for this purpose has been met.

Importantly, we suggest that the legislature work with the Department of Agriculture and Markets to ensure that state funding for protecting farmland is made available on an annual basis. Annual funding availability is important for maintaining the high level of interest among farmers that has been cultivated as well as to ensure a regular schedule of farmer trainings, pre-application procedures and other activities conducted at the local level, including raising local matching funds. Ultimately, this regular annual application process will ensure that the state receives high-quality projects that are poised to be completed within the two-year goal the department has set for completing farmland conservation projects.

Finally, we encourage the legislature to explore legislative options to create an Accelerated Implementation Option for land trusts with a proven track record of completing successful farmland protection projects. Such an option would empower capable local partners to efficiently help farm families while protecting state interests and could be modeled on the Farmland Protection Program in the Commonwealth of Virginia in which the state government's involvement in the details of farmland protection projects is minimal. This is a viable model to look to because Virginia, like New York, administers their farmland protection funds as grants, and therefore does not hold interest in real property when farmland protection projects are completed.

CLARIFYING STATE LAW TO ENSURE MUNICIPALITIES CAN PROTECT WORKING FARMS

In September 2016, State Supreme Court Justice Thomas Whelan issued a decision that called into question the authority of municipalities to protect working farmland in Suffolk County—the site of the first farmland protection program in the country. This decision asserted that farmers who have protected their land were not allowed to build structures such as barns, greenhouses, and deer fences; all of which are essential to the success of these farm businesses and were rights retained when they protected their farms. This decision has been reversed and settled by the appellate court, but the two-year protracted legal battle revealed legal vulnerabilities to municipal Farmland Protection programs in the Hudson Valley and in Central and Western New York that are based on General Municipal Law section 247.

The Alliance for New York's Farmland encourages the State Legislature to address this issue by clarifying the authority of municipalities in New York to protect working farms under General

Municipal Law §247, not just undeveloped open space, as part of the FY2020 Enacted State Budget.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE WHILE SUPPORTING FARMERS

Climate change presents an incredible threat to farm viability and productivity, and efforts to mitigate climate change while supporting farm viability and resiliency will be critical in the coming years to ensure a strong future for agriculture in New York State. At the same time, farmers and farmland can play a critical role in the fight against climate change.

Released last fall, the 4th National Climate Assessment foretold dire consequences for our ability to continue to grow food in the US in the face of climate change. However, this report also confirmed something long-suspected: comparatively to other regions, growing food in the Northeast will become increasingly important due to our abundant water resources and relatively temperate climate. Permanent farmland protection is a first step to ensure we will have the land necessary to continue farming in New York while poising our farmers to be able to help in the fight against climate change by sequestering carbon in the soil, roots, and plants.

In 2017, AFT released a report entitled, “Greener Fields: Combating Climate Change by Keeping Land in Farming in New York” which looks at greenhouse gas emissions from human activity on different types of land uses in New York. The report found that on average, human activity on one acre of agricultural land emits 66 times less greenhouse gases than human activity on an acre of developed land in New York. Similar research in the state of California spurred the California Air Resources Board to allocate over \$70 million to date from their Carbon Market Proceeds to fund both smart growth planning and the purchase of permanent agricultural conservation easements to help implement these plans as a way to reduce GHG emissions from vehicular transportation. Based on their modelling, these investments into permanent farmland protection will avoid over 40 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions from cars over the next 30 years.

As stated above, in his FY2020 Executive Budget Proposal, the Governor proposed \$17 million for Farmland Protection, and \$2 million to invest in municipal Smart Growth plans. We encourage the state Legislature to build on these proposals in the FY2020 enacted state budget to ensure that the Farmland Protection program is an important part of reducing GHG emissions and helping the state achieve its climate goals. AFT highly recommends appropriating \$20 million for the Farmland Protection Program as part of a \$300 million EPF in the FY2020 state budget to increase both the number of acres protected and GHG emissions avoided with these dollars, while directing the Department of Agriculture and Markets to create a system to quantify GHG emissions avoided with current and future farmland protection projects.

Beyond permanent Farmland Protection, there are important opportunities for programs in this year’s state budget to help farmers play a role in mitigating climate change in New York. Last fall’s IPCC report warned that we have 12 years to not only reduce GHG emissions but also

remove carbon from the air and store it back in the earth in order to avoid climate catastrophe. As the 4th national Climate Assessment pointed out, agriculture is one of the few sectors with the potential for significant increases in carbon sequestration to offset GHG emissions.

In the Governor's State of the State, he proposed to establish a goal for carbon sequestration on Natural and Working Lands, including farmland, and invest in research to identify pathways to harness natural and working lands' ability to join in the fight against climate change. To carry this forward, the governor proposed to invest \$1.5 million of EPF funds to address GHG emissions outside of the power sector with a portion carved out for Cornell to develop a natural working lands agricultural inventory. He also proposed to double the state's investment in the Climate Resilient Farming Grants program to \$5 million in the EPF to invest in both research and programs to help farmers adopt practices that sequester carbon, improve water efficiency, and reduce GHG emissions while supporting farm viability. We strongly support these proposals, and wish to see them included in the FY2020 enacted State Budget.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that farms and farmland will play an important role in the state's transition to renewable energy. Flat open, sunny, well-draining farmland near transmission lines is often the first location renewable energy developers come to when choosing sites for solar and wind projects. While it is critical to transition to renewable energy as quickly as possible, state programs and policies must ensure that our best farmland for growing food and crops is not converted to solar development. State policies guiding solar siting away from our most productive farmland and prime soils to marginal lands, previously disturbed lands, rooftops, and other industrial sites should continue be adopted to ensure that our best farmland remains available for growing food and crops.

We look forward to working with the State Legislature to make farms and farmland a key piece of the state's climate change mitigation policies in this year's budget and beyond.

BUILDING FARM TO SCHOOL IN NEW YORK

Five years ago, AFT launched a collaborative initiative called "Farm to Institution New York State" (FINYS) that seeks to strengthen the economic security of farmers and health of New Yorkers by empowering public institutions, such as schools and hospitals, to spend at least 25% of their food dollars on food grown in New York.

A report released by American Farmland Trust and the New York Academy of Medicine in 2017 titled, "The Public Plate in New York State: Growing Health, Farms and Jobs with Local Food," underscores the opportunity that exists when publicly-funded institutions, including K-12 schools, purchase more food from New York farms. The report found that if institutions were to spend 25% of their food dollars on New York grown food, it would inject an additional \$200 million into the state's economy and improve the health of 6.6 million New Yorkers. As a first step, helping K-12 schools purchase and serve more fresh and minimally processed food from

New York farms to our children provides an exciting opportunity to open up new markets for farmers while positively influencing the health of 1.7 million New York schoolchildren.

According to the NY Department of Health nearly 1 in 5 children are obese, with 1 in 3 considered obese or overweight—a record high. Providing more fresh and minimally processed farm-fresh foods to the 1.7 million schoolchildren served school meals annually is an important opportunity to improve health outcomes and academic performance for our children all while teaching healthy habits. For food-insecure children, school meals can be their only daily dependable source of food, therefore Farm to School is an effective way to improve access to healthy food for our most vulnerable children. Finally, Farm to School also supports our state’s economy and the viability of New York farms—recent studies show that for each dollar invested in Farm to School activities, on average, an additional \$1.67 in local economic activity is stimulated and for each job created in Farm to School, 1.6 more are created within the community.

As a part of the “No Student Goes Hungry” Proposal in the FY2019 state budget the Governor and State Legislature took a huge step to grow Farm to School programs in New York by doubling the State’s investment in the Farm to School grants program to \$1.5 million and creating a groundbreaking new program to incentivize schools to buy more New York Grown food. Funded at \$10 million, this new incentive program will quadruple the current per meal reimbursement from \$0.059 cents to 25 cents for schools who purchase 30% of lunch meal ingredients from New York farmers. The New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition (NYGFFNYK), a coalition of school, food, farm, economic development, public health, environmental, and anti-hunger organizations led by AFT, strongly supported both of these initiatives as complementary programs that will help schools purchase and serve more New York Grown food to our students for the positive impact they could have on student health and the viability of our farms.

This generous new incentive has schools working hard to find ways to achieve 30% New York grown purchasing, and has great potential to redirect a sizable portion of our food dollars into the local economy while at the same time feeding healthier food to our children. However it will take time for most schools to reach 30%, and it is critical that the state continue to fund this new incentive programs, as the Governor proposed in his FY2020 Executive Budget. There are also other important opportunities for investment in this year’s state budget to support schools in their effort to increase local purchasing:

- The supply chain infrastructure to process and transport food from farms to schools in forms they can use needs to be built up,
- Within schools, investments in equipment to store and cook farm fresh foods and training for staff on how to do so need to continue to be made, and
- Relationships between schools and farms as buyer and seller need to be built.

The Farm to School Grants program is one important way some of these investments can be made—many of these grants are used to hire Farm to School coordinators, train staff, or

purchase necessary equipment. In 2018, the Department reportedly received \$3.4 million in application requests for \$1.5 million in available Farm to School funds. They awarded this \$1.5 million to schools, Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, and other organizations to increase schools' ability to purchase, handle, store, cook, and serve New York Grown food. In the Governor's FY2020 Budget Proposal however, only \$750,000 was allocated within the education budget to invest in Farm to School Grants this year, which would meet only 22% of current demand for these funds.

We ask that the Legislature work with the Governor to increase funding for the Farm to School Grants program to \$3 million to meet the high demand for this popular program which supports schools in working to achieve 30% local purchasing. We also recommend appropriating \$5 million in capital funding to continue to invest in projects that will build an unbroken Farm to School supply chain, such as processing facilities, food hubs, and distribution networks. These investments will also pave the way for other public institutions, such as universities and hospitals, to purchase more New York grown food.

Finally, children choose and eat more fresh foods in school meals if they are directly involved in growing or preparing them, or if they learn about these foods in an experiential way. Nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, school gardens, farm visits and food tastings are just a few of the activities that New York schools undertake to teach kids about farms and the benefits of healthy eating; lessons that will serve them for a lifetime. Federal regulations require schools to maintain a School Wellness Policy. We recommend that the State of New York create a Model New York State School Wellness Policy supporting Farm to School that promotes locally-sourced school meals and links them with increased experiential education such as hands-on lessons, taste tests, school gardens activities, local farm visits, and family engagement. This will improve linkages between the cafeteria and the classroom, and continue to improve the health and academic performance of students in connection with Farm to School Programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information. I welcome any questions you might have, and look forward to continuing the conversation about these proposals and more in the months ahead.



FARMLAND FOR A NEW GENERATION PROPOSAL

Beginning farmers in New York, and throughout the nation, face major barriers in getting started in farming—including finding farmland at prices they can afford with conditions that will enable them to launch successful businesses. As a result, there were 30% fewer young farmer operators in New York in 2012 than in 2002.

At the same time, more than 30% of New York’s farmers are 65 or older and there is evidence that over 90% of these senior farmers do not have a young farmer involved in the ownership or management of their farm. Thus, nearly 2 million acres of farmland in New York will be changing hands in the coming years. Whether this farmland is lost to real estate development or remains in agriculture is in the balance.

The *Farmland for a New Generation New York* Program creates one of the most progressive solutions in the country to address this issue. This program, coordinated by American Farmland Trust and modeled on the successful Hudson Valley Farmlink Network, fosters a statewide approach to help new farmers and younger generations of farm families access land, while supporting retiring farmers and landowners in successfully transferring their farms to the next generation.

MAINTAINING NEW YORK’S ABILITY TO HELP A NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS ACCESS LAND

To continue this critical work, we ask that the State of New York sustain funding for the statewide Resource Center, and grow the network of Regional Navigators in 2020 by allocating:

Farmland for a New Generation Resource Center FY2020 Budget Request: \$200,000

In October 2018, AFT launched a statewide Resource Center which offers critical, centralized services to farmers searching for land and for landowners across New York, including:

- A statewide website to enable farmers to find land in every region of New York while making it easier to navigate services, find training materials and obtain model documents.
- A first point of contact with AFT’s experienced staff to help farmers navigate farm leasing and purchasing strategies, land conservation options, agricultural assessment and other land access topics.

Farmland for a New Generation Regional Navigators: FY2020 Budget Request: \$300,000

In November 2019, American Farmland Trust received applications from 20 organizations requesting over \$373,000 in funds to become FNG NY Regional Navigators. In February 2019, AFT will award \$170,000 in available funds to support a network of regional navigators at Cornell Cooperative Extension, land trusts, and other organizations to provide coaching and personalized assistance to farmers and landowners across New York. Regional Navigators’ work

includes helping beginning farmers evaluate properties, develop secure farm leases, identify financing options for purchasing farmland, or find ways to use conservation easements to purchase land at an affordable price. American Farmland Trust will also provide active support to Regional Navigators including offering professional development trainings, networking opportunities, and guidance and resources in response to farmer and landowner needs.