



**Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony
Monday, January 27, 2020**

**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 honored to present my testimony on the FY 2021 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Despite continued uncertainties at the federal level and in the marketplace, the State's agricultural community is making progress, thanks to Governor Cuomo's dedication to the industry and to our partnerships with all of you.

The Executive Budget recommends \$190 million for the Department, an increase from last year, showing strong commitment to the agricultural industry. These funds will allow us to execute our essential functions while implementing innovative programs that promote agriculture in New York.

Importantly, this year's Executive Budget addresses our industry's concerns and provides clarity on the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act by expanding the definition of extended family.

It also confronts climate change, continuing Environmental Protection Fund funding at \$300 million. For our Department, that means \$55 million to support farmland protection, climate change mitigation, water quality improvement programs, and invasive species programs.

Building on that, the Executive Budget proposes the \$3 billion Restore Mother Nature Bond Act, which will also expand on-farm best practices and agricultural nutrient management programs.

We are pleased that the Executive Budget proposes \$27.4 million in local assistance to ensure the future of New York agriculture. These dollars will support key programs that provide the specialized technical assistance, research, agricultural education, workforce development, and marketing programs for agriculture. For example, we are continuing to fund historic investments in the NY FFA program. The results have been impressive: the NY FFA had the highest membership increase in the country in 2019.

To expand our opportunities for new farmers, the Department will also be convening a workgroup this year committed to increasing diversity in the farming community in New York State.

Through the Taste NY and NYS Grown & Certified programs, Governor Cuomo continues to prioritize the promotion of locally grown and produced foods. New York State Grown & Certified has done a tremendous job of helping farmers and small businesses answer the demand from consumers for fresh, local food. In three years, we have seen the program grow to over 3,000 farms on over 775,000 acres of farmland.

A proposed Blue-Ribbon Task Force will build on the NYS Grown & Certified program and look at produce traceability to provide consumers with more information about the source of the food they eat.

The Executive Budget provides an additional \$1.5 million investment in our Farm-to-School program, bringing more fresh local foods to children and connecting farmers to new markets.

The Department performs crucial regulatory functions that help safeguard our plants and animals and ensure the safety of New York's food supply. The number of establishments requiring our inspection is ever increasing. The Executive Budget provides a much-needed boost of support with the addition of staff, including inspectors for the Industrial Hemp Agricultural Research Pilot Program, who will be on the front lines of our food safety, public health, and plant health efforts.

Finally, our New York State Fair has shattered attendance records for four years straight. In 2019, the Fair welcomed over 1.3 million guests. This year's budget proposes \$5 million to extend the Fair's run, allowing more visitors than ever to experience New York agriculture. In addition, \$15 million will be used to continue to modernize the grounds and encourage year-round use.

The proposed FY 2021 Executive Budget moves our agricultural industry forward. As the development of a State budget is a partnership with the Legislature, we look forward to hearing your priorities and working with you in the year to come.

Thank you.