



2020 Joint Legislative Hearing

Environmental Conservation Hearing on FY2021 State Budget

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TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY:

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“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

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 over 6.5 million acres of farmland and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more. Established in 1990, AFT's New York 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. A national leader in many commodities, the recent 2017 USDA census revealed that New York's now nearly 33,400 farms generated \$5.7 billion in gross income in 2017, up more than 23% from a decade earlier, while creating jobs for 55,000 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 communities strong. 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.ⁱ All of this activity creates a total economic impact from agriculture of nearly \$45 billion.ⁱⁱ

ENSURING A STRONG FUTURE FOR FARMING IN NEW YORK STATE

Almost 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 and food 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.

The loss of farms and farmland impacts not only the state's farm economy but also the ability of New York's farmers to meet state residents' burgeoning demand for 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.¹ This is one of the reasons the state Farmland Protection Program, which has been investing in protecting productive farmland in the path of development in New York since 1996, is so critical to the future of agriculture in New York.

There is also growing evidence of an emerging threat to farmland in New York due to the number of aging farmers in the state. According to data from the newly released 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age of farmers is 57, up from 54 in 2007. Additionally, the census revealed that the ratio of farmers over 65 to farmers under 35 is 5:1. Senior farmers in New York cultivate nearly 2 million acres of land, and AFT 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 young, new, limited resource, and beginning farmers face is finding affordable farmland in New York. Prices for land are often driven out of reach for these farmers as they find themselves competing for land with real estate developers, non-farming landowners and established farmers—as well as new high value opportunities such as hemp and solar.

As senior farmers continue to retire over the next decade, the fate of their farms and the nearly 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. This is why programs like the Farmland Protection Program and Farmland for a New Generation-New York funded in the FY19 and FY20 budgets to connect farmers who need land with available properties, are so important to the future of agriculture in New York State.

Climate change also presents an incredible threat to farm viability and productivity, and efforts to mitigate climate change while supporting farm viability and resiliency to extreme weather will be critical in the coming years to ensure a strong future for agriculture. At the same time, farmers and farmland can play a critical role in the fight against climate change, and we look forward to working with the State Legislature to continue to make agriculture a key pillar of the state's climate change mitigation and adaptation policies in the coming years.

HIGH DEMAND FROM NEW YORK FARMERS FOR FARMLAND PROTECTION FUNDS

In 1996, the State of New York began to invest funds through the Farmland Protection Program to permanently protect viable working farms. This 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 all while permanently protecting this irreplaceable fertile soil for our next generation of farmers. Just this summer, the State of New York celebrated the milestone of 75,000 acres protected, and to date the

¹ Calculations based on the 2012 Census of Agriculture and the Economic Research Service's Urban Influence Codes.

program has provided more than \$180 million in funding to purchase development rights on about 76,300 acres of farmland on 299 farms in New York State.ⁱⁱⁱ

Demand for the farmland protection program has been, and continues to be, high. Since the inception of the Farmland Protection Program in 1996, there has been more interest among farmers in protecting farmland than funds available to do so. Between 1996 and 2015, \$689 million in applications were submitted for FPIG funds, with 72 percent or \$497 million being rejected by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets largely due to a lack of state funding.^{iv} That means funds officially requested vs. funds available was at a level of 3:1, and this number does not include total demand from New York farmers due to the cap on the number of applications an entity can submit.

Over the past two years, the Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) released a record amount of funding to permanently protect farmland in New York—particularly to help struggling dairy farmers diversify, transition to a more viable business model, or pass their farm on to the next generation. These new opportunities have stimulated more interest and demand in this program from farmers across the state. Well over 200 farmers have recently expressed interest in protecting their farms, and regional examples of current significant unmet demand includes:

- Western NY: The Western New York Land Conservancy serving Erie and Allegany counties currently has 30 inquiries for farmland protection encompassing over 4,600 acres and has received more than 60 additional requests for farmland protection assistance in the last 3 years. The western region has consistently submitted applications for the recent dairy program opportunities, at a rapid rate with little outreach—and all funds allocated to this region have been expended with more farmers interested in applying.
- Hudson Valley: Scenic Hudson works independently and with other regional land trusts in the Hudson Valley. Combined, they estimate expressed interest from more than 40 farms.
- Mohawk Valley: the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy gets 6-12 calls annually regarding conserving and/or finding farmland.
- Upper Hudson Valley: The Agricultural Stewardship Association, a land trust that conserves farmland in the Upper Hudson Valley, has received 35 pre-applications for the 2020 funding that will be released this spring with 24 in Washington county, and 11 in Rensselaer county. Saratoga PLAN currently has 18 farms expressing strong interest, and 20 others seriously exploring the opportunity to protect their land. In Saratoga County, PLAN has seen steady growth in interest from farmland owners over the past few years, and consistent funding has made a strong impact on farmers within this county.
- Finger Lakes: The Finger Lakes Land Trust receives many inquiries directly from farmers interested in protecting their land. Additionally, counties in the area send farms to the land trust that are highly-ranked in their pre-application scoring. The Finger Lakes Land Trust is only able to apply on behalf of a small fraction of these farmers due to the application cap.
- Central New York: The New York Agricultural Land Trust (NYALT) pools and submits applications from Cayuga, Cortland, Onondaga, Seneca, and Madison counties. Between

these counties, 46 farmers are currently interested in the Dairy and non-dairy transitions programs, and the upcoming FPIG RFP expected in the spring of 2020.

Starting in the FY17 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 FY18, this funding level of \$20 million for the Farmland Protection Program was maintained, but in the last two year's enacted budgets, it was reduced to \$18 million—an unfortunate reduction given the level of demand and need out in the field today.

In the FY21 Executive Budget Proposal, the Governor maintained funding for the EPF at \$300 million, but proposed a cut to the Farmland Protection Program to \$17 million. The governor also proposed to allow the agencies to use EPF funding for staff and agency costs for administering this program.

The future of farming in New York rests on our ability to keep land in farming at a time when farmers are struggling financially. While AFT is encouraged by the governor's continued commitment to a \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund, AFT is concerned that the language enabling agencies to use EPF dollars for agency staff expenses, as well as a proposed \$1 million reduction in the state's farmland protection program, may accelerate farmland loss across the state. AFT and the Alliance for New York's Farmland encourages the legislature to restore funding to the Farmland Protection program, and work with the Governor to increase appropriations to \$20 million in FY21, with the goal of restoring this program's funding to its peak level of \$30 million in future years, while also increasing the EPF appropriation to \$500 million.

While investing in staff and agency capacity to ensure farmland protection funds are spent quickly so that they reach the farmers that need them is a critical priority, because of the high level of unmet demand for this program, AFT and the Alliance for New York's Farmland does not support using EPF funding for administrative expenses. We appreciate the legislature's diligent work to ensure this language was not in the FY20 enacted budget last year, and we are eager to work alongside you again to ensure the language authorizing the use of EPF funds for agency staff and expenses is not included in the FY21 enacted state budget.

FARMLAND FOR A NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS

As stated above, our farmers are aging and nearly 2 million acres of farmland will become vulnerable to development as it changes hands over the next decade. 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 transfer their more affordable protected farms to the next

generation without sacrificing their retirement funds. This funding also gives new farmers the opportunity to purchase farmland that has been made affordable by being placed under agricultural conservation easement—especially when there is a pre-emptive purchase right attached—a further restriction that ensures the land can only be sold to a qualified farmer.

In addition to needing affordable farmland, beginning farmers often need active support to clarify their personal and business goals, identify and evaluate farms, and evaluate lease or purchase options, and guidance to find programs that can help them access land. Conversely, senior farmers and their families need support developing succession and retirement plans that enable their land to continue in farming. To address these needs, in 2014, AFT coordinated the development of the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network (HVFN), a partnership of 16 organizations that offer a farmland finder website, trainings and one-on-one assistance for farmers and landowners. Modelled off of this successful program, the State of New York invested \$400,000 as part of each the FY19 and FY20 budgets to create and sustain the statewide Farmland for a New Generation-NY (FNG-NY) program, 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 which have been funded each year at \$200,000 each:

- 1) A Statewide Resource Center coordinated by AFT to offer a statewide farmland finder website and first point of contact for support for farmers searching for land and for landowners with available land across New York; and
- 2) A network of regional navigators within Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, land trusts, and other organizations across New York to provide one on one support for farmers in their service area in identifying, evaluating and securing access to farmland, to senior farmers in planning to transfer their farm to the next generation, and to landowners to make their land available for farming.

On October 22nd, 2018 AFT launched the Farmland for a New Generation-NY Statewide Resource Center and land-linking website at nyfarmlandfinder.org. Later that year, AFT requested applications from organizations to become regional navigators, and received nearly \$385,000 in funding requests from 20 organizations across New York. In February 2019, AFT awarded \$170,000 in available state funding to 18 regional navigators. Throughout the course of 2019, American Farmland Trust has provided active support to Regional Navigators including offering professional development trainings, networking opportunities, and guidance and resources in response to farmer and landowner needs to continue to grow their ability to work together and meet needs out in the field.

American Farmland Trust, and Farmland for a New Generation regional navigators have accomplished great things within just one year of the program's existence. Notably:

- 13,600+ users have visited the landlink site to view listings, and find resources and events
- 1,823 farmers, landowners, and others have received training and support through events
- 1226 landowners and land seekers have received one-on-one guidance from RNs
- 322 landowners and land seekers have received one on one guidance from AFT staff
- 263 farmland seekers have posted profiles
- 195 farmland owners have listed properties
- 36 matches spanning 866 acres have been reported, with more coming in every month

Of these matches 9 were sales, 21 are leases—including one 99-year ground lease to help the farmer build equity in their business—and the rest were management agreements and mentorships. Encouragingly, farmers that are finding land so far through this program include only three established farmers who are expanding, the rest are farmers establishing new businesses—including a number of immigrants, and a community of Somali-Bantu refugees in Oneida county. The new businesses established through matches made include diverse farms—from mushrooms to organic beef to aquaculture—and are located not only in the Hudson Valley, and Central New York, but also on Long Island, in Staten Island, and in Brooklyn.

To kick off year two of the program, in November 2019 AFT continued to build and strengthen this support network by convening the second statewide On Solid Ground Forum in Albany. This forum aimed to enrich the abilities of professionals who are working in this field by bringing together farmers and professionals to network and plan how to more successfully engage and create new opportunities for farmers and landowners in New York. Additionally during the fall, AFT opened up the second round of applications for regional navigators. In response, 27 organizations—an increase in seven over year one—applied to become regional navigators, and year two funding awards of \$170,000 to support their work will be announced within the next month². Because the number of navigators grew, and the level of state funding available has remained constant, in order to ensure that funds were spread across organizations AFT reduced this year’s application cap to \$15,000 per navigator, down from \$25,000 in year one, and yet AFT received a total of nearly \$300,000 in funding requests from regional navigators. This requested funding is far less than their need, but still much more than available to award to support their necessary one-on-one work.

Assisting farmers in finding land, or helping senior farmers plan for retirement and succession is work that takes time. While 36 matches is an admirable achievement in year one of a new land linking program, it is critical to remember that the investments of time that regional navigators are making will continue to pay off and increase match numbers in future years as the farmland access and transition support network and relationships are built and strengthened. But this

² A full list of 2020 Farmland for a New Generation NY Regional Navigators can be found on page 16 of this testimony

will only continue if they receive enough funding to cover the costs of the time intensive one-on-one work they need to do.

Thank you to the members of the Senate and Assembly that have supported this program in the past—we now look to you to again to help this program build our ability to provide these essential services to bring a new generation of farmers onto the land and keep land in farming in New York. To accomplish this, AFT and the Alliance for New York's Farmland asks that the legislature work with the Governor to fund Farmland for a New Generation New York in the FY21 budget at \$600,000. (see attached proposal on page 15)

Broken down by the program components in the state budget, this would mean:

- \$200,000 to maintain the Farmland for a New Generation Resource Center, enabling AFT to maintain the website, dedicate resource center staff time as a first point of contact for farmers, and build critical staff capacity to support intra-region coordination and strengthen the program's impact in Central and Western New York.
- \$400,000 for Regional Navigators to continue their ability to dedicate staff time to the one-on-one work that farmers and landowners need most. This funding increase will enable organization across the state to meet the growing demand from new farmers, established farmers and landowners looking to make their land available for farming, ensuring they can provide one-on-one support and assistance necessary to keep land in farming as it changes hands over the course of the next decade.

Thank you in advance for your support—we look forward to working with you to continue to support new farmers and to help senior farmers choose to keep their land in farming this year.

FARM TO SCHOOL: TAKING ACTION TO REVOLUTIONIZE SCHOOL FOOD WHILE SUPPORTING FARMS STATEWIDE

Five years ago, AFT launched a collaborative initiative called "Farm to Institution New York State" (FINYS) to strengthen the economic security of farmers and health of New Yorkers by empowering institutions to spend at least 25% of their food dollars on food grown in New York. FINYS does this in a number of ways, including research, training, and policy advocacy. In 2017, AFT/FINYS began organizing and leading 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 advocating for support to build Farm to School in New York State.

Farm to school programs create new market opportunities for farmers who are currently facing significant economic challenges remaining economically viable. Recent studies show that each dollar invested in Farm to School stimulates an additional \$0.60–\$2.16 in local economic activity, and a 2016 study published by Cornell University revealed that if New York schools were to buy just one additional New York grown fruit or vegetable per week, this could increase revenue for vegetable farmers by \$9.2 million, or for fruit growers by \$5.3 million.^{v vi} Beyond

the economics, farm to school programs are also an important strategy to improve nutrition for school-aged children as about half of a students' daily calories come from school meals. In addition, these programs provide access to farm fresh food to those that need it most – on average 46% of students who eat meals at school are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, meaning they come from families that are facing economic challenges.^{vii}

In recognition of the benefits of Farm to School, in both the FY19 and FY20 state budgets the Governor and State Legislature allocated \$10 million in the education budget to create a nation leading incentive program which quadruples 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 state also invested \$1.5 million each year split equally between the agriculture and education budgets for the Farm to School grants program. The reimbursement incentive provides a financial award for schools that increase their purchasing of New York grown food, and the Farm to School grants program invests in projects that help schools hire and train staff, or buy equipment that will enable them to purchase and serve more New York grown food. The NYGFFNYK coalition strongly supports both of these initiatives as complimentary programs that will help more schools support New York farms while increasing access to health local food for their students.

The New York State Farm to School Incentive program leads the nation as the most generous incentive to encourage purchasing of local food by schools—a win-win-win for farms, kids, and local communities. So far, this program has been in effect for one complete school year. While many schools saw 30% as a challenge to achieve, 48 SFAs applied to the New York State Education Department for the extra reimbursement in year one claiming they reached 30%. Ultimately, only seven schools qualified, but this list includes Buffalo Public Schools, the second largest district in the state, which spent over \$2.6 million on food from New York farms to successfully meet 30% spending and qualify for the extra reimbursement.

NEW AFT RESEARCH SHOWS GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR FARM TO SCHOOL IN NEW YORK

Beginning in June 2019, AFT conducted research evaluating this incentive program's current and potential impact to determine whether it was successfully stimulating more school purchases from New York farms. Findings and recommendations are detailed in the report: "Growing Opportunity for Farm to School: How to Revolutionize School Food, Support Local Farms, and Improve the Health of Students in New York," released publicly today—January 27th, 2020! **This report revealed that, with the right support, 72% of schools expect to reach 30% by 2024, increasing their purchases of food from New York farms threefold to nearly \$150 million while increasing access to local food for over 700,000 students statewide. This achievement would generate over \$210 million in economic impact while costing the state less than half that amount over the course of the next five years.**³ However, achieving this

³ The full "Growing Opportunities" report detailing this research, findings, and recommendations can be found at www.farmland.org/growingopportunity.

incredible potential will require New York to take decisive action this year to begin to build a strong Farm to School support system for schools across the state.

CHALLENGES SCHOOLS FACE IN BUYING NEW YORK GROWN AND RAISED FOOD

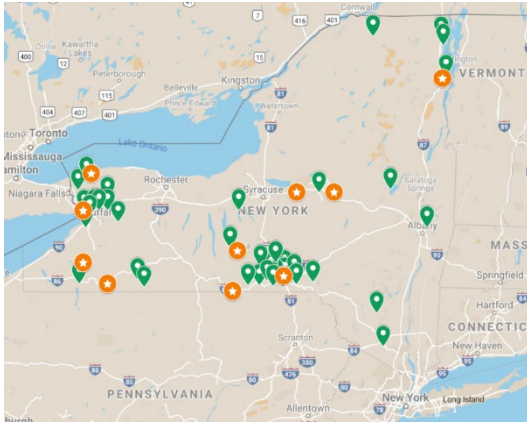
According to AFT’s research, school food service directors still reported facing barriers when attempting to buy more New York grown food and reach 30%, and more must be done to help them in order to unlock the full economic and public health potential of this program. In survey responses and during follow-up interviews, Food Service Directors reported cost, not having enough staff time to dedicate to Farm to School, and difficulty navigating complicated procurement regulations that favor “least cost” options as some of their main barriers to buying more food from New York farms.

When asked about the challenges they face in participating in the incentive program specifically, many schools reported a lack of clarity around program guidelines and requirements. Notably, however, cost fell from first to sixth in terms of reported barriers as compared with the challenges they face buying New York grown food generally. This reveals that the incentive program is doing what it was meant to—making schools less cost-sensitive when buying New York grown food.

Another finding of the research was that focusing this program only on lunch created challenges for Food Service Directors to participate. Since high-need schools are required to serve more breakfast, afterschool meals, and summer meals, when this program was created it was limited to lunch in order to keep an even playing field of access for all schools. However, this choice created unintended administrative barriers to participation, and a limitation on the program’s impact on the farm economy. Both for Food Service Directors that don’t have time to commit to Farm to School and for those that anticipated achieved 30% in year one, separating lunch purchases was reportedly difficult as it is not naturally done and takes time to accomplish. In addition, throughout the research, there was evidence of other unintended impacts of focusing only on lunch, including “creative accounting.” Though net impacts on the farm economy are likely to be positive, some Food Service Directors reported shifting New York grown items already purchased for other meals to lunch—which could mean there will be schools that meet 30% without increasing the amount they purchase from New York farms.

THE RIGHT SUPPORT TO HELP MORE SCHOOLS PURCHASE NEW YORK GROWN FOOD

This research also sought to understand what support school food service directors need to increase their spending on food from New York farms. Due to the breadth of work they are responsible for, and corresponding time limitations they face—outside support was critical to success. When looking at the geographic overlap of SFAs that applied for the 30% initiative in year one on the map below, and comparing this to the location of Farm to School coordinators



Map of Farm to School Coordinators (orange) and schools that applied for the 30% Initiative in year one (green)

across the state, it becomes clear that these coordinators, often located within schools, Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, BOCES, or at non-profit organizations, are essential to establishing successful Farm to School programs at schools across the state.

Based on this research, in order to begin to unlock the full potential of this program, AFT and the NYGFFNYK coalition ask that the State continue the incentive program, seek expansion to other meals in the future, make modest increased investments in the farm to school grants program in order to invest in a network of Farm to School coordinators, and update procurement laws in the FY21 state budget to

make it easier for schools to spend food dollars at local farms.

The Farm to School grants program has proven necessary to enable schools to start and maintain successful farm to school programs in order to increase procurement of New York grown and raised foods. Both in 2018 and 2019, NYSDAM received \$3 million in requests for Farm to School projects that would help schools buy more New York grown food—two times the \$1.5 million in funding they had available to award each year.

In his FY21 Budget proposal, Governor Cuomo proposed maintaining the incentive program for lunch at \$10 million and proposed \$1.5 million for the Farm to School Grants Program. He also included language in the Article VII TED bill on Page 262 to change state procurement laws to increase the flexibility schools have to spend more of their food dollars at local farms. As mandated by federal law, when school spending goes above the small purchase threshold, this triggers a time-consuming sealed bidding process. The state small purchase threshold is currently effectively \$20,000 (potentially up to \$50,000) and the Federal threshold simple, and much higher at \$250,000. Updating state law to increase this state’s threshold to match the higher federal threshold as proposed in the executive budget would address one of the main barriers schools reported facing in their attempt to buy New York grown food—navigating complicated procurement laws. This change would enable schools to more easily spend larger amounts of money directly at New York farms without going through the formal procurement process—helping them more easily reach 30%.

The NYGFFNYK coalition encourages the legislature and the Governor to build on these proposals in the FY21 Enacted State Budget by:

- Appropriating \$10 million to continue to reimburse 25 cents per lunch to K-12 schools that spend at least 30% of their lunch budget on food from New York farmers, growers, producers, and processors;

- Exploring the opportunity to expand to other school meals in the future;
- Increasing funding for the Farm to School Grants program to \$3 million split between agriculture and education, so long as this does not compromise funding for other agricultural programs, to meet current demand and support projects that will help schools purchase, prepare and promote New York grown foods to New York kids;
- Creating a statewide network of regional farm to school coordinators through the Farm to School grants program to support food service directors and connect them with farms. These coordinators should also be centrally coordinated to facilitate the sharing of best practices between regions;
- Including language proposed in the Article VII TED bill, page 262, in the final budget which would harmonize the state Small Purchase Threshold to the Federal Threshold.

A CRITICAL ROLES FOR FARMS IN RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE EPF AND BOND ACT

Climate change presents an incredible threat to the future of our farms, 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. Farmers could play a central role in combating and mitigating the impacts of climate change and opportunities to support them in taking these actions should be included in the state budget.

The governor’s proposed budget includes a landmark plan for a \$3 billion environmental bond act, which, if passed by voters in November, would invest in capital projects that help combat and reduce the impacts of extreme weather caused by climate change. While the types of projects detailed for funding in the environmental bond act proposal are important to our ability to address the climate crisis, equally important are projects designed to keep land in farming, as well as increase the environmental services our farmers provide as stewards of the land. Win-win investments into helping farmers permanently protect their land, and to buy equipment to adopt soil health practices will keep land in farming, protect surrounding water quality, and reduce the impacts of droughts and floods on farm yields. These types of investments should be made eligible in the environmental bond act language.

When coupled with Smart Growth Planning, permanent Farmland Protection can help mitigate climate change by lowering GHG emissions associated with transportation. 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 fewer 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 create the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation program in 2015 to invest 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. To date, over \$124 million has

been invested to permanently protecting 90,000 acres of farmland which, based on their modeling, will avoid over 49 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions from cars over the next 30 years. In 2019, \$56 million in additional funding was awarded to protect 20,000 more acres of farmland and the State of California is currently calculating the GHG emissions avoided as a result of these new investments.

Similar opportunities, modeling and program should be explored and developed for New York State, and the Bond act could be the right opportunity to do so. As the environmental bond act progresses, we see an important opportunity to explore how this funding can help our farmers adopt more regenerative farming practices, and to create a climate farmland protection program in New York. We look forward to working with the Governor and the legislature to ensure our farmers are fully recognized in the final proposal.

Finally, the governor also proposed to maintain the state's investment in the popular Climate Resilient Farming Grants program at \$4.5 million in the EPF to help farmers adopt practices that sequester carbon, improve water efficiency, and reduce GHG emissions while supporting farm viability. Along with making a strong investment into Smart Growth planning and increasing investments to \$20 million for permanent Farmland Protection this year, AFT strongly supports this proposed funding as a way to continue to help farmers play an important role in mitigating climate change, and wishes to see this proposed funding included in the FY21 enacted State Budget.

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.

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FARMLAND FOR A NEW GENERATION NEW YORK

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, and as of 2017, principal operators over 65 outnumber those under 45 by 5:1.

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 another farmer involved in the ownership or management of their farm. Thus, nearly 2 million acres of farmland in New York will change 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 funded in the FY19 and 20 State budgets creates one of the most progressive solutions in the country to stem the loss of farmland as this transition occurs—ensuring access to farmland for existing, new, and underserved farmers. This program, coordinated by American Farmland Trust, 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.

STRENGTHENING NEW YORK'S ABILITY TO HELP A DIVERSE NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS ACCESS LAND

To continue this critical work, we ask that the State of New York increase funding for the statewide Resource Center and grow funding for the network of Regional Navigators in the FY2021 State budget.

Farmland for a New Generation Resource Center

Recommended FY21 Budget: \$200,000

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

- A website (nyfarmlandfinder.org) 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.

The proposed funding increase will enable AFT to build staff capacity that supports increased intra-region coordination and ability to meet the needs of diverse communities of farmers in accessing land.

Farmland for a New Generation Regional Navigators

Recommended FY21 Budget: \$400,000

In 2019, 7 more organizations—including CCE offices, land trusts, and farm organizations—applied to become regional navigators, bringing the total to 27 organizations. These organizations have requested a total of \$295,000 in funding out of \$170,000 available, to become Regional Navigators and provide coaching and personalized assistance to help farmers find land and landowners find farmers across New York. Regional Navigators (listed on the reverse) will assist a broad diversity of new farmers in finding land. Round 2 of Regional Navigator funding will be awarded by January 2020. In order to continue forward momentum for this program, this network requests an increase in funding in State FY21 to meet the growing demand for these funds, and increase the amount able to be awarded to each organization to support their commitment and build their ability to help match farmers and landowners through events and one-on-one services.

2019 FARMLAND FOR A NEW GENERATION NEW YORK REGIONAL NAVIGATORS



COLUMBIA
LAND CONSERVANCY



PACE
UNIVERSITY
ELISABETH HAUB
SCHOOL OF LAW

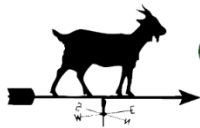


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Agricultural Stewardship Association

CADE
Center for
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GROUND SWELL
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GENESEE
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Seneca Trail Resource and
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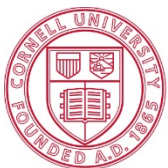
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