



Elizabeth Wolters
Deputy Director of Public Policy
New York Farm Bureau
ewolters@nyfb.org/518-795-8448

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Thank you, my name is Elizabeth Wolters and I am Deputy Director of Public Policy at NYFB—the state’s largest general agricultural advocacy organization.

This has been quite a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted agriculture as it has many other sectors. In the beginning of the pandemic businesses shut down and so did our markets. Farmers and processors quickly pivoted shifting products that were set to go to wholesale market to retail and products that lost their markets and needed a home were donated and eventually part of the Nourish-NY program.

As employers, our farmers quickly adapted to attempt to ensure safe workplaces and housing for their employees, it was not easy, and it didn’t happen overnight. Access to PPE was not always available and access to some equipment like latex and nitrile gloves, still are an issue ten months in.

As most of you know, prior to the pandemic the farm economy struggled. Low commodity prices have led our farmers to see a loss of over \$1 billion annually in the value of their production since 2014. In general, we have seen commodity prices continue to remain low, particularly dairy and beef. Some direct market farms have been able to compensate and receive higher prices, but this is not consistent across the board and not all farms have the ability to sell direct to consumers.

Agriculture relies heavily on statewide programs related to animal and public health, workforce development, farm safety, food access, agricultural education, migrant childcare, and farm family assistance.

We are grateful to the Legislature and the Governor for the \$25 million in last years’ budget for the Nourish-NY program. This has been a lifeline to those farmers who lost their markets as well

as for our New York Families that have struggled to put food on the table during this pandemic. This program has been renewed in the Executive Budget and we ask that you support it in the final budget.

Two years ago, the Governor committed the largest allocation (\$5 million) to date by the Executive, for statewide animal and public health, promotion, and research funding for agriculture in the Aid to Localities budget. We are pleased that the Governor renewed his commitment to helping to fund critical agricultural programs in his proposed 2021-22 Executive Budget.

The promotional and research programs for vegetables, apples, berries, grape, maple, honey, Christmas trees, wine, craft beverages, among others, serve as the economic development engine for our industry. These provide the same economic development benefits for farms as programs run by Empire State Development for other types of businesses.

We also strongly support the North Country Agricultural Development program which does great work on a very small budget and the Farm Viability Institute. We also support the Expansion of PRO-DAIRY's agricultural environmental management research and extension capacity is needed to meet dairy farmer ongoing needs to utilize new precision agriculture-based technology for nutrient reduction.

Additional investment in Pro-Dairy at Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Science would help farmers address climate change, along with the incidence of harmful algal blooms in specific watersheds. It is clear that both dairy and field crop farmers need improved technologies and guidance to appropriately manage nutrients and nitrogen fertilizers.

I would also be remiss if I did not bring up the importance of the FarmNet program. FarmNet provides farm business planning, which is incredibly important in these difficult times but even more important is the mental health outreach they provide our farmers. This year has been hard economically, but it has also been very challenging on our mental health. This funding line has been reduced in the Executive Budget and we request the Legislature fully fund this program not just at this table but also at Health table as well.

We rely heavily on the EPF as the funding stream that bridges the gap between agriculture and the environment. Funding for these programs, such as the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement Programs, Farmland Protection, Integrated Pest Management, Pollinator Protection Plan, DEC's Clean Sweep Program, Climate adaption and soil health, just to name a few, are extremely important.

New York Farm Bureau is also supportive of the extension of the Farm Workforce Retention Tax Credit proposed in the Executive Budget. This refundable tax credit for farm employers provides a credit of \$600 per employee for the taxable years 2021-24. This credit helps farmers off-set some of the increased labor costs and make New York more competitive to our neighboring states that have lower minimum wage and no overtime requirements.

We also commend the attention that the importance of broadband services have received not only in the Executive Budget but through several legislative initiatives and bills. The pandemic has highlighted the inconsistency in access to affordable and reliable broadband we have in the State. Our farms and our farm families need access to broadband to run their business and children need it to attend school. We are committed to continue to work on this issue to ensure access.

Thank you all for your support of agriculture in New York State. At this time, I am happy to take any questions.