



2021 Joint Legislative Hearing

Environmental Conservation Hearing on FY2022 State Budget

9:30 AM January 27, 2021

Online Video Hearing

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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, for giving me the opportunity to testify, and for the New York State Legislature’s support for programs that improve the health of New Yorkers, keep land in farming, bring a new generation of farmers onto the land, and help farmers steward and protect the irreplaceable natural resource that is New York’s farmland.

I am pleased to present testimony today 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.

New York’s Farmland is the Foundation of \$47 billion Farm and Food Economy

Over 9 million acres¹ of farmland and 58,000 producers² in New York are the irreplaceable foundation of a vibrant food system that feeds tens of millions of people – from rural areas to New York City and beyond.³ New York is even among the nation’s top 5 producers of various dairy and fruit products, including cottage cheese, sour cream, yogurt, apples, and grapes.⁴ The Map in Figure 1 gives just a taste of the breadth of food and crops grown on farmland in REDC regions across New York—with just one acre of farmland providing approximately 1,000 meals per day to New Yorkers and other eaters across the globe.⁵ This farm and food economy

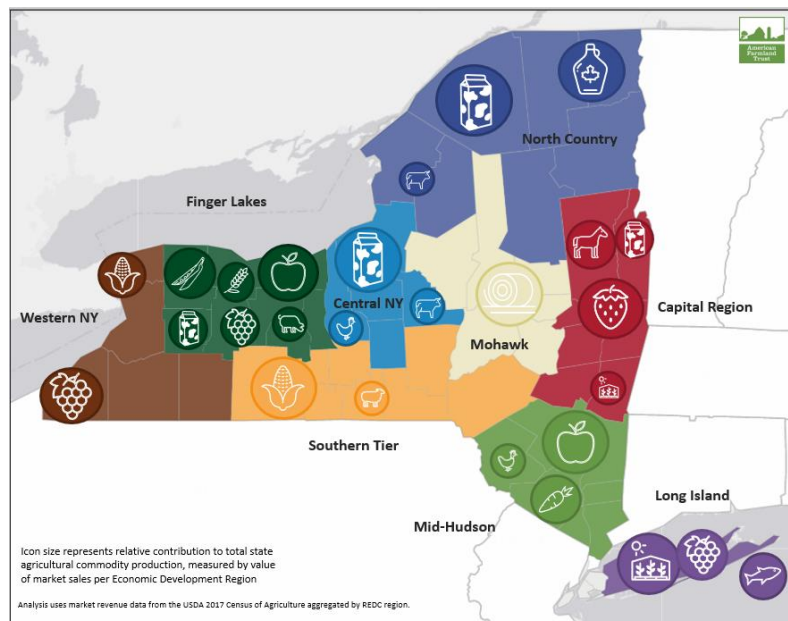


Figure 1 - What Do New York Farmers Grow and Raise?

¹ Freedgood, Julia, Mitch Hunter, Dempsey, and Ann Sorenson. 2020. “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States.” American Farmland Trust.

² USDA/NASS 2019 “State Agriculture Overview for New York.” Accessed December 29, 2020. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=new%20york.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Office of Budget and Policy Analysis. 2018. “Agriculture of New York State.” Office of the New York State Comptroller. <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/reports/special-topics/pdf/economy-agriculture-2018.pdf>.

⁵ Peters, Christian J., Jennifer L. Wilkins, and Gary W. Fick. 2006. “Testing a Complete-Diet Model for Estimating the Land Resource Requirements of Food Consumption and Agricultural Carrying Capacity: The New York State Example.” *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 22 (2): 145–53.

generates \$47 billion in annual economic activity while supporting 160,000 jobs.⁶

Farms businesses support electricians, feed and seed dealers, carpenters, farm equipment dealers, truckers, mechanics, bankers, veterinarians and many others with 1,000 on-farm jobs supporting an additional 688 jobs on average.⁷ And agriculture's mutual dependency on upstream and downstream industries such as equipment suppliers, trucking, and the restaurant and beverage industries intimately ties the health and success of this sector with that of New York's broader economy. This is why farms are often considered anchor businesses—keeping rural economies strong by retaining economic opportunities for residents.

These direct and induced benefits have become even more crucial in light of the pandemic, which has placed tremendous pressure on New York's economy while also revealing vulnerabilities in our current global food supply chains that resulted in empty shelves in the spring of 2020. In these times of budgetary constraint, every public dollar spent must work to help New York recover and rebuild so that our state gets through this pandemic more resilient to future challenges. Farmland protection, farmland access, and farm to school programs preserve farmland, bring a new generation onto the land, encourage institutional buying from New York's farms, and efficiently direct investment and foster market growth with limited state involvement. These programs have repeatedly demonstrated significant returns on investment for every taxpayer dollar spent and have successfully directed investment into local communities in ways that support jobs, farm and food business viability, and the development of local food supply chains more resilient to disruption than the global supply chains we currently rely on. Due to ongoing support from both the state Senate and Assembly, these programs have gained recognition, respect, and buy-in from constituencies statewide—and for these reasons and more, we encourage the legislature to work with Governor Cuomo to ensure these programs remain well-funded in the SFY22 state budget.

Farmland Protection Program Saves Land and Supports Farmers and their Surrounding Community

In New York we have sufficient water and productive soils to grow “the full plate”, even in the face of projected climate changes. A recent report published by American Farmland Trust, “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States” revealed that fifty-four percent New York's farmland is nationally significant, or possessing the right characteristics to both sustain food and crop production and sequester carbon over time with little environmental impact.⁸ However, New York's farmland is severely

⁶ Farm Credit East. 2020. “Northeast Economic Engine: Agriculture, Forest Products, Commercial Fishing.” <https://www.farmcrediteast.com/knowledge-exchange/Reports/2020%20Northeast%20Economic%20Engine>.

⁷ Schultink, Gerhardus. 2009. “Land Use Planning and Open Space Preservation: Economic Impacts of Low-Density Urbanization and Urban Sprawl.” *Journal of Civil, Environmental, and Architectural Engineering* 3 (1).

⁸ Freedgood, Julia, Mitch Hunter, Dempsey, and Ann Sorenson. 2020. “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States.” American Farmland Trust. [“USDA/NASS 2019 State Agriculture Overview for New York.” n.d. Accessed December 29, 2020.](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=new%20york)

threatened by high land prices and development pressure. Between 2001 and 2016 alone, New York lost or fragmented over a quarter of a million acres of farmland, mostly on urban fringes, as can be seen in red in Figure 3 below. As urban flight due to the pandemic increases development pressure on this farmland, we must ramp up our efforts to protect farmland both for our food security and to keep our upstate economy strong.

Further pressure on lands around urban areas threatens our local food security and resilience — over 80% of the fruits, vegetables, and dairy products produced in New York State are grown on farmland immediately surrounding urban areas.⁹ This has impacts on food security as counties surrounding our cities are also where most of our local food comes from, as seen in Figure 2 above. In fact, 2017 USDA census data reveals that 17% of New York farms sell their products directly to consumers with farmers in half of New York counties selling between 20 and 50% of the food they grow directly to consumers¹⁰.

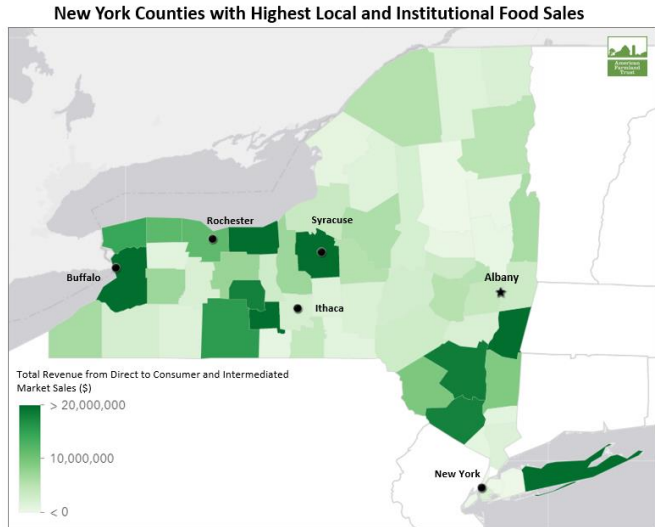


Figure 2 - NYS Counties with High Local Food Sales

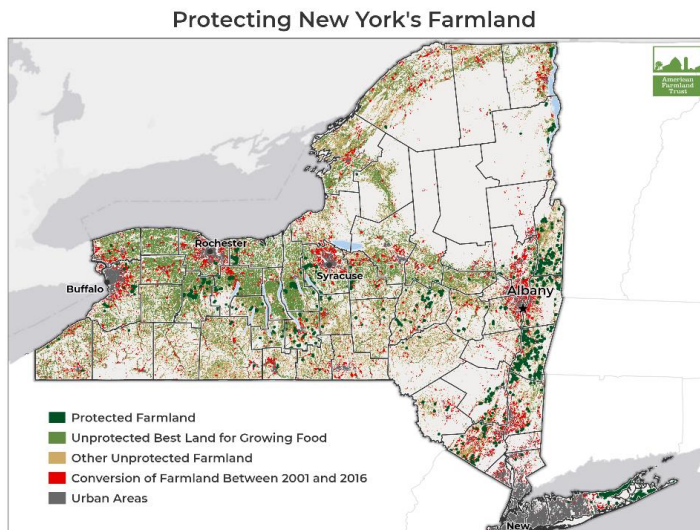


Figure 3 – Farmland Conversion and Protected Farmland in NYS

In order to keep land in farming in New York, since 1996 the state has invested in the farmland protection program in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), purchasing agricultural conservation easements from farmers so that land can remain in farming forever. **While the state has permanently protected over 76,000 acres of farmland through this voluntary grant program since its inception,¹¹ New York has lost more than three times that amount between 2001 and 2016 alone.¹²**

⁹ Calculations based on 2012 Census of Agriculture and the Economic Research Service’s Urban Influence Codes.

¹⁰ USDA/NASS. 2019. “2017 Census of Agriculture - Volume 1, Chapter 1: State Level Data.” Accessed January 4, 2021. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/New_York/.

¹¹ Office of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo. 2019. “Governor Cuomo Announces More Than 75,000 Acres of Farmland Have Been Protected from Development Since Start of Farmland Protection Program.” July 16, 2019. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-more-75000-acres-farmland-have-been-protected-development-start>.

¹² Freedgood, Julia, Mitch Hunter, Dempsey, and Ann Sorenson. 2020. “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States.” American Farmland Trust. [“USDA/NASS 2019 State Agriculture Overview for New York.”](https://www.americanfarmlandtrust.org/2020/06/23/usda-nass-2019-state-agriculture-overview-for-new-york/) n.d. Accessed

Based on average sales per acre, farmland lost within this fifteen-year time frame translates to nearly \$200 million in lost revenue from farm sales. Half of the farmland lost within that time frame was nationally significant—irreplaceable acres we simply cannot afford to lose.

The state’s renewable energy goals are also increasing development pressure on farmland in other areas of the state as solar developers look to flat, sunny farmland near transmission as a first choice site for development. In upstate New York, 43% of the land proposed within Article 10 solar project boundaries as of Fall 2019 was nationally significant farmland.¹³ Without policies in place, this conversion threat will only increase as the state continues to work to meet its critical renewable energy goals.

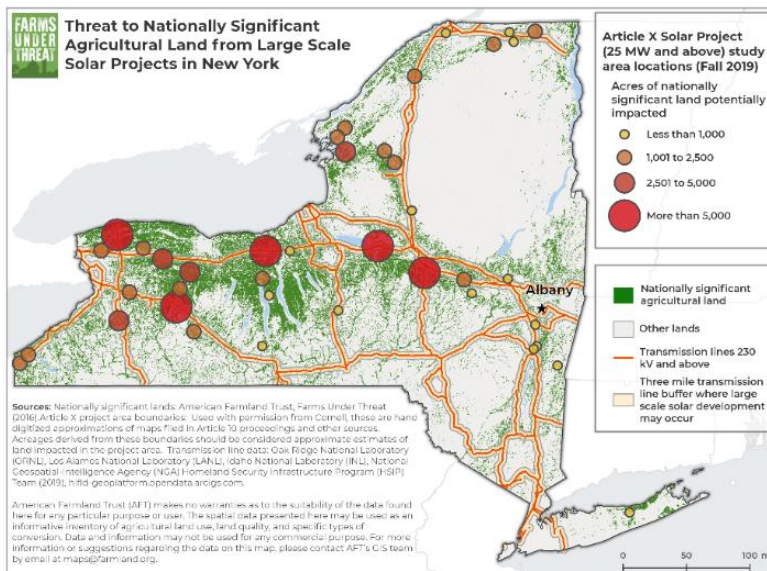


Figure 4 – Nationally Significant Farmland Threatened by Large Scale Solar Projects

American Farmland Trust and the Alliance for New York’s Farmland, a coalition of land trusts, farmers, and agricultural and environmental organizations, encourages the legislature to work to maintain strong levels of farmland protection funding in the Environmental Protection Fund in the SFY22 budget, and to put the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act, which would invest at least \$100 million into farmland protection over the next 30 years, on the ballot as soon as possible. These actions would curtail further loss of New York’s farmland and retain the environmental benefits, economic activity, and the necessary food production our farmland provides.

Economic Benefits of Farmland Protection for Farmers and Surrounding Communities

Farmland protection programs help support farms and the communities that rely on them by permanently protecting farmland from development while providing farmers with the funds they need to invest in business viability and longevity. Research has shown that farmers use the proceeds from the sale of their development rights to pay down debt, put money towards savings, purchase leased land, expand and diversify operations, upgrade farm equipment, and transfer farms to the next generation.¹⁴

Investments spurred by farmland protection funding have positive impacts that reverberate throughout the community, including keeping jobs in rural communities and fostering economic development. A study in Pennsylvania found that every dollar invested in farmland protection programs re-circulates

[December 29, 2020.](#)

[https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=new%20york.](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=new%20york)

¹³ Spatial analysis conducted by American Farmland Trust with data collected by Cornell CaRDI. 2020.

¹⁴ Seidl, Andrew, Ryan Swartzentruber, and Rebecca Hill. 2018. “Estimated Economic Impact of Federal Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP) on Colorado, 2009-2017.” <https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/csu307173-RuralLandResearch-bk-www.pdf>.

within the local economy, with an economic multiplier of \$1.62-\$2.00.¹⁵ Protecting farmland also encourages other local farmers and business owners to invest in their own operations because they have greater confidence in the stability and longevity of the local agricultural sector. Protected farmland has also repeatedly shown to increase nearby residential property values between 1.2% and 2.6%, and local property tax revenues far more than “developable” agricultural land.¹⁶ Finally, on average, an acre of farmland in New York costs municipal governments \$0.34 per acre in services, compared to \$1.34 for residential land use.¹⁷

Farmland Protection Facilitates Intergenerational Transition

In New York, a third of farmers, who own or manage nearly 2 million acres of farmland, have surpassed retirement age. Farmland protection funding allows these senior farmers to retire without having to sell their land to a developer by freeing up equity in what is often their most valuable asset—their land. This, in turn enables them to sell the farm at the agricultural value, making land affordable for farmers looking to start new farm operations or invest in their existing operation. Bridging this financial gap is critical to keeping land in farming in New York as the state is beginning to enter a period of significant intergenerational transition of farmland.

Farmland Protection Helps Fight Climate Change while Providing Other Environmental Benefits

Keeping land in farming also retains environmental benefits that combat climate change and protect the health of New Yorkers. According to AFT’s 2017 Greener Fields report using NYSERDA data, human activity on an acre of farmland produces 66 times fewer greenhouse gas emissions than human activity on an acre of developed land, and strategic farmland protection coupled with smart growth planning can have significant GHG emission reduction benefits.¹⁸ California’s farmland protection program, the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, invests in both permanent farmland protection and smart growth planning to reduce emissions from vehicle miles traveled and other transportation, which at 40% represent the highest sector of emissions in New York state. According to their modeling, to date California has invested \$180 million of its carbon market proceeds to protect 112,000 acres of farmland and support smart growth, avoiding **55 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent from vehicular travel over the next 30 years**. This is a strategy New York can adapt through its current farmland protection program to limit sprawled development, especially around upstate cities, while keeping land in farming and combatting climate change.

¹⁵ Daniels, Tom. 2019. “An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Pennsylvania’s Farmland Preservation Program.” University of Pennsylvania.

https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Plants_Land_Water/farmland/Documents/PA%20Farmland%20Preservation%20Economic%20Impact.pdf.

¹⁶ King, Jonathan R., and Christopher M. Anderson. 2004. “Marginal Property Tax Effects of Conservation Easements: A Vermont Case Study.” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 86 (4): 919–32.

¹⁷ American Farmland Trust. 2016. “Cost of Community Services Studies.” Northampton, MA. https://s30428.pcdn.co/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Cost_of_Community_Services_Studies_AFT_FIC_201609.pdf

¹⁸ Arjomand, Sanaz, and David Haight. 2017. “Greener Fields: Combating Climate Change by Keeping Land in Farming in New York.” American Farmland Trust. https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/AFT_NY-GrFields-RPT_FNL2lo.pdf.

Participation in farmland protection programs has also been shown to encourage the adoption of new, improved, and more widespread climate-friendly conservation practices, many of which sequester carbon while improving soil health, water and air quality, and farm viability when adopted long term.¹⁹ The healthier our soils, the greater the capacity of farmland to store carbon and convert the agricultural sector from a carbon source to a carbon sink—critical for meeting our climate goals. In addition to carbon sequestration, farmland also provides a range of reliable yet often-unaccounted-for cost-saving environmental services such as air pollution removal, wildlife habitat, and flood mitigation.

Farmers Show Renewed Interest in Permanently Protecting Their Farmland in 2021

Farmer interest in permanently protecting their farmland has historically been high, with requested funds outstripping available funds at a rate of 3:1. Between 1996 and 2015, \$689 million in farmland protection (FPIG) applications were submitted with 72% rejected by the Department of Agriculture and Markets, largely due to a lack of state funding,²⁰ and these numbers fail to capture total demand from New York farmers because the number of applications each entity can submit is capped. In recent years, Governor Cuomo has committed to making FPIG funding available on a biennial basis and has also released \$94 million in special FPIG funding opportunities for dairy farmers, farmers in the Hudson Valley, and other commodities impacted by recent trade wars. Though farmers are still awaiting the promised 2020 RFP, interest in farmland protection has continued to grow with this renewed state commitment, and as farmers see their neighbors successfully protect their farms and use the funds to pay down debt, invest in their operations, or transfer their land to the next generation, they have become interested in protecting their land too.

Land trusts across the state who submit FPIG applications on behalf of farmers continue to report significant demand from farm families interested in protecting their land, and as a result they have steadily expanded their staff capacity to meet this demand. **Within the past 3 years, roughly 250 farmers across New York have reached out to land trusts to express interest in protecting their land—which based on average farm size in New York represents a near-term opportunity to protect over 50,000 acres of land.** Land trusts currently have 60 farmers ready to apply for funding as soon as the promised 2020 RFP is released. Regional examples of additional unmet demand include²¹:

- **Hudson Valley:** More than 40 farmers have expressed interest in protecting their land to Scenic Hudson, which works independently and with other land trusts in the Hudson Valley. Columbia Land Conservancy has 3 projects prepared for when new FPIG funding is announced, and the Town of Warwick in Orange County currently has four farms totaling 450 acres seeking preservation.
- **Upper Hudson Valley:** The Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA), a land trust that conserves farmland in Washington and Rensselaer counties, typically fields 25 inquiries annually from farmers interested in protecting their land. In 2019, 37 farmers approached ASA, and they had prepared the expected maximum of 8 applications to submit to the state for the 2020 RFP. Fourteen farmland owners are actively exploring their options to conserve their land in Saratoga County with the

¹⁹ Esseks, J. Dixon, and Brian J. Schilling. 2013. "Impacts of the Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program: An Assessment Based on Interviews with Participating Landowners." University of Nebraska-Lincoln: Center for Great Plains Studies. <http://farmlandinfo.org/publications/impacts-of-the-federal-farm-and-ranch-lands-protection-program-an-assessment-based-on-interviews-with-participating-landowners/>.

²⁰ "NYS DAM Farmland Protection Program History." Unpublished raw data, September 2015.

²¹ Data comes from a survey of land trust staff across NYS conducted in November/December 2020.

Saratoga PLAN land trust, and four farmland owners working with PLAN are currently waiting to apply for FPIG funds when they are available.

- North Country: Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust serves areas in Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, Oswego, Herkimer, and Saint Lawrence Counties. Twenty-three farmers who meet the requirements for the FPIG program have approached them about applying.
- Mohawk Valley: The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy works in Albany, Montgomery, and Schenectady counties and receives between 6 and 12 calls annually from farmers interested in conserving their land or finding farmland. This year 18 farmers have expressed interest in protecting their farms with the Otsego Land Trust, who works in Otsego and portions of Herkimer, Chenango, and Schoharie counties.
- 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, 18 farmers submitted pre-applications to apply for FPIG funds, and NYALT is prepared to submit 6 applications for the 2020 FPIG RFP round when it is released.
- Finger Lakes: Over 45 farmers in the Finger Lakes attended information sessions in 2019 and 2020 to learn more about how to protect their farms. Finger Lakes Land Trust and Genesee Land Trust work to protect farms that have first been vetted and recommended by counties in this region. The Finger Lakes Land Trust has 6 active projects and fields 10 calls per year on average from interested farmers, and Genesee Land Trust received 14 pre-applications for the expected 2020 FPIG round and is working with 6 other farms interested in protecting their land that don't qualify for any of the currently available FPIG opportunities.
- Western NY: The western region has consistently submitted applications for the recent dairy and trade commodity transition program opportunities at a rapid rate and all funds allocated to this region have been expended with more farmers interested in applying or awaiting awards. Over the last 3 years more than 50 farmers have submitted requests to the Western New York Land Conservancy (WNYLC), which serves all 8 counties of Western New York, for farmland protection assistance. WNYLC is currently working with 10 farmers waiting to apply to protect nearly 3,000 acres of farmland. Two farmers are also working with another regional land trust, the Genesee Valley Conservancy to protect 2,200 acres when new funding becomes available.
- Long Island: Peconic Land Trust has prepared 2 applications for state funding to protect 21 acres of high value farmland in Suffolk County, an area with enormous development pressure, and has 2 farmers preparing to apply to protect an additional 60 acres. Peconic Land Trust reports that unless new state funding is released soon, they will lose these important projects. The Town of Southold is also processing applications to protect over 350 acres of farmland.

Alliance for New York's Farmland Recommends \$18 million for Farmland Protection in SFY22

The pandemic has increased food insecurity while also placing new pressures on farm businesses and land availability. At the same time, the advancing age of farmers and a growing commitment to renewable energy will accelerate the loss of important farmlands across the state without sufficient safeguards and commitments to protect farmland. In his executive budget proposal, Governor Cuomo proposed \$17 million for the farmland protection program as part of a \$300 million EPF—\$1 million less than in recent years and \$3 million less than program funding at its peak. While we understand the state's financial position and were happy to see the Governor propose near full funding for farmland protection, given the impacts of the pandemic on an already difficult farm economy, the current opportunity to support farm families through this program, and the many benefits it provides,

we respectfully request that the legislature work with the Governor to appropriate \$18 million for the Farmland Protection Program as part of a \$300 million EPF in the FY22 state budget. We also encourage the legislature to work with the Governor to reauthorize the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act on the ballot. These two actions will be important pathways to invest in our farm families and keep land affordable and available for farming during this moment of intergenerational transition.

Transitioning Land to a Diverse New Generation of Farmers

New York is at the beginnings of a large-scale intergenerational transition of farmland. According to the 2017 USDA census, 29% of New York’s farmers were over 65 with an additional 29% nearing retirement age (Figure 5). **New York’s senior farmers own or operate nearly 2 million acres of land vulnerable to being lost forever as it changes hands, and AFT’s research shows that 92 percent of these senior farmers do not have a young farmer-operator involved in the ownership or management of the farm ready to take over.**²²

At the same time, young, new, beginning, and limited resource, farmers face enormous challenges finding land at prices they can afford from which to launch successful farm businesses. This challenge is particularly acute for Black,

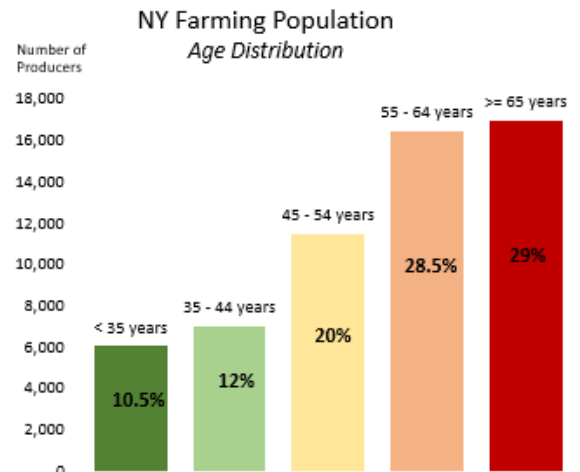
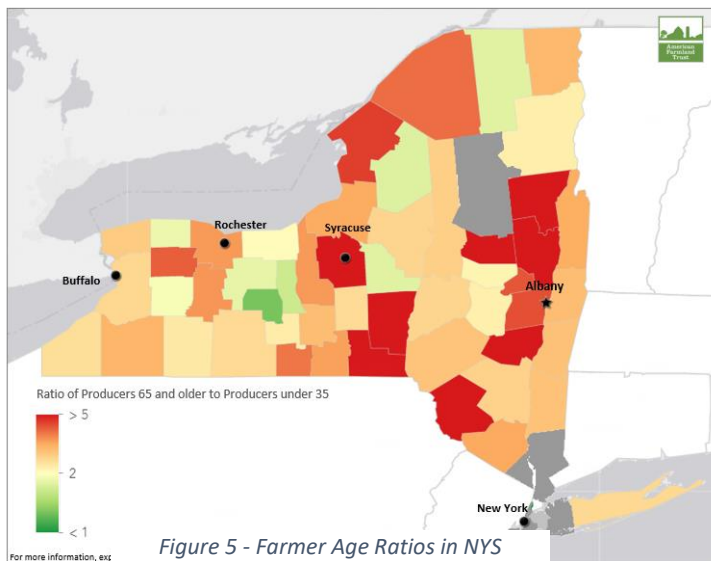


Figure 6 - NYS Farming Population Age Distribution

Ratio of New York Farmers 65 and older to Farmers under 35



Indigenous and Farmers of Color (BIPOC), who represent less than 2% of farmers in the state.²³ 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. This growing challenge and disparity is well characterized by the map in Figure 6, which spatially color-codes each county by the ratio of senior to young farmers working within that county with yellow, orange, and red counties representing those where there are more than two

²² USDA/NASS. 2019. “2017 Census of Agriculture - Volume 1, Chapter 1: State Level Data.” Accessed January 4, 2021. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/New_York/.

²³ USDA/NASS. 2019. “State Agriculture Overview for New York.” Accessed January 4, 2021. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=new%20york.

farmers over 65 for every farmer under 35. These ratios are highest in Broome (8:1), Onondaga (6:1), Greene (5.5:1), and Saratoga (4:1) counties, which are all above the median ratio for the state (3:1). **For the future of our farm and food system, we must work to ensure that this land makes its way safely into the hands of a diverse new generation of New York farmers.**

Farmland Protection Program Keeps Land in Farming and Contributes to Farmland Affordability

As stated above, a well-funded farmland protection program has an integral part to play in a successful intergenerational transition by helping aging farmers afford retirement without having to sell their land for development. Extinguishing the right to develop the property also lowers the market value of farmland, keeping it affordable for new generation of farmer. There are numerous examples across New York of the farmland protection program enabling the intergenerational transition of land by bridging the gap between what farmers need to sell their land for, and what younger farmers (even within the same family) can afford to pay. Farmland for a New Generation New York works hand in hand with the farmland protection program to bring a diverse new generation of farmers onto farmland in New York so that we may continue to have a thriving agricultural sector to feed New Yorkers in the future.

Farmland for a New Generation New York Brings a New Generation of Farmers onto the Land

Farmland for a New Generation New York (FNG-NY), a state-funded partnership between the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, AFT and organizations statewide, leads the nation in helping farmers gain access to land while supporting retiring farmers in transferring their farms to the next generation. State funding for this program supports a free one-stop shop for farmers and landowners which includes a website (www.nyfarmlandfinder.org) featuring farmer and farmland profiles and a farm job listings page, and expert staff at AFT who serve as the first point of contact to offer guidance and advice. A network of Regional Navigator organizations also funded through this program provide one-on-one, on-the-ground support to farmland owners and seekers in all 62 counties.

Beginning farmers often need active support to clarify their personal and business goals, identify and evaluate farms, evaluate lease or purchase options, or find financing, legal advice, or other resources that can help them access land to start a new farm business. Senior farmers and their families often

Where FNG-NY Regional Navigators Work with Farmers

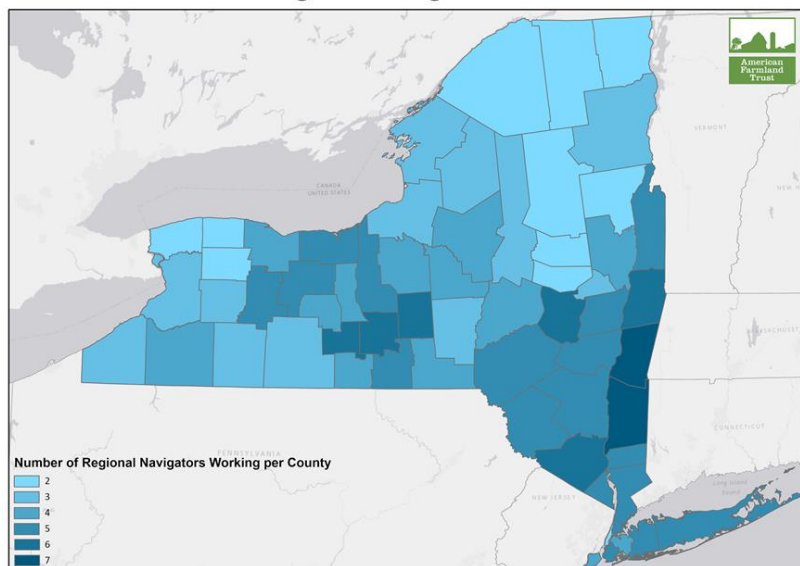


Figure 7 - FNG-NY Regional Navigator Coverage

need support developing succession and retirement plans that enable them to pass their land to the next generation of farmers. FNG-NY's network of 27 Regional Navigators—including CCE offices, land trusts, and farm organizations—provide coaching, training, and one-on-one assistance to help farmers find land, landowners make their land available, and senior farmers transition their land to the next generation across the state (Figure 8). Regional Navigators also often help connect new

farmers with legal assistance and local professionals like accountants and real estate agents, and frequently provide training on how to develop business plans, evaluate finances, and establish successful farm businesses. Because of this unique structure and hands-on approach, the “Farms Under Threat: the State of the States” report found FNG-NY to be the #1 farmlink program in the United States.²⁴ Over the past two years, Regional Navigators working in the following New York regions have received funding to help farmers and landowners from Long Island to New York City and beyond:

Hudson Valley: \$77,500	NYC: \$27,000	Central NY: \$38,500
Capital Region: \$7,500	Long Island: \$27,000	Southern Tier: \$25,000
North Country: \$7,500	Finger Lakes: \$38,500	Western NY: \$54,500
	All Regions: \$27,500	

FNG-NY launched in October 2018 and within just two years of operation, this partnership has already achieved remarkable results:

- Over 55,000 users have visited the farmlink site to view listings, and find resources and events,
- 2,505 farmers, landowners, and others have received training and support through events,
- 2,093 landowners and land seekers have received one-on-one guidance from Regional Navigators,
- 649 landowners and land seekers have received one on one guidance from AFT staff,
- 827 farmland seekers and owners have posted profiles with 478 profiles currently active, and
- 68 matches spanning 2,613 acres have been reported across New York, with more coming in every month (Figure 7).

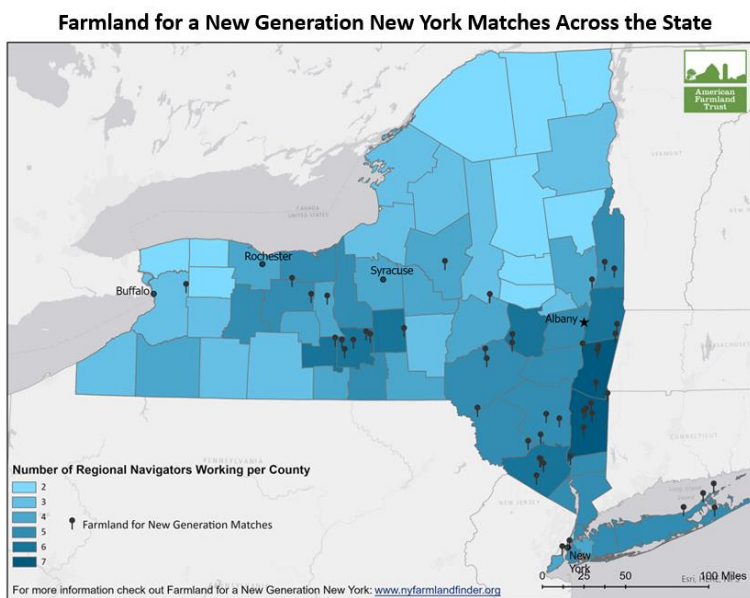


Figure 8 - FNG-NY Matches

Given the average farm sales per acre in New York state, with only \$800,000 in state funding, this program has generated or retained an estimated \$2 million in farm revenue through these matches within just two years.

²⁴ Freedgood, Julia, Mitch Hunter, Dempsey, and Ann Sorenson. 2020. “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States.” American Farmland Trust. [“USDA/NASS 2019 State Agriculture Overview for New York.” n.d. Accessed December 29, 2020.](#)

Alliance for New York's Farmland Recommends \$400,000 for FNG-NY in the SFY22 Budget

Farmland for a New Generation contributes to a resilient local food supply in New York by connecting farmers and landowners in order to help keep land in production and support the next generation of agricultural entrepreneurs in getting started. In only two years and on a shoestring budget, FNG-NY has already been able to achieve so much. We thank the legislature for the essential role they have played in funding this program since its inception. **At this critical juncture, we respectfully ask the members of the Assembly and Senate to please work to maintain funding for this program at \$400,000 in the SFY22 budget. We also ask the legislature and Governor to work together to consolidate this program into one budget line to ease the annual contracting process with the state.** Without state funding for this program, we will be unable to uphold its track record of excellence—and the network of support and services for senior and new farmers will be set back at a critical time of intergenerational transition, when the New York agriculture industry needs it most. Thank you for your past and continued support for this work.

Farm to School Incentive and Grants Programs are Investments in Public Health and Economic Growth to Build Back Better

The pandemic has had clear and painful impacts on New York's families. Child food insecurity has increased significantly during 2020 due to increased rates of poverty stemming from job loss. According to a US Census Bureau Pulse survey conducted in December 2020, 13% of all New York households and 17% of households with children said they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the past 7 days.²⁵ This has implications for child nutrition and wellbeing now and in the future; taking on added importance as we reckon with disparate COVID-19 health impacts stemming from underlying health conditions, many of them diet-related. **Given that students consume half of their daily calories at school on average, helping schools serve their students more nutritious foods sourced from New York's farms provides an easy and widespread public health intervention for children, no matter their socioeconomic status.**²⁶ The pandemic has highlighted how steps taken to invest in nutritious diets at school pays dividends in the future by supporting better long-term health outcomes and saving lives.

The New York Farm to School incentive, funded since SFY19 in the Aid to Localities Education budget, works hand in hand with the state's Farm to School Grants program, funded equally between the Education and Agriculture Aid to Localities budgets, to support the health of our children and a strong farm economy while building businesses and local food supply chains more resilient to the kinds of disruptions experienced in the spring of 2020. New York's nation-leading farm to school incentive enables K-12 schools to increase spending on foods grown and raised in New York by quadrupling their per-meal reimbursement from the state, from 6 cents to 25 cents, for schools that spend at least 30% of their lunch budget on New York grown food. After year two of this program (2019-20 school year), 57 schools reported that they reached 30% spending on local foods—including the seven schools that qualified in Year One—spending over \$5 million total on food from New York farms, and increasing access to healthy, fresh New York grown food for over 90,000 students. It is also worth noting that

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. "Week 21 Household Pulse Survey. Table 2b and 3a." Accessed January 2021. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp21.html>.

²⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2015. "America's schools make positive changes to create healthier school meals." Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2015/p0827-school-meals.html>

schools didn't just stop at spending 30% of their lunch budget on local foods during the 2019-20 school year, the average spent was nearly 39%, **with Argyle CSD reporting that they spent over 63% of their lunch food budget** on food from New York farms!²⁷

And this growth isn't only limited to those 'early adopter' schools that were poised to reach 30%, many schools across the state are increasing purchases of local food. According to research conducted by American Farmland Trust during the summer of 2020 and detailed in the recently released report: "Growing Resilience: Unlocking the Potential of Farm to School to Strengthen the Economy, Support New York Farms, and Improve Student Health in the Face of New Challenges," during the 2019-20 school year 87% of schools reported buying New York food products, defined as food grown or raised in New York or processed products that contain at least 50.1% raw ingredients from New York farms. Schools reported growth in their purchases of fresh, healthy local produce by value compared to past years with 87% of schools reporting buying more New York grown fruit and 54% reporting buying more New York grown vegetables to serve to students. **Compared to answers from AFT's 2019 survey, this is a 33% increase in the amount of healthy New York grown vegetables and 20% increase in the amount of healthy New York grown fruit purchased and served to K-12 students within just one year!** In addition, more than half of schools reported buying more New York produced fluid milk and 32% reported buying more of New York's other dairy products like cheese and yogurt, suggesting that the state's dairy farmers would benefit greatly from continued increases in farm to school purchasing.^{28 29}

These economic benefits were not limited to fresh produce, but also included processed food items that are comprised of at least 50.1% raw agricultural ingredients grown or raised on New York farms. **During the 2019-20 school year, forty-two percent of schools reported buying more of these processed local products, a 1300% increase from the 2018-19 school year when only 3% of schools reported making these purchases.**³⁰ This is a reflection not just of increased interest, but also of increased availability of these products in the marketplace—evidence of considerable market growth and economic development spurred by efficient investments in the state's farm to school programs. Examples of these newly available New York food products include apple sauce, grape juice, granola, and cheese sticks—some of which are produced by local New York businesses, and others by international food companies like McCains and Motts which are creating new markets for our farmers as a result of this incentive program and the increase in demand for local products from schools. This offers farmers expanded market opportunities and makes it easier for not only other schools, but also hospitals, universities, and other large institutions to increase their purchases of New York grown food. This Farm to School Incentive is clearly driving investment and innovation in our local supply chains, which can help us build

²⁷ New York State Department of Education. 2020. "30 Percent NYS Initiative Applications." Accessed November 2020. <http://eservices.nysed.gov/sedreports/list?id=2>

²⁸ Levy, Samantha, and Kali McPeters. 2020. "Growing Opportunity for Farm to School: How to Revolutionize School Food, Support Local Farms, and Improve the Health of Students in New York." American Farmland Trust. www.farmland.org/growingopportunity

²⁹ Levy, Samantha, and Mikaela Ruiz-Ramón. 2020. "Growing Resilience: Unlocking the Potential of Farm to School to Strengthen the Economy, Support New York Farms, and Improve Student Health in the Face of New Challenges." www.farmland.org/growingresilience. (Hereafter: "Growing Resilience, 2020")

³⁰ Growing Resilience, 2020

greater food system resiliency while also supporting our agricultural industry and the health of our children now and in the future. And there is so much more to come.

This Farm to School incentive program carries with it the potential for enormous economic growth in the future. According to general Farm to School research, each dollar invested in farm to school activities stimulates up to \$2.16 in local economic activity,³¹ but New York's incentive program carries with it even greater promise than that. AFT's 2020 research revealed that with the right support, like that provided

through the state's Farm to School grants program, 75% of schools, including New York City, expect to reach 30% spending of their lunch budgets on New York grown food by 2025. Conservative estimates show **this would mean over \$250 million spent by K-12 schools on food from New York farms by 2025, generating nearly \$360 million in total statewide economic impact—a return of investment of \$3.50 for every taxpayer dollar spent**



on farm to school reimbursements, grants, and support. Best of all, achieving this would mean that over 900,000 students, or roughly half of the schoolchildren in New York, would have increased access to high quality, nutritious local foods at lunch in school by 2025.³²

The Farm to School Grants Program Works Hand in Hand with the Incentive Program to Help Schools Succeed

The Farm to School grants program has enabled schools statewide to start and maintain farm to school programs by funding the training, equipment, and staff schools need to successfully procure and serve more New York grown and raised foods. Since the Governor launched New York's Farm-to-School Grants Program in 2015, more than \$3.5 million has been invested to support 43 Farm to School projects, benefitting almost 750,000 students in 255 school districts across the State. 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.

Many schools use these grants to hire farm to school coordinators, who provide food service directors with the expert guidance and additional capacity they need to participate in farm to school purchasing. Farm to school coordinators are consummate professionals that help schools connect with farmers,

³¹ National Farm to School Network. 2017. "The Benefits of Farm to School." <http://www.farmtoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf>

³² Growing Resilience, 2020

design menus, procure local foods, and foster kids' curiosity and excitement for eating healthy foods. In interviews conducted by AFT during the summer of 2019, food service directors that intentionally procure New York grown food recognized farm to school coordinators as essential to their success in reaching 30%.³³

These critical positions are currently funded on an ad hoc basis through the state and federal farm to school grants programs and lack support for interregional coordination. **Establishing a statewide regional farm to school coordinator program would ensure that all schools have access to the capacity and expert knowledge they need to build strong relationships with New York farmers and serve more New York grown food to students at school meals.**

Adding Breakfast to the Incentive Program Benefits New York's Students and Farmers

Schools have repeatedly identified the difficulty of separating out lunch from other meals as a top barrier to participating in the incentive program. The current program design focus on lunch also has the unintended impact of incentivizing schools to shift New York foods purchased for other meals to lunch, creating a mirage of increase in farm spending while decreasing student access to these foods throughout the school day. The bottom line? **Focusing the incentive program on lunch limits the potential economic and student health impact of program.**

According to AFT's Growing Resilience Report, 95% of schools serve breakfast meals, and 83% of schools report already serving at least one New York food product at breakfast. Incentivizing purchasing of New York grown food at breakfast would increase access to fresh healthy local food throughout the school day and could unlock \$78 million in annual spending if 75% of schools not already spending 30% or more of breakfast costs on New York food products reached that level of spending. Much of this spending would go towards New York's dairy farmers, who produce the milk, yogurt, and cheese products served to kids at breakfast. This would result in nearly \$112 million in additional annual total statewide economic impact. **If schools were incentivized to increase purchases of New York food products at lunch *and* breakfast, this could generate roughly half a billion dollars in total economic impact.**

New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition Suggestions for SFY22 Budget

In his FY22 Budget proposal, as in years' past, Governor Cuomo proposed to maintain full funding for the incentive program for lunch at \$10 million in the education budget and for the Farm to School grants program at \$1.5 million split between the agriculture and education budgets. The New York Grown Food for New York Kids coalition, a group of farm to school experts from the school, farm, food, public health, academic, environmental, and anti-hunger sectors, appreciates this proposed continued commitment to these programs during this difficult budget year, and encourages the legislature and the Governor to include this proposed funding in the enacted SFY22 state budget while also:

- Changing budget language for the incentive program to allow schools serving lunches through USDA summer meals programs, which has been necessary due to the pandemic, to participate,
- Ensuring every school across New York has support from a Farm to School coordinator through the grants program to help them increase the amount of local food they buy. This could begin to be accomplished in the SFY22 budget by directing NYSDAM, Cornell and other active farm to school

³³ Levy, Samantha, and Kali McPeters. 2020. "Growing Opportunity for Farm to School: How to Revolutionize School Food, Support Local Farms, and Improve the Health of Students in New York." American Farmland Trust. www.farmland.org/growingopportunity

coordinators to create a plan for a program that will ensure every school across New York has access to a regional Farm to School coordinator in the future. This program should include funding for coordinators that work specifically with BIPOC farmers to help open pathways for farmers of color to tap into institutional market opportunities,

- Increasing the state Small Purchase Threshold in GML § 103 so that schools can purchase more fresh food directly from New York farmers using prescribed and regulated informal bidding methods to reach 30%, and
- Expanding this incentive to other school meals, such as breakfast, in the future when it is financially feasible to do so.

Farmland is a Critical Part of New York’s Climate Solution

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. However, farmers and farmland also have the potential to play a critical role in the fight against climate change. Two reports published in 2020 indicate that working lands could play a key role in our state climate strategy if more farms implement practices that increase soil health and improve surrounding water quality like cover cropping, crop rotation, reduced tillage, and using biological soil amendments to enhance soil fertility.^{34 35} In addition, unpublished AFT research indicates that in the near-term, increasing the adoption of these practices on a small number of acres can sequester over half a million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually. This type of carbon sequestration on natural and working lands is necessary to meeting our climate goals, and with greater adoption, the opportunity for increased carbon sequestration on farmland is much higher. **AFT strongly supports the Governor’s proposed increase for the Climate Resilient Farming program to \$4.7 million, as well as the proposed increase in funding for soil and water conservation districts. Both of these proposed increases in funding will help farmers adopt practices that sequester carbon, improve water efficiency, and reduce GHG emissions while supporting farm viability. AFT respectfully requests that the legislature and Governor work to include these proposed funding increases in the FY22 enacted State Budget.**

Farms and farmland will also be central to the enactment of the Governor’s green economy development plan announced in the State of the State. As stated previously, 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 wind turbines sited on farmland support farm viability and are very compatible with continued farm production, solar projects present a more complicated picture. When well sited on a portion of a farm’s marginal land or designed to support both agriculture and energy production on the same parcel, solar can do the same. Unfortunately, large scale solar projects more commonly displace agricultural activities from farmland, and AFT’s research has

³⁴ Wightman, Jenifer L., and Peter B. Woodbury. 2020. “New York Agriculture and Climate Change: Key Opportunities for Mitigation, Resilience, and Adaptation.” Cornell.

³⁵ Energy + Environmental Economics. 2020. “Pathways to Deep Decarbonization in New York State.” San Francisco.

indicated that 43% of acres within proposed Article X project boundaries as of fall 2019 are considered our best farmland for growing food over time with minimal environmental impact.

While it is critical to transition to renewable energy as quickly as possible, we encourage the state legislature to ensure that our best farmland for growing food and crops remains in farming as we build up the state's essential renewable energy generation. By treating our most productive, versatile, and resilient farmland as irreplaceable and priority for protection from development, we will retain a thriving, viable rural farm economy and produce the food we need now and in the future. AFT looks forward to continuing to work with the State Legislature and Climate Action Council to keep farming strong and make agriculture a key pillar of the state's climate change mitigation and adaptation policies in the coming years.

Conclusion

We are living through a difficult moment of intersectional overlapping crises—a pandemic, systemic racism, food insecurity, economic challenges, and climate change. Our state must continue to invest in programs and adopt policies that will help us address these intersecting crises effectively during a time of budgetary constraint, when every public dollar spent must work effectively to help New York recover and rebuild towards resilience and equity. Farmland protection, farmland access, farm to school, and agricultural climate programs work to preserve farmland, bring a diverse new generation onto the land, encourage institutional buying from New York's farms, efficiently direct investment and foster market growth with limited state involvement, and help farmers adopt sound farming practices that help them adapt to and mitigate climate change. We hope that you will work to prioritize the above programs as part of a multi-faceted pathway to build a stronger future in New York. Thank you for considering these recommendations, and for your support for these critical programs. I look forward to working with you in the months to come to help New York emerge more equitable, more resilient, and more abundant for years to come.