



**Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony
Tuesday, February 1, 2022**

**Richard A. Ball, Commissioner
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets**

Good morning Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, Senator Hinchey, Assemblywoman Lupardo, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am honored to present my testimony on the Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

This year's Executive Budget recommends \$273 million for the Department, allowing us to continue our fundamental work and to build exciting new programs that will drive New York agriculture forward.

The proposed Budget makes significant investments in the agricultural industry unlike anything we've ever seen. This includes a robust tax credit package that will offset increased costs to farmers, helping them to both support their workers and meet food production goals as they face continued challenges, including from COVID-19.

I am proud of what New York agriculture has accomplished during the pandemic to ensure that the food supply chain stays open. A big part of this work is the Nourish New York program. So far, Nourish New York has helped food banks to purchase 43.7 million pounds of products from New York producers. This translates to 41 million meals for families in need and financial help for more than 4,000 agricultural businesses. We're excited that Governor Hochul has proposed \$50 million to continue this program.

Expanding programs like SNAP, the Farmers' Market Resiliency grant program, and the Urban Farms and Community Gardens grant program will additionally make local food accessible to more residents. Plus, moving the School Lunch Program from the State Education Department to our Department will better connect schools and farmers, and boost local production.

The Executive Budget also increases funding for Agribusiness Child Development Centers, which had to close their doors during the early days of the pandemic, leaving our essential farm workers facing difficult choices when it came time to balance work and childcare. The Budget's historic \$13.5 million investment in these centers will help support farm worker families and keep New York's agricultural industry working as the pandemic continues.

Lending further assistance to farmers and their families, the Governor has committed critical funding to bring more farming opportunities to New Yorkers in historically marginalized groups. Members of the Department's diversity and racial equity listening sessions outlined several recommendations to help us better address underrepresentation in agriculture. I am encouraged that the Executive Budget will help us take steps to advance this important work.

Another noteworthy inclusion in the Executive Budget this year is the Companion Animal Capital Fund. Governor Hochul has dedicated \$5 million to revitalize the animal shelters that care for our dogs and cats, recognizing the legislature's longstanding commitment to this program and highlighting the importance of these shelters to our communities.

The Great New York State Fair will also be invigorated by a \$33 million investment for planned infrastructure projects and improvements to the Fairgrounds. This is in line with Governor Hochul's effort to provide an enhanced experience for fairgoers and strengthen educational programming to make the Fair a real showcase of New York agriculture.

Further supporting the agricultural industry, the Executive Budget proposes \$43 million in local assistance for key programs focused on research, education, workforce development, marketing, and more. This is a significant increase from last year's budget, thanks in part to the opportunity to reinstate funds for the Taste NY program at the Department. Governor Hochul is also expanding the NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure, Technology, Research, and Development Grant program to help producers adopt state-of-the-art food safety and environmental practices, and better meet demand.

Last, but certainly not least, we also continue to aggressively tackle climate change. Thanks to the Governor's proposed \$400 million investment in the Environmental Protection Fund, we will see a meaningful expansion of several programs, including Farmland Protection, Cornell Soil Health, the Soil and Water Conservation Committee, and the Agricultural Non-point Source Abatement and Control program. In addition, the Climate Resilient Farming program will receive an increase from \$4 million to \$17.5 million, helping farmers further their efforts to combat climate change.

We have a lot to be proud of when it comes to New York agriculture, yet there is more work to be done. We look forward to hearing your priorities and working with you to strengthen the agricultural community.

Thank you.