



Agriculture and Markets

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony Wednesday, February 7, 2024

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Good morning Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, Senator Hinchey, Assemblymember Lupardo, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am honored to present my testimony on the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Agriculture is a major driver of the economy in New York State, home to nearly 33,500 farms that are among the nation's top producers of more than 30 commodities, from fruits and vegetables to dairy and maple, and more. Under the leadership of the Governor, and with support from the Legislature, the Department is proud to not only promote the industry to our consumers, but also to provide critical assistance to our farmers and food and beverage businesses that feed our families.

One of the Department's top priorities is to create a stronger, more resilient food supply chain that provides a boost to our farmers and increases food access for all New Yorkers. Last fiscal year, the Governor announced significant initiatives to further grow New York agriculture and strengthen the food system. This includes making the 20% Investment Tax Credit refundable for five years and issuing an Executive Order directing New York State agencies to source 30% of their food purchases from New York producers. The State continues to support key programs, such as Nourish New York, Farm-to-School, and the 30% Initiative to bring more New York food to our local communities.

We are well aligned with our federal partners in our priorities, from the food system to diversity in agriculture and climate change. In the last year, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has targeted upwards of \$100 million to our farmers and food businesses and to increase the capacity of regional supply chains. This includes a \$40 million investment in the New York Food for New York Families program, which we are proud was modeled after our Nourish New York program, the Regional Food Business Center Program, and more. Approximately \$60 million has been committed to programs to mitigate climate change.

This year's Executive Budget builds on this work and recommends nearly \$324 million for the Department, including over \$100 million in federal funds and nearly \$48 million in local assistance for key programs focused on research, education, and marketing. It also includes significant funding that will allow us to not only continue to work towards our core mission but also implement new programs that reinforce the State's agricultural goals.

To assist New York's dairy industry, the Governor has proposed \$34 million over two years to support dairy farm modernization and infrastructure that improves dairy supply chain efficiency.

Statewide, the Governor is maintaining her pledge to aggressively tackle climate change. With her proposal of a \$400 million Environmental Protection Fund, we will see the continued funding of several of our programs that are key to protecting the environment, including Cornell Soil Health, the Soil and

Water Conservation Districts, which are seeing an increase of \$2 million this year, and the Climate Resilient Farming program.

To further build the State's agricultural workforce and advance its agricultural education programs, this year's Executive Budget includes \$1.25 million to the FFA, a \$250,000 increase from last year. It also provides for the renewal of annual funding to other critical programs that will complement the Governor's proposed first-ever collaborative youth agriculture leadership conference. In addition, \$500,000 will create the Agricultural Workforce One-Stop Shop, which will be managed by Cornell University's Agricultural Workforce Development Program.

Shaping tomorrow's agricultural workforce also means providing opportunities for all our farmers and ensuring a diverse and equitable industry. I recently had the honor of attending the first ever Conferencia de la Comunidad Agrícola Latina del Noreste, coordinated by the Cornell Small Farms Program, which receives \$500,000 in State assistance. The conference, conducted entirely in Spanish, connected Latino/a/x farm families with service providers, providing them critical resources. These are the first of many steps we must take to make sure that our industry is accessible to everyone.

Continuing to support the local food supply, the Executive Budget proposes a \$5 million investment in marine dock space, processing equipment, and other vital infrastructure for the growth of our aquaculture businesses. It also maintains funding for the Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program and the Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program. In addition, the \$50 million Regional School Food Infrastructure Grant Program will see another \$10 million in funding to help encourage the use of fresh New York State farm products in K-12 school meals and further increase market opportunities for New York's producers.

The Governor recognizes the need to invest in public, animal, and plant health programs as part of our efforts to bolster the agricultural industry. In addition to focusing on disease detection and prevention, food safety education, and veterinary care, she is proposing \$2.25 million for pest management solutions through Cornell University's Integrated Pest Management Program.

Also supporting animal care and health, the Executive Budget has proposed \$5 million again this year to continue the Companion Animal Capital Fund. The program provides animal shelters funding to make critical upgrades that enhance care for our dogs and cats.

The Great New York State Fair will receive a proposed \$15.7 million investment under the Executive Budget. This will provide for infrastructure improvement projects on the Fairgrounds, such as vendor concession stands, the Greenhouse Educational Center, and more. To provide a boost to New York's county fairs, and also agricultural education, the Executive Budget includes \$2 million in marketing funds, a new County Fairs Passport, and funding to encourage visitor growth at our fairs.

We have a lot to be proud of when it comes to New York agriculture, yet there is more work to be done. As we look toward the future, we must ensure that agriculture remains an economic driver and that we strengthen the connections between our farmers and consumers here and across the globe. We look forward to hearing your priorities and working with you to advance New York's agricultural community.

Thank you.