



**Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony
Tuesday, January 27, 2026**

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

Good morning, Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, Senator Hinchey, Assemblymember Lupardo, committee members, and elected officials. I am pleased to offer my testimony on the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The Executive Budget recommends nearly \$378 million for the Department, allowing us to carry out the work that is critical to our core mission. These funds also invest in initiatives that help offset costs for our farmers, boost our environmental protection efforts, further our agricultural education goals, and advance on-farm infrastructure, marketing, and research projects. All of this is aimed at growing the industry and strengthening our rural economies.

Agriculture is a major economic driver in New York, with more 30,000 farms that are among the nation's top producers of more than 30 commodities, including dairy. New York farmers are forward thinking, innovative, and eager to meet consumer trends, producing some of the very best products in the world. Yet, they face continued challenges—from increased labor costs to additional pressures stemming from supply chain disruptions, ongoing tariff changes, and cuts to important programs.

Recognizing this, Governor Hochul has proposed in her Executive Budget a \$30 million tariff relief program. This will provide direct payments to New York specialty crop growers, livestock producers, and dairy farmers, providing some certainty and helping our farmers remain competitive in today's changing global marketplace.

From helping producers reduce costs to investing in infrastructure, the Governor is focused on direct support to our farms. The State's dairy community, which makes up half of New York's agricultural economy, has seen historic investments in infrastructure and processing capacity in recent years. The Executive Budget proposes to build on those achievements by advancing another round of the Dairy Modernization Program and extending the refundable investment tax credit.

With Governor Hochul's plan to maintain the Environmental Protection Fund at \$425 million, the Department will see continued funding for programs that reduce the effects of climate change on the farm and protect our natural resources. Funding will target our grant programs that conserve farmland, boost farm resiliency, and provide additional aid to our Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Building a strong local food system and expanding access to food for all New Yorkers continues to be a priority for the State. In support of these efforts, this year's Executive Budget includes funding for the Farm-to-School, Farmers' Market Resiliency, and Urban Farms and Community Gardens programs. The Regional School Food Infrastructure Grant Program will also see another \$10 million to encourage the use of fresh, local farm products in school meals and open new market opportunities for New York's producers.

To assist our farm families and workers, I am pleased to say that the Governor has proposed increasing the State's commitment to the Agri-Business Child Development Centers to \$11.3 million, plus a \$3.2



Department of Agriculture and Markets

KATHY HOCHUL

Governor

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Commissioner

million allocation for capital investments. This network provides childcare, nutritious meals, and a foundation for learning, while also providing essential family support services.

Our local assistance budget will see an increase this year, to nearly \$84 million, under the Executive Budget. This funding will support research and promotion for many commodities, including craft beverages, apples, vegetables, honey, hemp, and more. In addition, New York's cider industry will receive a \$250,000 boost, dedicated to establishing New York as the State of Cider. This investment will promote and market our cideries as premier agritourism destinations.

In support of animal care, \$5 million will continue the Companion Animal Capital Fund, which provides critical upgrades at animal shelters and enhanced care for our dogs and cats.

Finally, the State is continuing its commitment to county and local fairs, which are hubs for ag education and a key part of our overall workforce development efforts. The Executive Budget proposes \$5 million in capital funding to help our fairs make infrastructure improvements and \$500,000 in additional marketing funds to increase off-season event capacity. This will help to draw new visitors to these community staples and introduce more young people to agriculture.

Thanks to the investments that the Governor, and all of you, have made in New York agriculture over the years, we no doubt have a stronger industry today. I look forward to working together to further our shared goals in the coming year.

Thank you.