



New York Farm Bureau • 159 Wolf Road • Suite 300 • Albany, New York 12205 • (518) 436-8495 Fax: (518) 431-5656

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New York Farm Bureau Testimony for Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Agriculture

*Renée St. Jacques, Director of Public Policy
New York Farm Bureau
Rstjacques@nyfb.org*

Agriculture Committee Chairs and members of the New York State Legislature, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and speak with you today. My name is Renée St. Jacques, and I serve as Director of Public Policy at New York Farm Bureau (NYFB). NYFB is the state's largest general agricultural advocacy organization and the voice of New York agriculture. Our members represent an industry that provides significant revenue to local, state, and national economies along with providing locally produced food for our communities.

New York farms produce food, support jobs, and sustain local economies in every region. At the same time, farms operate under cost pressures that continue to intensify. Labor, energy, infrastructure, and insurance costs remain a burden for our farms. Weather volatility continues to raise production risk and operating costs. These conditions shape decisions from hiring to planting to investment. To ensure New York farmers can continue to feed consumers, the state needs a budget and policy framework that supports farm viability and long-term competitiveness of our farms.

NYFB appreciates the Governor's continued attention to agriculture in the executive budget proposal. The proposed funding is significant for the agricultural community and includes meaningful investments for farms. We are particularly pleased that the executive budget includes several proposals that directly support farm viability and urge the legislature to support these proposals in the final state budget:

- The extension of the 20 % refundability of the investment tax credit through 2033 which supports continued infrastructure investment on our farms. We continue to ask the legislature to make investments in farmworker housing an eligible item for this tax credit.
- An additional \$5 million for the Dairy Farm Modernization Grant, Farm and Food Growth Fund, which help farms and food businesses invest in efficiency, safety, and expanded capacity.
- \$30 million to aid eligible farm operations financially affected by tariffs. This is an important acknowledgment of the market disruptions and cost pressures farmers continue to face.

Additionally, we support the \$2.5 million for capital improvements at Cornell CALS satellite research farms and ask the legislature to increase this allocation to \$5 million. These research

farms are essential to connecting academic research to commercial applications to ensure workable solutions. NYFB also requests \$5 million in the budget to support Cornell CALS operational costs at the research farms. Cornell's land grant system requires sustained attention and investment. Research farms, extension programs, and applied research facilities across the state continue to face significant operational and capital needs. These programs are the backbone of on-farm research, education, and technical assistance, and funding gaps directly limit their ability to deliver timely, practical support to producers.

NYFB urges a final budget that focuses on stable, predictable funding for agriculture. Holding key programs flat does not reflect the real cost of delivering services in today's environment, and several core agricultural programs will require legislative action to maintain effective capacity.

Applied research, extension, and commodity-focused programs are among the areas where support is critical. Sector-specific research and promotion lines for vegetables, apples, berries, grapes, wine, maple, turfgrass, hops, craft beverages, and other emerging sectors are proven tools that help farms manage pests and disease, improve yields, develop new products, and access markets. These programs routinely rely on legislative adds to function at effective levels and continued, longstanding support is essential to ensure farmers across commodities can respond to changing production and market conditions. Additional funding to support the research of the Cornell Maple Program is needed. After shortfalls in federal support, New York needs to step up and ensure that the state's maple producers have access to applied research. Funding for the New York Farm Viability Institute is also essential to supporting ongoing agricultural research in the state. These programs are the state's economic development investment for farms.

NYFB also urges continued legislative support for Cornell CALS PRO DAIRY and PRO Livestock. The executive budget proposal leaves PRO DAIRY short of needed funding, reducing the program's ability to provide effective technical assistance. For PRO Livestock, NYFB urges full funding at \$250,000 to support statewide applied research and technical assistance for livestock operations. These programs deliver practical, farm-facing support that helps producers improve efficiency, meet environmental and regulatory expectations, and adopt new technology.

Regionally focused agricultural development programs also require sustained legislative support to meet the on-the-ground needs of local producers. Programs such as North Country Agricultural Development provide critical, targeted assistance to farms that often operate with limited access to technical expertise and support services. These initiatives are not peripheral. They are essential tools that help farms adapt to changing markets, diversify operations, and remain economically viable in rural communities facing distinct geographic and economic challenges.

Workforce-related investments remain a top priority for New York farms. NYFB supports continued funding for the Cornell Farm Labor Specialist and work done by Cornell Agricultural Workforce Development, which provides farm labor specific information for both farm employers and employees. New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) also provides critical research and information to support the health and safety of people working in all sectors of agriculture. NYFB urges the legislature to support funding for NYCAMH, NY FarmNet and the John May Farm Safety fund.

NYFB further urges continued legislative investment in working lands and conservation programs that support on-farm stewardship. The executive budget includes a record \$425 million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), and NYFB supports maintaining that commitment in the final budget. At the same time, agriculture-focused conservation lines within the EPF, including Farmland Protection, Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement, Pollinator Best Management Practices, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts, require adequate funding to provide farms with guidance and support on water quality and soil health goals. Legislative action is needed to ensure these agriculture-specific programs receive adequate allocations within the EPF so they can continue providing practical, on-farm tools that help farmers protect water quality, manage nutrients, and conserve soil while keeping land in agricultural production.

In addition, NYFB encourages the legislature to continue strong support for Nourish NY and related nutrition and food access initiatives. The executive budget proposal is below the \$75 million level that has been requested to meet statewide demand. This reduction would limit purchasing capacity and reduce the program's ability to serve as a reliable market outlet for New York farmers. Nourish NY strengthens markets for New York farm products while improving access to fresh, locally produced food for families across the state. Legislative action to restore funding will help preserve these market opportunities for farmers and ensure continued access to New York-grown food for food-insecure households.

NYFB appreciates the continued investment in Farm to School program and urges the legislature to support modernizing the NY 30% Incentive Program. There are many schools unable to participate in this program due to operational and financial barriers. NYFB supports the changes proposed by the New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition including adding breakfast, updating the reimbursement rate and indexing it modestly to inflation.

County fairs and the New York State Fair play a critical role in connecting the general public to agriculture. NYFB asks the legislature to support the proposed \$5 million in infrastructure grants for county fairs in the executive budget along with additional funding for premiums so that youth are encouraged to continue exhibiting their projects and livestock at our fairs.

In addition, NYFB supports the executive budget proposal to move the administration of product marketing and research orders from Empire State Development to the Department of Agriculture and Markets. This change will streamline the administration of these programs and support the continued use of the funds for marketing and research.

One item that was not included in the executive budget is legislation creating a clean fuel standard. This standard would create a regional market for low carbon fuels including biomethane which is produced through manure and food waste anaerobic digestion on farms. Currently, this energy (with its GHG reduction) has market value under California's Low Carbon Fuel Standard. Current biomethane from New York's dairy manure and local food waste could fuel over 30,000 tractor trailers annually, displacing at least 300 million gallons of diesel. NYFB urges the legislature to include legislation for a clean fuel standard in the final budget.

As Assembly Speaker Heastie said on the first day of legislative session, “Here in New York, we will do all we can to uplift our farmers and support the agricultural economy that is the backbone of our state.” That statement reflects what farmers across New York need from this budget: steady, practical support that recognizes agriculture as essential to the state’s economy and food system.

The decisions made in this year’s budget will directly affect whether farms can continue to invest, hire, and operate in an increasingly challenging environment. Strengthening core programs, maintaining research and extension capacity, supporting the farm workforce, and keeping working lands in production are not abstract goals. They are the building blocks that allow farms to remain viable and competitive.

NYFB appreciates the legislature’s ongoing partnership and looks forward to working with you to deliver a final budget that reflects this shared commitment to supporting farmers and strengthening the agricultural economy across every region of the state. Thank you for your continued attention to agriculture and for the work you do on behalf of New York’s farm families and communities.