



Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Agriculture  
January 27, 2026

Thank you to Chairs Krueger and Pretlow for the opportunity to testify on issues impacting New York's dairy farm families. Thank you to Chairs Lupardo and Hinchey and Ranking Members Tague and Borrello for your steadfast support of agriculture.

New York's dairy farms are multi-generational businesses that anchor rural communities, support thousands of jobs, and sustain a robust processing and manufacturing sector across the state. Ensuring these farms remain viable requires thoughtful policy, reliable markets, and continued public investment.

We appreciate Governor Hochul's leadership and partnership with agriculture reflected in the Executive Budget Proposal. As dairy farmers prepare for a year of low milk prices, the proposed investments will be critical to farm sustainability and long-term planning. In particular, we strongly support:

- Extension of the refundable Investment Tax Credit (ITC), which provides certainty for long-term capital planning. While extension is a positive step, we reiterate that making the ITC permanent remains a top priority to give farms and lenders the confidence needed to move forward with major investments.
- \$15 million for the Dairy Farm Modernization Grant Program, which has already demonstrated strong demand and clear value in helping farms improve efficiency, expand on-farm milk storage, and invest in technology needed to meet processor and market demands.
- \$425 million for the Environmental Protection Fund, which supports farmland conservation, soil and water programs, and environmental stewardship efforts essential to sustainable agricultural production.

We also appreciate the Governor's recognition of market volatility and uncertainty created by tariffs. We look forward to learning more about the proposal to create a program to provide relief to NY's dairy farmers.

Strong research, extension, and applied technical assistance remain foundational to the success of New York's dairy sector. NEDPA supports continued funding for key Cornell University programs, including the NYS Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, Cornell University Ruminant Center (CURC), Cornell Farm Labor Specialist program, and Cornell Dairy Profit Teams, all of which deliver direct, practical value to dairy farms.

We respectfully ask the Legislature to increase funding by \$1.125 million for the Cornell PRO-DAIRY Program. Despite its critical importance to dairy farms across New York State, PRO-DAIRY's core funding has not increased since 2014. During that same period, the demands on the program have grown significantly as farms face increased economic pressure, evolving environmental expectations, workforce challenges, and rapid changes in technology.

The core mission of PRO-DAIRY is to support dairy farmers through improved productivity, profitability, and environmental performance. That mission has never been more important, particularly as New York makes historic investments in new and expanded dairy processing capacity. Farms must be able to plan, invest, and adapt to meet processor needs while remaining economically and environmentally sustainable, and PRO-DAIRY provides the applied research, technical assistance, and business expertise that make this possible.

Increased funding would allow PRO-DAIRY to continue the Climate Leadership Specialist positions and expand expertise in farm business management, dairy nutrition, animal well-being, and youth development – areas identified by dairy farmers as high priorities. In addition, the funding would help address program cost increases that have accrued over the past decade while enabling PRO-DAIRY to fill critical positions needed to meet growing demand for services across the state. A few examples of PRO-DAIRY's vital work to ensure farms remain viable for the next generation include:

- The Farm Business Management Program, which is highly regarded by dairy farmers, and builds financial acumen, supports informed decision-making, and creates peer networks among farmers. Expanded staffing capacity is needed to meet demand and reintroduce previously offered programs.
- The Cornell Dairy Advancement Program (DAP) (formerly known as the Dairy Acceleration Program) helps farmers develop business plans, evaluate modernization options, and strengthen long-term environmental and economic sustainability. DAP has supported hundreds of dairy farm projects, including developing comprehensive nutrient management plans and engineered best management practices.
- Research by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and at the CURC are essential for developing, testing and demonstrating innovative opportunities for farms to improve environmental sustainability and economic viability. The PRO-DAIRY team is a critical component to helping farmers apply that research and innovate on their farm.

Investing an additional \$1.125 million will ensure PRO-DAIRY can continue delivering high-impact, practical support that strengthens farm performance, maximizes the return on New York's processing and infrastructure investments, and reinforces the long-term competitiveness of the state's dairy sector. Further, these investments will help ensure dairy farms remain strong economic anchors in their communities while strengthening a secure, reliable food supply for all New Yorkers.

A stable, skilled workforce is the backbone of New York's dairy industry. We support continued funding for Cornell's Farm Labor Specialist team and New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH), which collectively strengthen farm leadership, safety, and employee well-being.

We request \$75,000 for a joint project between NYCAMH and Cornell Ag Workforce Development to create standardized on-boarding safety training for dairy employees. Workforce safety, retention,

and training are critical to farm productivity and risk management, and this collaboration would provide scalable, practical tools for farms across the state.

Additionally, farm-provided employee housing remains a critical workforce investment. Making employee housing investment eligible under the ITC, further expanding the Farm Worker Housing Loan Program, and increasing the loan program cap would help farms address housing shortages while improving recruitment and retention.

Dairy farmers remain deeply committed to environmental stewardship. However, navigating regulatory requirements continues to be a challenge, particularly as environmental regulations evolve. NEDPA recommends the Department of Environmental Conservation establish a dedicated “One Stop Shop for Agriculture” to streamline communication, improve regulatory consistency, and enhance compliance outcomes for both farms and regulators.

Continued investment in programs such as the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Agricultural Waste Management is essential to achieving shared environmental goals while maintaining economically viable farms. We also encourage the state to pursue clean energy solutions that complement food production, including renewable natural gas, as recognized in the State Energy Plan. We strongly recommend the creation of a Clean Fuel Standard in New York State.

New York’s dairy farms are prepared to do their part by investing in their businesses and people, caring for the environment, and supporting our local economies. With continued partnership from the Legislature and strategic investment in modernization, research, workforce, and environmental stewardship, New York can ensure a strong and competitive dairy sector for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention and for your continued support of New York agriculture.

Sincerely,

Allyson Jones-Brimmer  
Executive Director