Cornell CALS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

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Testimony for the NYS Legislative Budget hearing
Agriculture & Parks

Submitted by Julie C. Suarez,
Associate Dean, Director, Translational Research Programs

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the critical importance of remembering, and supporting, an over 150+ year partnership between New York State and our College. Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is a uniquely situated institution of higher education, nested within the private, Ivy League Cornell University, yet embedded as a contract college of the State University of New York. In fact, Cornell pre-dated the SUNY system by well over 100 years. We are located in Ithaca NY as a result of a former legislative 'battle' many years ago settled when former Senator Ezra Cornell donated farmland in Ithaca. This donation of farmland helped settle Cornell as the 'land grant' institution, one of which was established in every state, in order to further education in agriculture, military and engineering, and natural sciences. Cornell University, and our college, are centered in our founding by New York State with a mission to conduct purpose-driven science that meets the needs of New York's agrifood, environmental, and life sciences systems through teaching, research, and extension.

We recently gained the distinction of being ranked the **#1 College for the study of agricultural sciences** by those who matter most — our students, in Niche. Cornell CALS consistently ranks among the **top four universities globally** for agricultural sciences according to QS Analytics, and **#2 in the nation** by U.S. News & World Report. We are proud of these honors and remain committed to maintaining strong, future-focused partnerships with federal, state, and community land-grant partners. I am particularly pleased to say that our 2026 incoming class reflects our commitment to New York State and our land-grant mission. We welcomed our largest class of students with FFA and 4-H backgrounds, with 10% of our students directly coming from a family farm, with just under 20% of our students the first generation to attend college. We have a focus on partnerships with the SUNY system, and annually welcome students who have earned their associate's degree from a local community college like TC3, FLCC, Suffolk Community College, and are transferring into CALS to complete their degree. I'm pleased to say we're just about to sign a new transfer agreement with Laguardia Community College.

However, today I'm going to talk more about our research and our extension or outreach mission. Our goal is to help New York's farmers, food systems, and entrepreneurs reach their full economic potential through purpose-driven science and extension/outreach while maximizing environmental stewardship. Agriculture is and continues to be an essential and vital part of the fabric of our rural communities and is vital to all of us who like to eat three times a day. I am exceptionally proud of the work we do to support New York's farm families, and our youth development work to pull (through our FFA and 4-H programs) the next generation into agricultural, environmental, farming, entrepreneurial and scientific careers.

Why does supporting science and education in our land grant matter? I am always struck by the generational partnerships that exist between our family farmers and the land-grant. Higher education is not always perfect, nor does CALS serve everyone we need to because of capacity constraints. But I am continually amazed that no matter where I go, whether it's in NYC speaking at a federal reserve

conference or talking about opportunities in dairy in Rome, NY, or connecting with maple producers across the state there's always a Cornell CALS connection, or a story about how CALS is doing something neat to assist, whether it's food safety training, adding value to a product, making sure soil health is safe for urban growers, or working to sustainably solve challenging pest and disease issues like spotted lanternfly. Cornell CALS is really like an octopus; our tentacles extend everywhere in this great state.

CALS is one of the main reasons that NYS is number one in table beets, because when Love Beets came into NYS and needed a steady supply of beets, CALS scientists worked hand in hand with farmers to develop better mechanisms to manage disease in our more humid climate making production efficiencies possible. We've also helped with the science to extract a natural based red dye from table beets, that is now being sold by a local vegetable processor nationwide. Cornell CALS science is behind many of the most popular fruits and vegetables NY consumers enjoy, from galaxy tomatoes sold at farmers markets and retail chains, to SnapDragon and RubyFrost apples. Cornell CALS science is one of the reasons why we're seeing so much dairy manufacturing expansion. Between 2014 and 2024***, NYS climbed from 11th in milk per cow to 5th***. PA went from 28 to 31 and VT went from 26 to 28. Our dairy farmers are outcompeting our neighbors, because of our science and our extension of that science into the community. I do want to emphasize that the resources for applied science to continually improve milk production efficiency per cow are vitally important to keep increasing the environmental sustainability of our dairy farms. I know first-hand that the competitiveness of our farmers, our food science team's work with dairy manufacturers and Cornell's overall ability to support dairy is one of the key reasons why Chobani chose to locate its second plant here. We're proud of both our historical legacy AND the bright future ahead of us all in the food and farming business, despite the current and real financial headwinds facing the community particularly with global trade conditions and an extraordinary consolidation in farm input supplies.

For Cornell CALS, we are at a pivotal moment in revitalizing and sustaining our 150-year+ land-grant mission for New York State. Like many others, we rely on your continued partnership, and that of the farming community, to chart a sustainable path forward. Significant challenges have occurred on our campus since 2008, when almost 20 years ago the SUNY budget was cut by 27%. A graph is appended to the end of this testimony that depicts the SUNY allocation to us over the years, and Cornell CALS in inflation adjusted dollars is down by approximately $40M annually which is causing serious strain on our institution. The 'land-grant' allocation has remained effectively flat since 2008. Expenses have not.

Cornell CALS has maintained a strong land-grant mission for New York's family farms through the dedication of our faculty, who have secured substantial federal research investments that have enabled us to serve NY, and to help operate our campus and remote facilities. We've also made difficult financial decisions to cut our costs; ***we have reduced staff by 17%*** and also experienced faculty reductions, and considerably reduced our footprint across the state of NY without, so far, compromising our farmer-focused service. Compounding the state funding challenges from the SUNY budget, **we've experienced $100 million in canceled federal contracts since January 2025.**

This loss of revenue is causing extraordinarily challenging times for our College, as we've relied on the revenue from federal research grants to sustain our research infrastructure that we operate, as part of the SUNY system, for NYS in the past two decades of stagnant operational funds for our campus. While the 'pause' on federal funding has been lifted for our institution, let me point out

that it takes time for our faculty members to write additional grants and federal funding for the scientific enterprise that has made our food system, and in fact our nation, the top country in the world is uncertain.

I have attached to the end of this presentation a map showing where our satellite research farms are across the state of NY. Cornell CALS believes strongly that these satellite farm locations are critically important for our scientific mission. We staff and maintain these primarily NYS owned lands as part of our land-grant mission, making sure that we have people who are helping farmers protect Long Island's sole-source aquifer, that we can trial new apple, grape and vegetable varieties we develop across the different microclimates we have in NYS, and that we can take the risk of developing new technologies to feed dairy animals differently, ensuring animal health while reducing emissions, because we have a working research dairy. In an agricultural and forestry context, if we do research only in a lab, we will not succeed in providing solutions that work. Farms and forests are biological systems that react in different ways in NYS climate, and growing seasons are different from year to year. These satellite locations are critical as our staff in these locations understand the challenges local farmers face, and actively work with our faculty in Ithaca and Geneva to co-create practical solutions, whether it's addressing a new pest challenge, or a nutrient management and water quality issue, sustainably and with solutions that work for the individual farm in a New York context. These satellite research farms are critical to keeping our local food system strong, growing the foods we all enjoy from our NY farm families.

We need New York State to recognize the long-term consequences of stagnant SUNY funding on our ability to operate and maintain the research farms and forests that make our work regionally relevant. These facilities, spread across New York's diverse microclimates, are essential for developing practical, science-based solutions for agriculture and natural resources. Our metrics are impressive. Including our Ithaca campus, the total impact of our R&D is $5.9B across the state of NY. When we look JUST at our satellite research farms and forest, which help facilitate research and extension through hosting important field days and workshops here are our metrics:

Total Employment: **396** Total R&D spend: **$59.5M for satellite farms**
Total Economic value of research impact: **$1.19B**
Total Economic value of educational programs**: $18.4M** (for example, workshops trialing new equipment to 'laser zap' weeds; soil health and resiliency cover crop demonstrations etc.).

I've appended to this testimony a document summarizing each of the key accomplishments from our satellite research farms and forests, so that you can understand why local farmers need us to bring science and education into the heart of NY's farming communities.

Cornell CALS is not asking for the state of NY to make up for the entirety of our federal funds loss of $100M this year. We are however asking for you to make an active choice. A choice to support the generational partnerships that have long existed between NYS, our family farmers, and our land-grant.

That choice is simple: please provide additional annual resources to help us maintain and grow our research and extension mission and support our satellite research farm locations.

Office of the Dean
17 Elk Street, 3rd Floor
Albany, NY 12207
518 728-6061
JCS433@cornell.edu
cals.cornell.edu

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We are requesting **$5 million in annual operational support** and **$5 million in annual capital support** for these research farms and forests. To reinvest fully in the College's future and enable us to make additional faculty hires, **increased SUNY operational funding** is critical.

A few points on Cornell CALS perspective about agricultural opportunities and how we would re-invest in our satellite research farms to tackle these challenges:

- NY's agricultural diversity is its strength. We are in the top 10 of a number of production areas – from table beets, to dairy, fresh market apples, cabbage, etc.
- NYS tends to produce what people eat and need for healthy lifestyles. We need to remember and value NY's farmers, and the scientific capacity, that helps protect our regional food system.
- Our access to 100M consumers on the eastern seaboard is vital to feeding our future.
- Labor efficiencies, assistive devices and robotics are a key area of need for NYS farmers, particularly for specialty crop and dairy. Cornell CALS needs to invest in these areas.
- Farm production costs have skyrocketed; new technologies are being developed, refined, and tested at CALS that solve for our future challenges (pyrolysis, AD-systems, biological and mechanical controls like laser weeding machines; science is needed now more than ever).
- NYS will continue to be a huge dairy state; but we need the science to keep increasing milk and particularly – proteins within milk needed by milk manufacturers – efficiently so that we minimize impacts on land and water while allowing our farmers to be economically sustainable.
- NYS has water. Our climate as a nation is changing. Food will need to be grown indoors, year-round, particularly as global trade conditions remain uncertain. We need to be investing in controlled environment agriculture; making sure we can grow more than lettuce and strawberries indoors year-round.
- Forestry, including agroforestry like maple and edible or manufactured forestry products, is increasingly important to providing nature based carbon sequestration while also ensuring rural communities have a way to economically steward their woodlands.
- NYS has funded several statewide extension and applied research teams in areas like maple, livestock, dairy, these teams are designed to help farmers throughout the state. We see growth in maple sales value, growth in livestock, and impending growth in dairy as key areas where we need to be actively engaged, and we appreciate and value your support greatly.

We deeply appreciate Governor Hochul and the Legislature's longstanding support through the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets line-items, which have strengthened research, education, and youth programs like FFA. These initiatives have grown even as SUNY funding has remained flat, and your support continues to enhance our service to New York's agrifood system. Cornell CALS seeks the legislature's normal restorations for our programs, and I'd be happy to share additional details on progress to date – whether it's the first taste test of several emerging NY hop varieties, additional work creating value from concord grapes into other food products, critical work occurring to support our state's growing non-dairy livestock sector including the emerging fiber production sector, and others.

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I'm particularly pleased with several of our recent results in our agrivoltaics trials, showcasing that small fruits are actually growing better under panels than in our control plots last year. Let me caution this is not enough time to be an official Cornell recommended guideline, as last year's growing season was extremely hot and dry and we need a few seasons before issuing confident guidelines. But this is exactly the type of practical information that growers will need to make sound dual-use agricultural production decisions with solar and food crops. We hope the legislature will continue investing in this needed practical work to help not solve but provide pragmatic advice to difficult land-use decisions.

We are also highly aware that we need to do more to support our dairy farmers as they face financial headwinds while also needing to ramp up to supply NY's ever-increasing milk manufacturing capacity. We can do this in several different ways; simply add more cows, putting constraints on our land, water and labor systems, or we can so this smartly. Investing in science through applied research continues to increase our per-cow efficiency, enabling farmers to add fewer cows and taking on less financial risk while ensuring we meet our new commitments as a state to dairy. I'm excited about the opportunities and I note we will need a fully funded research and teaching dairy (Cornell University Ruminant Center at $500k) and most critically, a fully funded PRO DAIRY applied research and extension team to work directly with our farmers. We're seeking an additional $1.125M to invest in new personnel in the area of animal and crop nutrition, farm business management and profitability, and animal well-being along with youth workforce education.

We are also facing significant headwinds in our long-standing Cornell Maple program, which has been the backbone of NY's maple industry going from a $7M economic value to a $30M economic value in agricultural sales to NYS over the past 15 years through applied research that has improved maple producers efficiency. A shift in federal funding priorities to invest long-standing maple research dollars from New York into states like Utah, has placed our program at risk. In order to re-hire and re-staff our program, we are asking for $350k in operational funding to rebuild our program after staff departures.

Please know that the land-grant mission in our college is truly embedded in our DNA. Generations of farm families, policy makers, and scientists at staff at our college have worked together to help support our local food system, which makes sure that we in NY always have a bulwark against uncertainty in food production from other areas of the globe. You are facing extremely difficult choices in this budget cycle and I recognize that dilemma, between meeting people's immediate needs for food, and meeting our children's and grandchildren's need to have a food system that is science-based and can keep up with the environmental and economic needs of a changing climate. New York State will need more science in the years to come; not less, and if we fail to invest in our scientific capacity as a state now, we are in jeopardy of putting our future food security at risk. We all need to be thinking about our respective responsibilities to steward this 150+ year partnership, and I sincerely hope that you carefully consider the need to support our college's decades of partnership with a boost to our operating and capital aid.

Cornell CALS doesn't always have all the answers, but we strive to do the best job that we can to assist NY's family farms, and to provide the best science we can to you as you consider controversial policy decisions. Happy to answer any questions, and grateful as always for the continued partnership as the land-grant institution serving the wonderful state of New York.

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State-wide Research and Impact

Cornell CALS faculty and staff are farmers too – just farmers with a different purpose in mind. De-risking and finding innovation-based solutions for practical challenges.

The Bottom Line: CALS satellite research farms help farmers economically.

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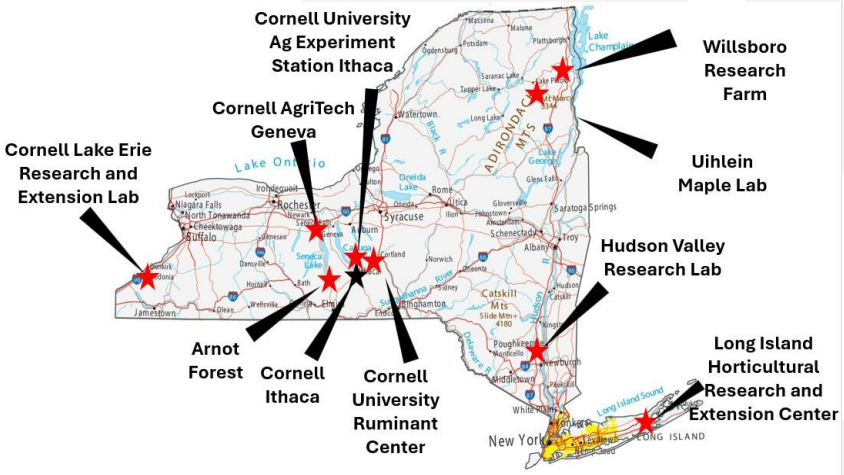
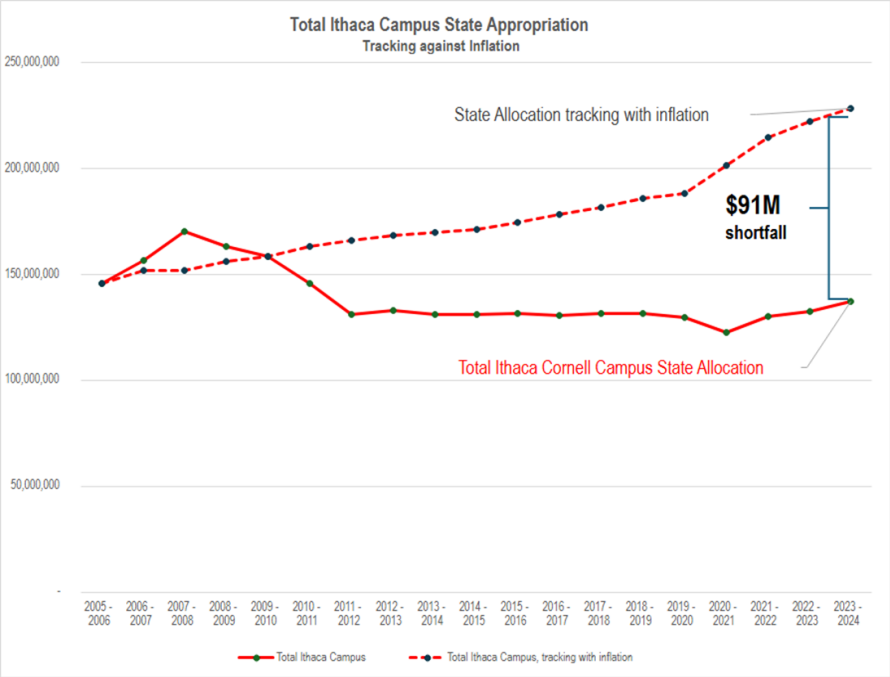


NYS FUNDING



Core funds have stagnated and are down by *$40M annually to Cornell CALS alone*

Since 2008; SUNY funding for teaching and extension mission has remained largely flat.

The Governor and Legislature have helped keep individual focused programs through 'lines' in the NYS AGM budget, which we are thankful have grown to support statewide farmer-focused teams.

The lack of core operating funding though is impairing our ability to honor our land grant mission promise.

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