



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

# **Senator Metzger and Assemblywoman Lupardo Host Discussion on Soil Health with Key Stakeholders From Across the State**

[Jen Metzger](#)

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**Albany, NY...**On Wednesday, February 5, Senator Metzger (SD-42) and Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo (AD-123), Chairs of the Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees, hosted a roundtable discussion on the importance of soil health.

Attendees included farm organizations, farmers, environmentalist groups, experts from Cornell University, the Department of Agriculture and Markets' Commissioner Ball and his staff, plus representatives from New York Soil Health, New York Farm Bureau, Northeast Organic Farming Association, the New York State Vegetable Growers Association, the National Young Farmers Coalition, and American Farmland Trust. Participants in Wednesday's roundtable discussed their own efforts to improve soil health, as well as some of the barriers they're facing.

"We wanted to bring farmers and experts together to see how the legislature can best support farmers in their efforts to improve soil health," **said Senator Metzger.** "We can address many issues simultaneously with healthy soils: Improving agricultural productivity and long-term sustainability, protecting our water resources and reducing the severity of climate change, and strengthening the resilience of farms to extreme weather events."

"Agricultural practices that foster soil health can play a significant role in the state's climate protection strategy," **said Assemblywoman Lupardo.** "We were challenged by the participants to help create a "culture of soil health," through

smart policies and wise investments. I'd like to thank the participants and look forward to the continued conversation on this important topic."

The meeting produced a number of ideas of how the state could help stakeholders' efforts, including providing funding and incentives for farmers to make needed investments in new practices and management systems, more farmer-to-farmer information-sharing about what works and what doesn't, and continued support of New York's network of on-the-ground experts through Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. There was also wide agreement on the need to be flexible, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach for farmers to improving soil health.

Soil health strongly factors in to farm sustainability, consumer demand for fresh and local, carbon sequestration, and environmental conservation. Outcomes for soil health programs include improved water quality, reduced erosion, increased resilience for farms and forests, lower costs of stormwater control, and other savings that can then be reinvested.

**Julie C. Suarez, Associate Dean of Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said,** "I am delighted that Senator Jen Metzger and Assemblymember Donna Lupardo convened this critical discussion on Soil Health policy. With groundbreaking basic research on the soil microbiome emerging that shows that soil microorganisms can naturally assist plant health, to the known ability of our soils to sequester carbon through improved management practices, the ground beneath our feet is one of the most important policy issues facing us all. Cornell CALS is prepared to continue assisting New York's farm families, and very thankful to the Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees' excellent leadership for convening the Soil Health Roundtable."

"Helping more farmers adopt practices that improve soil health is essential to the future of farming in New York—improving farm viability and resilience to an increasing number of extreme weather events," **said Samantha Levy, New York Policy Manager for American Farmland Trust.** "And this is something that matters to all New Yorkers as these practices help to mitigate climate change and ensure clean water. American Farmland Trust applauds Senator Metzger, Assemblywoman Lupardo, and Assemblyman Englebright for their leadership in holding this roundtable, and thanks Commissioner Ball, Senator May,

Assemblywoman Barrett, Assemblywoman Lifton, Assemblyman Crouch, and the many farmers and organizations who participated and spent their time exploring how the state can build on what our agencies, farmers and agricultural professionals are already doing in order to help more farmers adopt soil health practices. We look forward to continuing to engage in this critical conversation.”