



American Farmland Trust

2020 Joint Legislative Hearing

Environmental Conservation Hearing on FY2021 State Budget

Monday January 27th, 2020
Legislative Office Building, 2nd Floor
Albany, NY

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY:

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AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST**

**“The policy of the state shall be to conserve and protect its natural resources and scenic beauty
and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural lands
for the production of food and other agricultural products.”**

- Article XIV, Section 4, New York State Constitution

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Thank you very much for holding today's hearing, and for the New York State Legislature's support for state programs that enhance farm viability and help farmers steward and protect the irreplaceable natural resource that is New York's farmland.

I am pleased to present testimony on behalf of American Farmland Trust (AFT). AFT is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Since its founding in 1980 by farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped protect five million acres of farmland and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more. Established in 1990, AFT's New York State Office works to save the land that sustains us across the state.

AGRICULTURE FORMS THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE ECONOMY

The production, processing, buying and selling of food has traditionally formed the foundation of all economies, and New York is no different. A national leader in many commodities, the recent 2017 USDA census has shown that New York's now nearly 33,400 farms generated \$5.7 billion in gross income in 2017, up more than 23% from a decade earlier, while creating jobs for 55,000 New Yorkers. Farms also create business opportunities for farm support services such as electricians, feed and seed dealers, carpenters, farm equipment dealers, truckers, mechanics, bankers, veterinarians and many others. Because of this, they are often considered "anchor businesses"—keeping rural communities strong. Processing milk, fruits, vegetables and grains into cheese, yogurt, baked goods, wine, beer, spirits and other food products creates another 83,000 jobs for a total of over 160,000 steady jobs for residents across New York State.¹ All of this activity creates a total economic impact from agriculture of nearly \$45 billion.¹¹

ENSURING A STRONG FUTURE FOR FARMING IN NEW YORK STATE

Almost seven million acres of land form the essential infrastructure underlying the state's robust farm and food economy, yet this irreplaceable land is often taken for granted. Despite the importance of farms and food to all New Yorkers, roughly half a million acres of farmland in New York have been converted to real estate development since the 1980s—the equivalent of nearly 5,000 farms.

The loss of farms and farmland impacts not only the state's farm economy but also the ability of New York's farmers to meet state residents' burgeoning demand for locally grown food. In New York we have sufficient water and productive soils to grow "the full plate"—meat, dairy, fruits, grains, and vegetables. However, over 80 percent of the fruits, vegetables, and dairy products produced in New York State are grown on farmland immediately surrounding urban areas which lie directly in the path of suburban sprawl.¹ This is one of the reasons the Farmland

¹ Calculations based on the 2012 Census of Agriculture and the Economic Research Service's Urban Influence Codes.

Protection Program, which has been investing in protecting productive farmland in the path of development in New York State since 1996, is so critical to the future of agriculture in New York.

There is also growing evidence of an emerging threat to farmland in New York due to the number of aging farmers in the state. According to data from the newly released 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age of farmers is 57, up from 54 in 2007. Additionally, the census revealed that the ratio of farmers over 65 to farmers under 35 is 5:1. Senior farmers in New York cultivate nearly 2 million acres of land, and AFT research shows that 92 percent are doing so without a young farmer-operator involved in the ownership or management of the farm. At the same time, one of the biggest challenges young, new, limited resource, and beginning farmers face is finding affordable farmland in New York. Prices for land are often driven out of reach for these farmers as they find themselves competing for land with real estate developers, non-farming landowners and established farmers—as well as new high value opportunities such as hemp and solar.

As senior farmers continue to retire over the next decade, the fate of their farms and the nearly 2 million acres of land associated with them, will be vulnerable to being lost to development as farm families grapple with the challenges of successfully transferring their land and businesses, and new farmers struggle to find and afford land in New York State. This is why programs like the Farmland Protection Program and Farmland for a New Generation-New York, funded in the FY19 and FY20 budgets to connect farmers who need land with available properties, are so important to the future of Agriculture in New York State.

Climate change also presents an incredible threat to farm viability and productivity, and efforts to mitigate climate change while supporting farm viability and resiliency to extreme weather will be critical in the coming years to ensure a strong future for agriculture in the state. At the same time, farmers and farmland can play a critical role in the fight against climate change, and we look forward to working with the State Legislature to continue to make agriculture a key piece of the state's climate change mitigation and adaptation policies in the coming years.

PROTECTING FARMLAND TO SUPPORT FARMS WHILE COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE

In 1996, the State of New York began to invest funds through the Farmland Protection Program to permanently protect viable working farms. This program's popularity and benefits cannot be overstated—it bolsters the state's rural economy, secures our local food supply, helps to mitigate climate change, aids the transition of farmland to the next generation, and provides capital for farm businesses to expand and adapt to new markets while permanently protecting this irreplaceable fertile soil for our next generation of farmers. Just this summer, the State of New York celebrated the milestone of 75,000 acres protected, and to date, the program has provided more than \$180 million in funding to purchase development rights on about 76,300 acres of farmland on 299 farms in New York State.ⁱⁱⁱ Starting in the FY2017 budget, the New York State Legislature and Governor Andrew Cuomo made an historically significant increase in

funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, critical to protecting our natural resources, and raised the funding level to \$300 million. That same year, the annual budget for the Farmland Protection Program was raised from \$15 to \$20 million. In FY2018, this funding level of \$20 million for the Farmland Protection Program was maintained, but in the last two year's enacted budgets, it was reduced to \$18 million.

When coupled with Smart Growth Planning, research has shown that permanent Farmland Protection can help mitigate climate change by lowering GHG emissions associated with transportation. In 2017, AFT released a report entitled, "Greener Fields: Combating Climate Change by Keeping Land in Farming in New York" which looks at greenhouse gas emissions from human activity on different types of land uses in New York. The report found that on average, human activity on one acre of agricultural land emits 66 times less greenhouse gases than human activity on an acre of developed land in New York. Similar research in the state of California spurred the California Air Resources Board to allocate over \$124 million since 2015 from their Carbon Market Proceeds to fund both smart growth planning and the purchase of permanent agricultural conservation easements to help implement these plans as a way to reduce GHG emissions from vehicular transportation. Based on their modelling, these investments into permanently protecting 90,000 acres of farmland will avoid over 49 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions from cars over the next 30 years. Similar opportunities, modeling and program should be explored and developed for New York State.

Since the inception of the Farmland Protection Program in 1996, there has been more interest among farmers in protecting farmland than funds available to do so. Between 1996 and 2015, \$689 million in applications were submitted for FPIG funds, with 72 percent or \$497 million being rejected by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets largely due to a lack of state funding.^{iv} That means funds officially requested vs. funds available was at a level of 3:1, and this number does not include total demand from New York farmers due to the cap on the number of applications an entity can submit. Regional examples of significant unmet demand in recent years includes:

- **Western NY:** The Western New York Land Conservancy serving Erie and Allegany counties currently has 30 inquiries for farmland protection encompassing over 4,600 acres and has received more than 60 additional requests for farmland protection assistance in the last 3 years. The western region has consistently submitted applications for the recent dairy program opportunities, at a rapid rate with little outreach—and all funds allocated to this region have been expended with more farmers interested in applying.
- **Hudson Valley:** Scenic Hudson works independently and with other regional land trusts in the Hudson Valley. Combined, they estimate expressed interest from more than 40 farms.
- **Mohawk Valley:** the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy gets 6-12 calls annually regarding conserving and/or finding farmland.
- **Upper Hudson Valley:** The Agricultural Stewardship Association, a land trust that conserves farmland in the Upper Hudson Valley, has received 35 pre-applications for the 2020 funding that will be released this spring with 24 in Washington county, and 11 in Rensselaer county. Saratoga PLAN currently has 18 farms expressing strong interest, and 20 others seriously

exploring the opportunity to protect their land. In Saratoga County, PLAN has seen steady growth in interest from farmland owners over the past few years, and consistent funding has made a strong impact on farmers within this county.

- **Finger Lakes:** The Finger Lakes Land Trust receives many inquiries directly from farmers interested in protecting their land. Additionally, counties in the area send farms to the land trust that are highly-ranked in their pre-application scoring. The Finger Lakes Land Trust is only able to apply on behalf of a small fraction of these farmers due to the application cap.
- **Central New York:** The New York Agricultural Land Trust (NYALT) pools and submits applications from Cayuga, Cortland, Onondaga, Seneca, and Madison counties. Between these counties, 46 farmers are currently interested in the Dairy and non-dairy transitions programs, and the upcoming FPIG RFP expected in the spring of 2020.

Over the past two years, the Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) released a record amount of funding to permanently protect farmland in New York which has only served to stimulate more interest and demand in this program that continues to contribute to climate mitigation while maintaining open space and preserving rural communities. In this year's Executive Budget Proposal, the Governor maintained funding for the EPF at \$300 million, but proposed a cut to the Farmland Protection Program to \$17 million—which is \$1 million less than last year's enacted appropriation, and \$13 million less than the program at its peak. The governor also proposed to allow the agencies to use EPF funding for staff and agency costs for administering this program.

The future of farming in New York rests on our ability to keep land in farming at a time when farmers are struggling financially. While AFT is encouraged by the governor's continued commitment to a \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund, AFT is concerned that the language enabling agencies to use EPF dollars for agency staff expenses, as well as a proposed \$1 million reduction in the state's farmland protection program, may accelerate farmland loss across the state. AFT and the Alliance for New York's Farmland encourages the legislature to restore funding to the Farmland Protection program, and work with the Governor to increase appropriations to \$20 million in FY21, with the goal of restoring this program's funding to \$30 million in future years, while also increasing the EPF appropriation to \$500 million. Additionally, while investing in staff and agency capacity to ensure the farmland protection funds are spent quickly is a critical priority, because of the high level of unmet demand for this program, AFT does not support using EPF funding for this purpose, and we urge the legislature to remove this language from the EPF in the enacted state budget.

STRENGTHENING FARMLAND PROTECTION BY PROTECTING FARMS MORE QUICKLY

In 2018 and 2019, the Department of Agriculture and Markets made an historic level of farmland protection funding available to New York farmers, but the success of this funding will hinge on the ability of the State and conservation organizations to work together to quickly deliver these grants to the farmers who need them most—particularly our dairy farmers. Great

strides have been made in recent years by the Department of Agriculture and Markets to reduce the time it takes to complete Farmland Protection projects from, in some cases, 6 years down to a current reported average of 21 months from the contract date. But due to retirements and the ongoing difficulty of hiring new staff at the agency there is now only one full time staff member working to complete projects—less than in recent years. With \$65 million in current encumbrances spread over 81 projects, \$44 million more in awards expected within the next few months, and a new Round of FPIG funding expected to be released this spring, the State of New York is making admirable commitments to protect more farmland. However, with only one full time staff member working to complete farmland protection projects at the Department of Agriculture and Markets, we cannot possibly continue to complete these complicated projects and protect farmland within the time frame our farmers—in particularly our dairy farmers—need.

One decade ago, the State of New York was facing a similar problem. Tens of millions of dollars in commitments had been made to farm families to protect their farmland—and then the recession hit. The State had no cash to pay farmers the money that they had promised them, and farms, including Hemlock Hill—one of the last farms left in Westchester county—faced foreclosure due to a combination of bad luck and a lack of planning. While we have made great strides since then, we must continue to learn from the mistakes of past years and develop a plan now to avoid a similar crisis.

The Alliance for New York's Farmland has proposed a potential solution that will help the State of New York ensure farmland is protected more quickly. Modeled after the Commonwealth of Virginia's farmland protection program, the State of New York would contract with experienced local partners to enable them to complete projects more efficiently. Under this model, the State will continue to make award decisions, but local partners will be empowered to make decisions on project details more swiftly. Compared to the current system, where department staff are intimately involved with numerous details and decisions made throughout project completion for each individual project, this contracting solution would remove the burden on Department staff time—which right now is considerable given the growing number of complicated projects one person is responsible for completing. Department staff will be available for questions should they arise but will chiefly only be responsible for reviewing applications, awarding projects, and then reviewing the final project to ensure it meets the terms of the contract before state funds are dispersed. This approach will ensure that the State of New York and the taxpayer's interests are still protected, and farmland protection projects are completed to a high level of excellence and efficiency.

Whether this or another plan is adopted, one thing is very clear, with all of the new projects being awarded, some type of plan is necessary. We cannot continue in the same way we have been and expect to be successful, we must learn from past mistakes and ensure that project completion and spending keeps pace with our aspirations and the commitments we have made to farm families. We hope that the legislature will be diligent in engaging with

Commissioner Ball and the Department of Agriculture and Markets—as well as the land trusts and local governments that are working on bringing these projects towards completion—ensuring that there is a clear plan so that the State of New York meets its responsibility to get these funds into the hands of farmers that need them in a timely fashion.

CLARIFYING STATE LAW TO ENSURE MUNICIPALITIES CAN PROTECT WORKING FARMS

In September 2016, State Supreme Court Justice Thomas Whelan issued a decision that called into question the authority of municipalities to protect working farmland in Suffolk County—the site of the first farmland protection program in the country. This decision asserted that farmers who have protected their land were not allowed to build structures such as barns, greenhouses, and deer fences; all of which are essential to the success of these farm businesses and were rights retained when they protected their farms. This decision has been reversed and settled by the appellate court, but the two-year protracted legal battle revealed legal vulnerabilities to municipal Farmland Protection programs in the Hudson Valley and in Central and Western New York that are based on General Municipal Law section 247. The Alliance for New York's Farmland encourages the State Legislature to address this issue by clarifying the authority of municipalities in New York to protect working farms under General Municipal Law §247, not just undeveloped open space.

FARMLAND FOR A NEW GENERATION OF FARMERS

As stated above, our farmers are aging and as a result nearly 2 million acres of farmland will become vulnerable to development as it changes hands over the next decade. Funding offered by the state Farmland Protection Implementation Grants Program makes a significant contribution to helping new farmers access farmland. These funds can facilitate the retirement of established farmers, enabling them to transfer their more affordable protected farms to the next generation without sacrificing their retirement funds. This funding also gives new farmers the opportunity to purchase farmland that has been made affordable by being placed under agricultural conservation easement—especially when there is a pre-emptive purchase right attached.

In addition, beginning farmers often need active support to clarify their personal and business goals, identify and evaluate farms, and evaluate lease or purchase options, and guidance to find programs that can help them access land. Conversely, senior farmers and their families need support developing succession and retirement plans that enable their land to continue in farming. In 2014, AFT coordinated the development of the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network (HVFN), a partnership of 16 organizations that offer a farmland finder website, trainings and one-on-one assistance for farmers and landowners. Modelled off of this successful program, the State of New York invested \$400,000 as part of each the FY19 and FY20 budgets to create

and sustain the statewide Farmland for a New Generation-NY (FNG-NY) program, one of the most progressive solutions in the nation to help new and existing farmers find land, assist landowners in making their land available for farming, and to support retiring farmers in successfully transferring their farms to the next generation. This program, includes two components which have been funded each year at \$200,000 each:

- 1) A Statewide Resource Center coordinated by AFT to offer a statewide farmland finder website and first point of contact for support for farmers searching for land and for landowners with available land across New York; and
- 2) A network of regional navigators within Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, land trusts, and other organizations across New York to provide one on one regional support for farmers in identifying, evaluating and securing access to farmland, to senior farmers in planning to transfer their farm to the next generation, and to landowners to make their land available for farming.

On October 22nd, 2018 AFT launched the Farmland for a New Generation-NY Statewide Resource Center and land-linking website at nyfarmlandfinder.org. Later that year, AFT requested applications from organizations to become regional navigators, and received nearly \$385,000 in funding requests from 20 organizations across New York. In February 2019, AFT awarded \$170,000 in available funding to 18 regional navigators. Throughout the course of 2019, American Farmland Trust has provided active support to Regional Navigators including offering professional development trainings, networking opportunities, and guidance and resources in response to farmer and landowner needs to continue to grow their ability to work together and meet needs out in the field. In November 2019, AFT continued to build and strengthen this support network by convening the second On Solid Ground Forum. This forum aimed to enrich the abilities of professionals who are working in this field by bringing together farmers and professionals to network and plan how to more successfully engage and create new opportunities for farmers and landowners in New York.

Additionally during the fall, AFT opened up the second round of applications for regional navigators. In response, 27 organizations—an increase in seven over last year—applied to become regional navigators. Applications for funding to support their work will be awarded from the FY20 state budget within the next month. Because the number of navigators grew, and the level of funding available has remained constant, in order to ensure that funds were spread across organizations AFT reduced this year's application cap to \$15,000 per navigator down from \$25,000 in year one. AFT received a total of nearly \$300,000 in funding requests from regional navigators—far less than their need, but still more than available to award.

American Farmland Trust, and Farmland for a New Generation regional navigators have accomplished great things within just one year of the program's existence. Notably:

- 13,600+ users have visited the landlink site to view listings, and find resources and events

- 1,823 farmers, landowners, and others have received training and support through events
- 1226 landowners and land seekers have received one-on-one guidance from RNs
- 322 landowners and land seekers have received one on one guidance from AFT staff
- 263 farmland seekers have posted profiles
- 195 farmland owners have listed properties
- 36 matches spanning 866 acres have been reported, with more coming in every month

Assisting farmers in finding land, or helping senior farmers plan for retirement and succession is work that takes time. While 36 matches is an admirable achievement in year one of a new land linking program, it is critical to remember that the investments of time that regional navigators are making will continue to pay off and increase match numbers in future years as the farmland access and transition support network and relationships are built and strengthened.

Throughout the first full year of the program, it became clear that the need for this type of work across New York is very high—and that it is time intensive. In order to continue our ability to provide these essential services to bring a new generation of farmers onto the land in New York, we ask that the State of New York fund Farmland for a New Generation New York in the FY2021 budget at \$600,000. (see attached proposal)

Specifically, we are requesting \$200,000 to maintain the Farmland for a New Generation Resource Center, enabling AFT to maintain the website, dedicate resource center staff time as a first point of contact for senior and beginning farmers, and build critical staff capacity to support intra-region coordination and strengthen the program's impact in Central and Western New York. Additionally, the Alliance is requesting an increase to \$400,000 for Regional Navigators to continue their ability to dedicate staff time to the one-on-one work that farmers and landowners need most. This funding increase will enable organization across the state to meet the growing demand from farmers and landowners, ensuring they can provide one-on-one support and assistance necessary to keep land in farming as it changes hands over the course of the next decade.

FARM TO SCHOOL: TAKING ACTION TO REALIZE THE POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONIZE SCHOOL FOOD STATEWIDE

Five years ago, AFT launched a collaborative initiative called "Farm to Institution New York State" (FINYS) that seeks to strengthen the economic security of farmers and health of New Yorkers by empowering institutions to spend at least 25% of their food dollars on food grown in New York. FINYS does this in a number of ways, including research, training, and policy advocacy. In 2017, AFT began organizing and leading the New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition (NYGFFNYK), a coalition of school, food, farm, economic development, public

health, environmental, and anti-hunger organizations advocating for support to build Farm to School in New York State.

Farm to school programs create new market opportunities for farmers who are currently facing significant economic challenges. Beyond the economics, farm to school programs are an important strategy to improve nutrition for school-age children as about half of a students' daily calories come from school meals. In addition, these programs provide access to farm fresh food to those that need it most – on average 46% of students statewide come from families that face financial challenges.^v

In both the FY19 and FY20 state budgets the Governor and State Legislature allocated \$1.5 million for the Farm to School grants program, split equally between the agriculture and education budgets, and \$10 million in the education budget to create a nation leading incentive program which quadruples the current per meal reimbursement from \$0.059 cents to 25 cents for schools who purchase 30% of lunch meal ingredients from New York farmers. The NYGFFNYK coalition strongly supports both of these initiatives as complimentary programs that will help schools purchase and serve more New York Grown food to our students to the benefits of our farms, rural communities, and children.

The New York State Farm to School Incentive program leads the nation as the most generous incentive to encourage purchasing of local food by schools—a win-win-win for farms, kids, and local communities. While many schools saw 30% as a challenge to achieve, 48 SFAs applied to the New York State Education Department for the extra reimbursement claiming they reached 30% within just one year. While ultimately, only seven schools qualified, this list included Buffalo Public Schools the second largest district in the state which spent over \$2.6 million on food from New York farms to successfully meet 30% spending and qualify for the extra reimbursement.

Beginning in June 2019, AFT conducted research evaluating the program's impact and whether it was successfully stimulating new purchases from New York farms. **This research revealed that, with the right support, 72% of schools expect to reach 30% by 2024, increasing their purchases of food from New York farms threefold to nearly \$150 million, which would generate over \$210 million in economic impact while costing the state less than half that amount over the course of the next five years.** However, achieving this incredible potential will require New York to act now to build a strong support system for Farm to School across the state.²

CHALLENGES SCHOOLS FACE IN BUYING NEW YORK GROWN AND RAISED FOOD

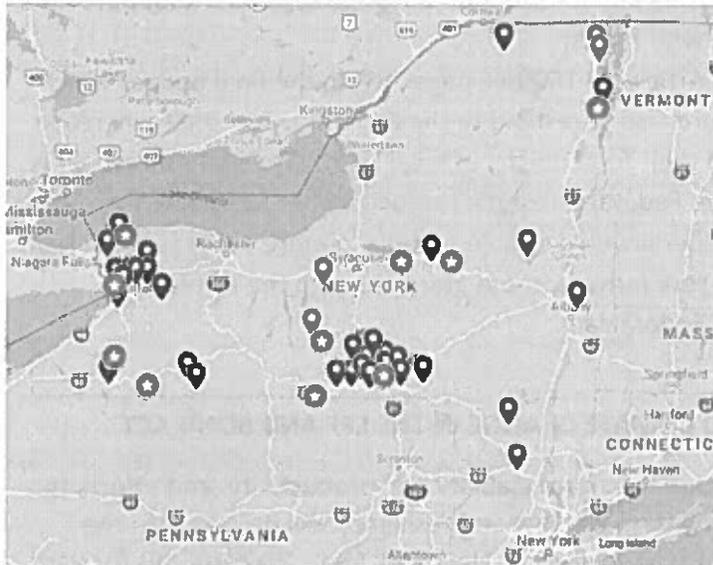
According to AFT's research, schools still face real barriers when attempting to buy more New York grown food and reach 30%, and more must be done to help them in order to unlock the

² The report detailing this research, findings, and recommendations can be found at www.farmland.org/growingopportunity.

incredible economic and public health potential of this program. In the survey and during follow-up interviews, Food Service Directors reported not having enough staff time to dedicate to Farm to School, and difficulty navigating complicated procurement regulations that favor “least cost” options as their main barriers to buying more local food. Regarding participating in the incentive program specifically, many schools also reported that there was a lack of clarity around program guidelines and requirements.

Another finding of the research was that focusing this program on lunch only created challenges for Food Service Directors to participate. Since high-need schools are required to serve more breakfast, afterschool meals, and summer meals, when this program was created it was limited to lunch in order to keep an even playing field of access for all schools. However, this choice created unintended administrative barriers to participation, and a limitation on the program’s impact on the farm economy. Both for Food Service Directors that don’t have time to commit to Farm to School and for those that anticipated achieved 30% in year one, separating lunch purchases was reportedly difficult as it is not naturally done and takes time to accomplish. In addition, throughout the research, there was evidence of other unintended impacts of focusing only on lunch, including “creative accounting.” Though net impacts on the farm economy are likely to be positive, some Food Service Directors reported shifting New York grown items already purchased for other meals to lunch—which could mean there will be schools that meet 30% without increasing the amount they purchase from New York farms.

Finally, this research sought to understand what support schools need to increase their spending on food from New York farms. Due to the breadth of work they are responsible for,



Map of Farm to School Coordinators (orange) and schools that applied for the 30% Initiative in year one (green)

and corresponding time limitations Food Service Directors face—outside support became critical to success. When looking at the geographic overlap of SFAs that applied for the 30% initiative in year one, and the location of Farm to School coordinators across the state, it becomes clear that these coordinators, often located within schools, Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, BOCES, or at non-profit organizations, are essential to establish successful Farm to School programs at schools across the state.

THE RIGHT SUPPORT TO HELP MORE SCHOOL PURCHASE NEW YORK GROWN FOOD

AFT and the NYGFFNYK coalition see the opportunity to continue the incentive program, seek expansion to other meals in the future, make modest increased investments in the farm to school grants program, and update procurement laws in the FY21 state budget to begin to unlock the full potential of the incentive program. The Farm to School grants program has proven necessary to enable schools to start and maintain successful farm to school programs, and increase procurement of New York grown and raised foods. Both in 2018 and 2019, NYSDAM received \$3 million in requests to fund projects that will help schools buy more New York grown food—double \$1.5 million in funding available each year.

In his FY21 Budget proposal, Governor Cuomo proposed maintaining the incentive program for lunch at \$10 million and proposed \$1.5 million for the Farm to School Grants Program. This coalition encourages the legislature and the Governor to build on these proposals in the FY21 Enacted State Budget by:

- Appropriating \$10 million to continue to reimburse 25 cents per lunch to K-12 schools that spend at least 30% of their lunch budget on food from New York farmers, growers, producers, and processors;
- Exploring the opportunity to expand to other school meals in the future;
- Allocating \$3 million for the Farm to School Grants program split between agriculture and education, so long as this does not compromise funding for other agricultural programs, to meet current demand and support projects that will help schools purchase, prepare and promote New York grown foods to New York kids;
- Creating a statewide network of regional farm to school coordinators, centrally coordinated to facilitate the sharing of best practices and information between regions, to support food service directors and connect them with farms;
- Including language proposed in the Article VII TED bill, page 262, in the final budget which would harmonize the state Small Purchase Threshold to the Federal Threshold to increase the flexibility schools have to spend their food dollars at local farms. The state threshold is currently effectively \$20,000 and the Federal threshold is much higher \$250,000. Increasing this state threshold to match the Federal would enable schools to more easily spend larger amounts of money directly at New York farms without going through the formal procurement process mandated by Federal law.

ROLES FOR FARMS IN RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE EPF AND BOND ACT

Climate change presents an incredible threat to farm viability and productivity, and efforts to mitigate climate change while supporting farm viability and resiliency will be critical in the coming years to ensure a strong future for agriculture in New York State. To carry this forward, the governor proposed to maintain the state's investment in the Climate Resilient Farming Grants program at \$4.5 million in the EPF to help farmers adopt practices that sequester carbon, improve water efficiency, and reduce GHG emissions while supporting farm viability. Along with making a strong investment into Smart Growth planning and investing \$20 million

into permanent Farmland Protection, AFT strongly support this proposals as a way to continue to help farmers play an important role in mitigating climate change, and wishes to see them included in the FY2021 enacted State Budget.

The governor's proposed budget also includes a landmark plan for a \$3 billion environmental bond act, which, if passed by voters in November, would invest in capital projects that help combat and reduce the impacts of extreme weather caused by climate change. While the types of projects detailed for funding in the environmental bond act proposal are important to our ability to address the climate crisis, equally important are the environmental services our farmers provide as stewards of the land, which are not yet fully reflected in the proposal. Investments into helping farmers adopt soil health practices will protect surrounding water quality while also potentially reducing flooding—and the impacts of extreme weather on farm yields.

Farmers play a central role in combating and mitigating the impacts of climate change and opportunities to support them in taking these actions should be explored for inclusion in the bond act proposal, as well as elsewhere in the state budget. As the environmental bond act progresses, we see a potential opportunity to work with the governor and state Legislature to ensure farmers are fully recognized in the final proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information. I welcome any questions you might have, and look forward to continuing the conversation about these proposals and more in the months ahead.

ⁱ Lopez, Rigoberto, Nataliya Plesha, Benjamin Campbell, and Chris Laughton. *Northeast Economic Engine: Agriculture, Forest Products, and Commercial Fishing*. Farm Credit East, 2015. The report uses data from 2012.

ⁱⁱ A Profile of Agriculture in New York State; Office of the New York State Comptroller, August 2019. <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/economic/agriculture-report-2019.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. <https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/ap/agsservices/farmprotect.html>.

^{iv} "NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Farmland Protection Program History." Unpublished raw data, September 2015.

^v New York State Department of Education (NYSED). (2018). *NY State – Student and educator report (2017-18)*. Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/studenteducator.php>

