



NOFA-NY Testimony for the 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing: Agriculture & Markets/Parks & Recreation

January 27, 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to share the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York's (NOFA-NY) priorities for the New York State fiscal year 2026-27 proposed budget.

Founded in 1983, NOFA-NY is the leading organization advocating for the growth of organic regenerative agriculture across New York State. We offer farmer-to-farmer education and technical support to farmers statewide, help connect consumers with local, organic products, and advocate for just and resilient food and farming systems. As a USDA-accredited organic certification body, NOFA-NY proudly certifies over 1,000 of New York's nearly 2,000 organic farms and businesses. Given NY's strong livestock industry, we are a leading certifier for organic livestock operations nationally.

New York State is a national leader in the organic agriculture sector, as confirmed by the most recent USDA Organic Census (2021). We're ranked 3rd in the nation for the number of organic farms and lead the country in the acreage of organic field crops, including hay, corn, and soy. In fact, no state surpasses New York when it comes to organic livestock, poultry farms, and dairy operations. As the organic industry experiences remarkable growth across the U.S. — especially in the Northeast — New York stands at the forefront, ready to expand its role as a national leader in the industry.

For the past several years of state funding contracts, NOFA-NY has been able to launch efforts to expand access to organic certification and support for underserved farmers. We have increased our capacity to offer expert assistance on organic farming practices and certification, now with more accessible virtual support options. Our streamlined online certification portal, developed with the help of state funds, helps farmers save time and reduce paperwork. We thank the state legislature for supporting these vital initiatives and request continued support this year for our virtual farmer support services and further developing our ability to resource underserved farmers.

This year, NOFA-NY is requesting a total of \$225,000 including:

- **\$100,000 to expand capacity to meet increasing demand for technical assistance support services.** As a core component of NOFA-NY's work, this provides assistance to

both those who are already certified organic as well as those who are using organic practices and may be transitioning to be certified. NOFA-NY provides live technical support to farmers through our farmer helpline (call-in line) and our open office hours *Farmer's Forum* on zoom. Due in large part to the support of the NYS budget, we fielded 350+ calls in 2024/25, a 20 percent increase from the 2023-24 period. Additionally, we held 36 Farmer's Forums in 2024/2025.

One clear example of how helpline calls turn into real action at NOFA-NY came this fall, when we saw a surge in calls from farmers struggling with drought. The drought in the Northeast significantly affected the way that New York's organic livestock farmers have been able to meet organic certification grazing requirements, and reduced their access to organic feed, which is in dangerously short supply due to decreased yields, inflation of trucking costs, as well as tariffs with Canada. NOFA-NY staff is proactively advocating on behalf of these dairy farms on both the state and federal levels, as well as with organic milk buyers.

This year, our plan for virtual farmer support includes:

- Expansion of Helpline outreach by collaborating with other organic helplines (in other Northeast states) in identifying specific regional organic needs
 - Funding technology upgrades to integrate helpline data into our databases, which would assist in identifying bigger issues that could use more detailed technical assistance for more farmers.
 - Expanding current staff capacity to meet the growing demand for our support services.
 - Ensuring ongoing development and maintenance of the Clover Portal.
 - Purchasing new hardware for phone and virtual meeting capabilities.
 - Purchasing subscriptions to translation services (specifically Spanish) which will make our Technical Assistance information more accessible
- **\$90,000 to increase the reach of USDA funding for NOFA-NY events** which spreads information about organic certification as well as about the value of organic practices and their positive effects on the environment. To complement and increase the reach of the USDA funding, this project will support the following activities:
 - Institutionalizing the **Mentorship Program** that has been piloted for the past 2 years. Farmers have told us that they find it exceptionally useful to be partnered (1:1) with an existing organic farmer in their scope to assist in activities such as completing certification, trying new/innovative solutions, and implementing climate smart practices.
 - **Technical assistance and training events** that are free and open to all farmers, aimed at fostering collaboration and information sharing among participants. NOFA-NY seeks to offset costs to keep programming free for NY farmers.

- Support for NOFA-NY's **45th Annual Winter Conference**, a large event held every winter, featuring a diverse range of technical sessions, and attracting participants from all over the state.
- **\$35,000 to expand Equity and Accessibility to our programs for underserved farmers.**
 - Continue to offer scholarships and affinity spaces for black, Indigenous, and farmers of color at events,
 - Integrate language interpretation and translation into our website and events, and begin translating certification materials into Spanish
 - In addition, we will continue our recent work with other organizations in encouraging and facilitating the workforce development training for multi-lingual organic inspectors who go on the farm each year. Farmers of color and Spanish-speaking farmers have specifically noted the importance of inspectors who look and sound like them.

2025 Challenges in Federal Funding

Similar to challenges faced by New York State and other state-wide non-profit organizations, both NOFA-NY and its individual farmers were significantly affected by the changing landscape of federal funding in 2025. In the spring, 2 major federal grants of ours were “frozen”, forcing us to implement staff lay-offs. While our Climate Smart funds were entirely withdrawn, we have been able to recover part of our USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) for 2026. With less field staff for climate-smart work, we have increased our virtual outreach, as noted above.

Farmers everywhere were hit with significantly reduced assistance from USDA agencies (both NRCS and FSA offices reduced staff), and organic farmers were denied their organic certification cost share reimbursements. Through significant national advocacy (by NOFA-NY and partners) it appears that funds have now been released to USDA for this program, with the possibility that farmers will receive their reimbursements later this year. This important program has existed for organic farmers since the USDA program began in 2002 and is necessary for keeping certification costs affordable for all farmers.

As we begin 2026, NOFA-NY has adjusted to challenges, and looks for additional ways to support our farmers as they face both funding and climate issues going forward.

NY Soil Health and Climate Resiliency

Soil health is foundational to organic production as well as being key to New York's climate goals. Increased investment in soil health initiatives is vital for strengthening food security, reducing emissions, and making our farmland more resilient to the extreme weather driven by climate change. Farmers across the state are embracing practices that improve soil health.

The Climate Resilient Farming Program and New York’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts, both funded through the Environmental Protection Fund, assist farmers in adopting climate-friendly practices like cover cropping and reduced tillage. These efforts are critical to transitioning our agriculture and food systems to meet the goals set by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

The NYS Climate Resilient Farming Program is consistently oversubscribed. In the most recent round of funding (Round 9), although an increased amount, \$24 million, was available through the 2025 budget, 50 - 60% of requests still went unfunded. As administrators of the Climate Resilient Farming Program and other conservation efforts, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) also need increased funding to meet growing demand and to recruit and retain staff.

We note with great appreciation that when federal funding for Climate Smart agriculture was eliminated, NYS AGM shifted funds from other areas to cover Climate Resilient Farming grants.

Climate Change Impacts NY Organic Dairy in 2025

Drought conditions in 2025 severely reduced organic pasture and hay production throughout the Northeast. As a result, many organic dairies in New York were forced to use winter feed reserves during the growing season and are now facing extreme feed shortages. With no organic forage available regionally, farms are sourcing hay and forage from the Midwest, incurring transportation costs that often more than double the price of feed. These costs are placing unsustainable financial pressure on farms that already operate on thin margins.

Certified Organic and grass-fed dairies must adhere to strict production standards and cannot substitute nonorganic feed, making them uniquely vulnerable to drought-related supply disruptions and price spikes. This crisis threatens animal welfare, farm viability, and a sector that is critically important to New York’s agricultural economy. New York is home to more organic dairy farms than any other state and ranks third nationally in organic milk production.

While federal disaster assistance programs may offer some relief, they are not currently structured to respond quickly or fully to the scale of this emergency for organic dairy producers. State leadership is essential to help bridge these gaps and ensure that New York farmers can access timely support.

While the Governor’s budget proposes flat funding for these programs, we urge the legislature to **increase funding for the Climate Resilient Farming Program and Soil and Water Conservation Districts as part of an increase in the Environmental Protection Fund to \$500 million.**

As members of the NY Renews Coalition, NOFA-NY also urges the legislature to **invest in the Climate Action Fund** and ensure that Cap-Trade and Invest proceeds are directed to increased affordability for households and to resource community-led climate justice efforts throughout NY, including in rural farming communities.

Additional budget measures supported by NOFA-NY

As a member of several coalitions and partnerships, NOFA-NY also urges the legislature to advance the following measures in the FY26-27 budget:

- Increase the EPF to \$500 m, including \$25 million for Farmland Protection in the Environmental Protection Fund, \$19.1 m for Climate Resilient Farming Program, and \$18.65 m for Soil & Water Conservation Districts.
- Full funding at \$700,00 for Farmland For a New Generation in Aid to Localities (Alliance for New York's Farmland) (**not included in Governor's budget**).
- \$500,000 for Black Farmers United - NYS AGM appropriations to continue meeting the needs of small-scale farmers across the state, while also helping to fill critical gaps resulting from loss of federal funding.
- At least \$10 million for an expanded Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive program and maintaining at least \$1.5 million for the Farm to School Grants program (New York Grown Food for New York Kids) .
- While we support the Continued baseline funding for the existing 30% NY reimbursement program, and sustained funding for the NYS Farm-to-School Grants program, we also believe that modernization and updates to the 30% Initiative which have been recommended by *NY Grown Food for NY Kids Coalition* but not funded in the Governor's budget are necessary improvements that would greatly increase participation in these programs.
- Include a state-funded food benefit for households with children that are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status (SNAP4All Coalition) .
- Maintain Governor Hochul's historic commitment to covering the cost of all school meals for NY students .

PFAS legislation

NOFA-NY would like to call attention to the issue of PFAS in agriculture and urge support for the Moratorium on the Land Application of Sewage Sludge Bill [S5759C/A6192D]. We note the significant negative effect of biosolids on agricultural lands and businesses as seen in states like Maine, and take that as a warning for pro-active attention to the lands of New York. It is

necessary that we take action now, including funding in NYS AGM for both testing and farmer relief in order to protect our farmland, farmers, and farm businesses.

Thank you again for your time and dedication in supporting New York's farming future.



Organic Farming in New York

New York continues to be a leading state in organic production.

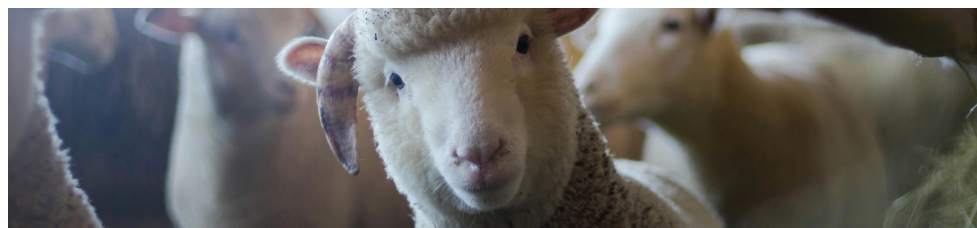


330,000+
acres of organic farmland
(second only to CA).

1,900+
total organic operations
(third in the nation).*

\$325M+
in annual farmgate sales
(sixth in the nation).
Over half of the sales are from meat, eggs, and dairy, over a third are from organic crops, and the rest are from livestock sales.

Organic in New York is growing! Nearly 40% of organic farmers are planning to increase production.



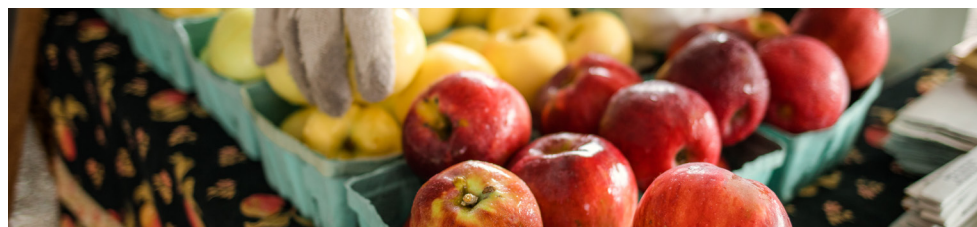
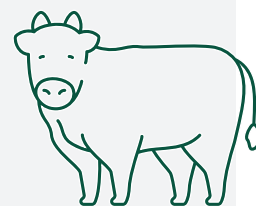
Organic Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops

New York ranks #1 in the nation for:

- greatest number of farms raising organic cattle
- greatest number of organic sheep
- greatest acreage of organic field crops (corn and soy)
- greatest acreage of organic hay (260,000 acres)
- greatest number of organic dairy operations

New York ranks #3 in the nation for:

- amount of organic milk produced and sold



Organic Specialty Crops

New York is also a top producer of specialty crops, many of which are grown on small diversified operations.

New York ranks #1 in the nation for:

- greatest number of organic mushroom farms

New York ranks #2 in the nation for:

- number of organic maple syrup operations, taps, and sales
- number of organic flower farms

New York ranks #3 in the nation for:

- number of organic apple orchards
- number of organic vegetable farms (top crops include: squash, sweet corn, snap beans, and lettuce)

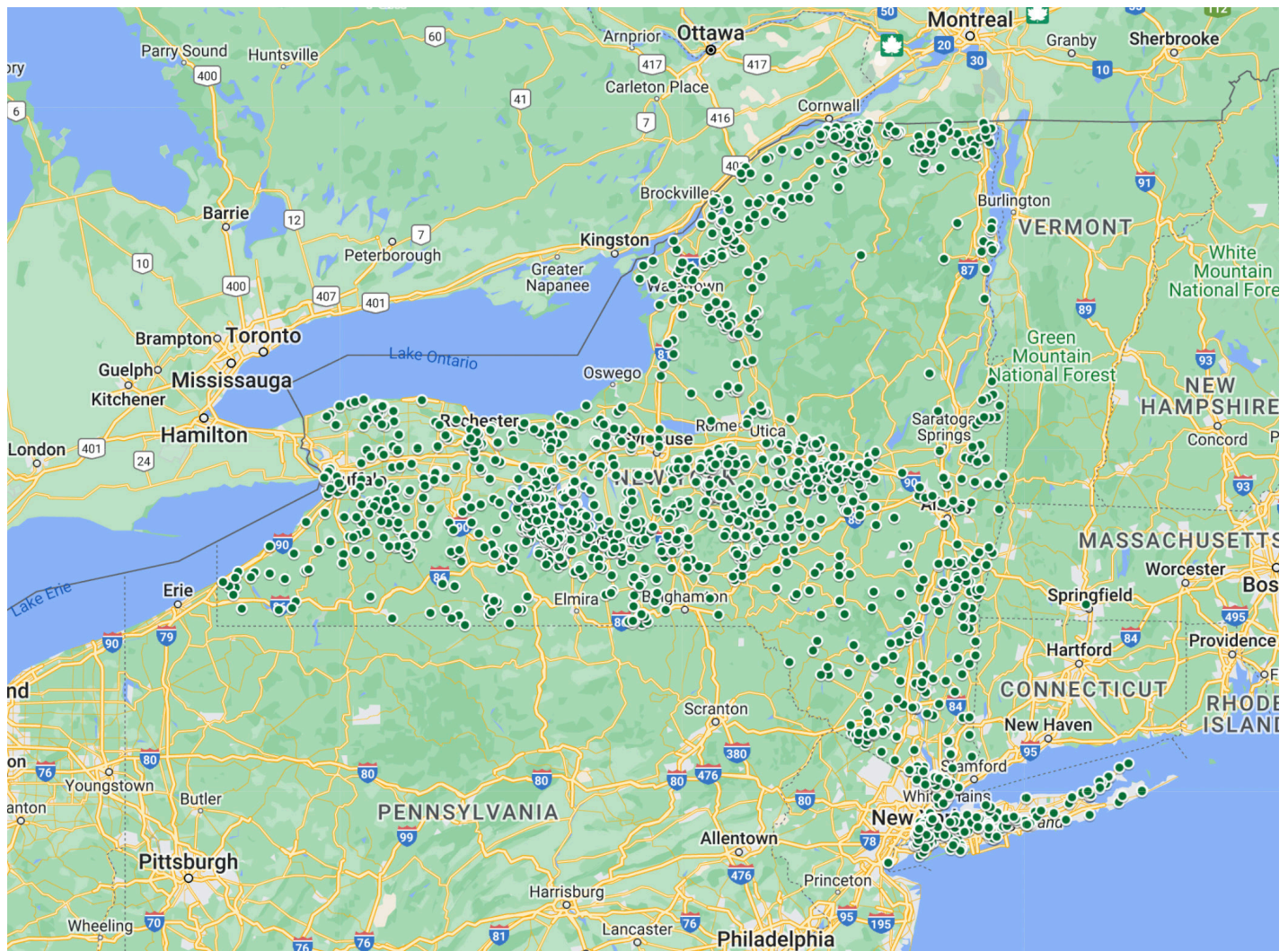
New York ranks #4 in the nation for:

- number of organic fruit farms (top crops include: blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries)



*The USDA organic integrity database shows over 1,900 total organic operations as of March 2023, the 2021 Organic Survey includes 1,407 farms. The Organic Survey farm count only includes farms with 2021 organic farm production. Handling only operations, certified operations without 2021 certified organic production, and operations with surrendered or revoked certification in 2021 are excluded from the farm count.

Certified Organic Operations in New York



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About NOFA-NY

NOFA-NY is an organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working together to create a sustainable regional food system that's ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable. Through demonstration and education, we promote land stewardship, organic food production, and local marketing. We bring consumer and farmer together to make high-quality food available to all people.

NOFA-NY Provides:

- USDA accredited organic certification to more than half of the organic farms and businesses in New York State
- Educational programming, technical assistance, and mentorship programs to farmers across New York State
- Tools to connect consumers with local and organic products
- Opportunities to advocate for thriving, sustainable, local, and organic food and farming systems

