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STATE OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & MARKETS
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Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Richard A. Ball
Acting Commissioner

**Testimony by
James B. Bays
First Deputy Commissioner
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Before the New York State Legislative Fiscal Committees**

Good morning Chairman DeFrancisco, Chairman Farrell, Senator Ritchie, Assemblyman Magee, and other members of the state legislature.

My name is James Bays and I serve as First Deputy Commissioner at the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. On behalf of Governor Cuomo and our new Acting Commissioner Richard Ball, I'm pleased to be with you today. It is an exciting time to be working in New York agriculture, in large part because this Administration understands agriculture's importance to New York's economy, especially in upstate.

The 2014-15 all funds Budget proposed by the Governor for the Department of Agriculture and Markets is \$163.6 million. This funding allows us to fully maintain our wide ranging responsibilities and continues strong support for a variety of programs important to New York agriculture.

The Executive Budget also funds the Taste NY initiative, a joint venture between Ag and Markets and Empire State Development. This program fuses the state's agriculture sector with tourism to highlight the great variety of wine, beer, spirits and food products grown and produced here in New York.

Taste NY markets New York State products through specialized events, as well as retail locations throughout the state, including stores in high-traffic rest areas, train stations and airports across New York. We already have stores at JFK Airport, LaGuardia, the New Baltimore and Chittenango service areas, and more will be coming in the weeks and months ahead. Last year, Taste NY participated in more than 15 events to promote agricultural producers, including the Great New York State Fair in Syracuse, the PGA Championship in Rochester, the Saratoga Race Course, the Manhattan Cocktail Classic, Hudson Valley Food and Wine Fest, Farm Aid, Cider Week, and the NYC Wine & Food Festival.

We've exposed hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people already, to the best food and beverage products our state has to offer. In the process we've increase tourism and also awareness of the Empire State of Agriculture. I should also note that Taste NY complements our existing branding program, known by over 3,000 businesses across the state as the Pride of New York. Pride companies participate in Taste events, their products are sold at Taste stores, and the program continues to grow.

The Executive Budget continues to support the FreshConnect farmers' markets, which are helping to feed underserved and undernourished communities across the state. The Governor launched this program in 2011, and last year the state supported 24 projects. The FreshConnect program also helps to maximize consumers' purchasing power allowing SNAP eligible consumers to receive a \$2 incentive to purchase locally grown foods for every \$5 spent at a FreshConnect market.

The Executive Budget continues the Department's work with DEC to protect the state's farmland, combat invasive species, control pollution and conserve our water and soil. The Executive Budget recognizes that the Great New York State Fair is an economic driver in New York and especially in Central New York. The Department did a great job last year in bringing the Fair back to its agricultural roots and we plan to continue this in 2014. There are already plans to expand our agricultural presence at the fair by making enhancements to the barns, and build upon the success of last year's highly successful "Taste NY at the Fair" initiative.

Bridging the gap between upstate agricultural producers and downstate consumers remains a challenge that the Department is poised to overcome. New York is home to the city with the largest appetite in the world, and we need to make it easier for our producers to tap into this market. The Governor's new Upstate-Downstate Food-to-Table Agriculture Summit will focus on linking our Upstate agriculture industry and downstate consumers and markets in order to create a self-sustaining agricultural-commercial food system for this state.

The Summit will identify strategies that will:

- Maximize procurement of local food and beverage products by public schools and government agencies;
- Increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved communities and address hunger; and
- Upgrade and streamline the distribution of fresh and processed food products and beverages around the state.

To ensure that New York retains its leadership position in dairy production, \$21 million has been made available to help dairy farmers produce renewable energy through anaerobic digesters and improve their business operations through the Dairy Acceleration Program, which is jointly administered by Ag and Markets and DEC. Due to the Department's efforts to identify new growth opportunities in the yogurt industry--where New York already leads the nation--New York is poised to expand its share in this critical market area. To further continue our support for growing industries, Governor Cuomo will host a second round of agricultural industry summits – one for our yogurt industry and another for farm-based beverage industry, to identify additional growth opportunities. As large as these sectors are, they still haven't reached their ceilings, which means more jobs and more opportunity for economic development upstate lies ahead.

Today, New York's 36,000 farms contribute more than \$5.3 billion in direct sales to the state economy. We are a diverse producer of commodities ranging from cabbage and apples to milk and eggs. Just last year, over 600,000 cows produced more than 13.1 billion pounds of milk, and nearly 1,500 vineyards and 350 wineries produced 180 million bottles of wine. We are a top producer of agricultural products in the country – maple, dairy, farm-based beverages, apples, you name it. And the best part is that we still have more room for growth and our potential has never been higher.

In conclusion, the Department recognizes and appreciates its partnership with the legislature. I am confident that New York's farms will continue to grow, creating more jobs and making our state's homegrown products known across the globe.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you and I am pleased to take any questions you may have.