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*New York Farm Bureau Testimony for Legislative Commission on Rural Resources Public Hearing:
to examine the effectiveness of current flooding emergency mitigation efforts, and to discuss
the need for future assistance due to increase in extreme weather events*

Thank you, my name is Elizabeth Wolters and I am the Deputy Director of Public Policy at NYFB—the state’s largest general agricultural advocacy organization.

Farmers are on the frontlines of adverse weather, not just the big storms that make national headlines like, Irene, Lee and Sandy, but smaller or localized events that are happening with increased frequency—like those we have seen in the Mohawk River and along the coast of Lake Ontario.

Unfortunately, many of the federal disaster assistance programs are made for those events that make national headlines and are not designed for these other events that we are seeing. Often times, even when a farm is in a County with an Emergency Declaration, the individual farm cannot prove the crop losses necessary to qualify for assistance—or they may have not exhausted their commercial credit lines—as required by some programs.

Furthermore, although crop losses are concerning, it is other impacts that can delay planting, cause damage to structures, equipment, impact pasture quality and access, bacterial and pathogen contamination, etc. Rain events may not even have the typical characteristics of a “flooding event” and have these more subtle impacts—like delaying field preparation or planting— saturated fields can reduce yields and even kill plants that have already germinated.

So, what can we do? And what does work? Communications –There has been better communication between local and state agencies during these events— this needs to continue. Resources are needed for programs like the New York Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN). EDEN provides not only education on preparedness, response and recovery but they have also help with the coordination of response to ensure that farmers have access to a forum for the most up to date and timely information and the ability to communicate.

Timely declarations, and decisions. Providing the authority through disaster declarations to ease or expedite some of the permitting requirements to ensure swift response.