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Testimony for the Joint Senate and Assembly Public Hearing on Rural Broadband

Presented by Renée St. Jacques, New York Farm Bureau Assistant Director of Public Policy
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Thank you Senator May, Assemblymember Santabarbara and Assemblymember Thiele, Jr. for allowing me to speak today, on behalf of New York Farm Bureau members, on the status of rural broadband in New York State, specifically the impact on the farming community.

- New York farms are constantly diversifying to meet consumer demands especially as more consumers look to buy locally grown and produced products. Farmers produce a wide variety of agricultural products, from fruits and vegetables to dairy and meats to timber and fiber. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), there are 33, 438 farms in New York which has decreased nine percent since 2012.
- Access to reliable internet is an important tool for farmers. By having this tool, New York farmers are better able to communicate with current and prospective customers as well as develop web-based capabilities to advertise their products.
- Increased internet access would have a positive effect on rural farm and widen their markets. This access to a variety of markets ultimately supports the growth of those farm businesses and the impact on the community where farms are located. Farms and agricultural businesses are primary drivers of jobs and economic opportunity in their communities.
- The current lack of reliable broadband access in rural areas is a major barrier to the growth of New York farms.
- According to the USDA NASS, 75 percent of farms in the United States reported having access to the internet and 81 percent of New York farms have access. Although some farms might have access, the speed of the internet has an impact on what the farms can do. Only 25 percent of those farms in New York that access to internet actually conduct agricultural marketing activities over the internet.
- Since 2017, Satellite and DSL continue to be the most popular choices that United States farms use to access the internet.
- Currently the New York Broadband Program provides grant funding to support broadband provider projects that deliver high-speed internet access to unserved and underserved areas. The issue is that most providers will choose locations for these

projects that will provide them with the most customers. Farmers who are the only one or one of few properties on a road will be the last ones to receive internet.

- Also, it is important that not only does more internet become available to rural areas, but also the speed of the internet must be reliable for the agricultural businesses.
- Another issue is that some farms still must receive important documents by mail because their internet is so unreliable. Some applications for governmental grants or other forms have the option to submit online, but unfortunately, many farmers have to mail these documents.
- While the New York Broadband Program does provide the opportunity for rural areas to receive broadband access, it is still critical to determine other ways to bring broadband access to farmers such as designating funding in the state budget and creating a taskforce (that includes agricultural participation) that can determine next steps in providing reliable broadband to all parts of New York.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.