



**Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony  
Wednesday, January 27, 2020**

**Richard A. Ball, Commissioner  
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets**

Good afternoon Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, Senator Hinchey, Assemblywoman Lupardo, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am honored to present my testimony on the Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

The Executive Budget recommends nearly \$179 million for the Department, allowing us to continue our core functions and implement initiatives to drive New York agriculture forward.

As you know, this past year has been incredibly difficult for all of us, including the agricultural industry. I am proud of what we have accomplished during the COVID-19 crisis, working together with our many partners, to ensure that our food supply chain remains open and that our agricultural community continues to operate safely. From developing critical guidance documents and advocating for federal relief dollars to providing face coverings and hand sanitizer to tens of thousands of farms and agribusinesses, our priority has been to help New York agriculture navigate this unprecedented public health crisis and continue its essential work.

The Great New York State Fair, while not able to execute its 2020 plans because of COVID-19, has also been imperative to helping New Yorkers during the pandemic. The Fair has hosted critical socially distanced events like Nourish New York distributions and blood drives, and most recently, is working as a State vaccination site.

This year's State of the State and Executive Budget supports the State's continued efforts to recover and rebuild from the pandemic. As part of that, the Governor has announced \$25 million for a third round of the Nourish New York initiative. This will allow us to continue connecting New Yorkers to fresh, local food and protecting the stability of our agricultural economy. So far, Nourish New York has helped food banks to purchase 21 million pounds of products from New York producers and deliver them to more than 1.3 million families in need across the State. It has helped reach more than 4,100 farms as they have struggled with the loss of markets and a surplus of products.

The Executive Budget proposes \$27.4 million in local assistance to ensure the future of the industry. This is in line with last year's Executive Budget, and the third consecutive year that we've seen this historic commitment to agriculture. This funding will support key programs focused on research, agricultural education, workforce development, marketing initiatives, and more.

This year's budget also supports our efforts to further several recently announced initiatives to strengthen New York agriculture. The Produce Traceability Blue Ribbon Task Force, for example, is focused on advancing our food safety tracking systems across the supply chain. The group is made up of New York farmers and representatives from produce distributors and retailers and facilitated by

Cornell University. I am excited about their work and what it will mean for the industry and for our consumers.

The Diversity and Racial Equity Workgroup will also move us forward, aiming to foster a more equitable agricultural industry and provide recommendations for systemic reform. Racial discrimination is an extremely urgent issue that we must tackle across all sectors. I am proud that this new workgroup has begun to have some crucial and difficult conversations in order to make much-needed change.

The hemp industry will also benefit from a workgroup as part of the Governor's 2021 State of the State agenda. The workgroup will build from our accomplishments in cultivating this sector and make recommendations for the further development of hemp as a multi-use agricultural commodity. The hemp workgroup will explore opportunities for New York growers and manufacturers, and for the development of safe New York products.

Lastly, we also continue to aggressively tackle climate change, which is a critical component of the Governor's Executive Budget. His plans to bolster the State's green economy builds on the groundbreaking work of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, and I am pleased that agriculture is at the table in these discussions. With the Governor's aggressive climate agenda and strong support in the Executive Budget for critical environmental programs, such as the Climate Resilient Farming Grant program and our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, agriculture is playing an important role in achieving our State's climate goals and protecting our natural resources.

We continue to work to strengthen and grow New York's agricultural industry and are proud of the proposed Executive Budget. We look forward to hearing your priorities and working with you in the year to come.

Thank you.