



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

NEW YORK STATE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE



Senator Jen Metzger
Chair

Chair
Agriculture

Committees

Domestic Animal Welfare
Education
Energy and Telecommunications
Environmental Conservation
Health
Local Government
Women's Issues
Legislative Commission
on Rural Resources

**THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK**



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December 17, 2020

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Temporary President and Majority Leader
New York State Senate
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Honorable Senator Stewart-Cousins:

As Chair, I am pleased to transmit the Annual Report of the Senate's Standing Committee on Agriculture for the 2020 Legislative Session and convey our efforts to support a thriving agricultural sector, which is integral to the strength of the state's economy and the well-being of the people of New York. With seven million acres farmed in New York State, from the most western reaches of Lake Erie to the eastern end of Long Island, agriculture generates \$5.7 billion a year in gross income (USDA 2017 Agricultural Census). More than 98 percent of the state's 34,000 farms are family-owned, with a growing number of them women-owned and -operated. New York ranks third in the nation in certified organic farm operations and is a national leader in milk, apple, and grape production. We benefit from great diversity in commodities, soil types, farm sizes (mostly small and mid-sized), and geography, as well as from proximity to large population centers. Policies that preserve and support this diversity while strengthening linkages to markets within our state are critical to sustainability and food security.

New York's agricultural sector and food supply system faced major challenges and stresses during the COVID-19 health crisis, with sudden and major food supply chain and market disruptions, devastating financial losses to farms and agricultural businesses (particularly in the dairy sector), significant challenges to keeping farms operating and essential workers safe, and an alarming and dramatic rise in food insecurity. On May 13, the Senate Agriculture Committee co-sponsored a legislative hearing on the impacts of COVID-19 on small businesses, and heard testimony from agricultural organizations and experts about federal assistance programs and where those programs were falling short. Several bills were introduced to address COVID-related impacts on farms and the food supply system during this session, two of which are now law: S8464-A ensures that farmers will not lose their agriculture property tax exemption because of reduced sales during the COVID-19 crisis; and S8561-A seeks to strengthen the state's food supply system and address related supply chain logistics, with guidance and recommendations from representatives of the affected industries and organizations.

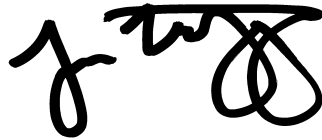
The Agriculture Committee met four times in the 2020 session and reported twenty seven bills. The Committee also hosted and sponsored a number of events, roundtables, and meetings, both in-person and virtually, including a Soil Health Roundtable and a Farm-to-School Briefing with the Senate Education Committee, among others.

The Agriculture Committee worked to include over \$31.7 million in funding in the 2020-2021 State Budget for important educational, research, and marketing programs through the Department of Agriculture and Markets to support farming and agriculture in the state. The Committee also advocated for robust funding through the Environmental Protection Fund to provide continued support for farmland preservation and agricultural practices and investments that protect natural resources, mitigate climate change, and promote climate resilience.

I thank my colleagues who served on the Standing Committee on Agriculture for their important contributions to the Committee's work during this difficult and challenging year, and I want to express my appreciation to our many partners in state and local government and in the agricultural community who are working to support a strong, sustainable, diverse, and resilient agricultural sector and food system in New York.

Sincerely,

Senator Jen Metzger
Chair, Standing Committee on Agriculture

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jen Metzger". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a prominent horizontal line across the top.

2020 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT

**NEW YORK STATE SENATE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON Agriculture**

Senator Jen Metzger, Chairperson

Committee Members

Senator Alessandra Biaggi	Senator, George Borrello - <i>Ranking Member</i>
Senator John E. Brooks	Senator Robert G. Ort
Senator Rachel May	Senator Pamela Helming
Senator Velmanette Montgomery	Senator Daphne Jordan
Senator James Skoufis	

Committee Staff

David Gordon - Legislative Director

Deborah DeWan - Agriculture Policy Advisor & Liaison

Alyvia Lewter - Committee Clerk

COMMITTEE JURISDICTION AND OVERVIEW

The New York State Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture has legislative oversight responsibilities for issues concerning the state's agricultural sector and food supply chain. The Committee routinely deals with legislation that impacts the Department of Agriculture and Markets, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and farm organizations.

During the 2020 Legislative Session, seventy bills were referred to the Committee for its review. Of these bills, twenty were reported from the Committee. Eight were passed by the Senate, and six passed in both houses. This work was conducted through a series of four committee meetings. A list of all bills that were reported from the Committee is provided at the end of this report.

Prior to the pandemic, the Senate Agriculture Committee undertook a variety of activities to promote New York-grown and -produced food and beverages, support agricultural education, build on the state's farm-to-school program, and advance the dialogue with the agricultural community on climate change solutions and diversity within the farming community.

February 3: Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees hosted the annual New York Wine Industry Association (NYWIA) Sip and Sample in the well of the Legislative Office Building, bringing together wineries and cheese producers from across the state to showcase their products.

February 4: The Senate Agriculture Committee welcomed members of Future Farmers of America (FFA) to sit in on the meeting to learn about the legislative process and address the committee on the subjects of agricultural education and the value of FFA programs to youth and the future of agriculture in New York. Valerie Lewis, New York State Future Farmers of America Secretary, presented on behalf of FFA.

February 5: The Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committee hosted a Soil Health Roundtable. This first-of-its-kind forum brought together representatives from Cornell's Soil Health Institute, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Soil and Water Conservation Program, and a diverse group of farmers and agricultural and environmental organizations to inform legislators on the multiple environmental, climate, and economic benefits of improving soil health, and examine the challenges and opportunities for public policy to promote a culture of soil health in agriculture.

March 11: Alongside the American Farmland Trust, the Senate Agriculture Committee hosted a Farm to School Breakfast Briefing for Senate members and staff from the Agriculture and Education Committees. AFT presented their research and recommendations for strengthening the school nutrition programs and increasing the number of schools participating in the "No Student Goes Hungry Initiative," the State's reimbursement incentive program to purchase more New York-grown and -produced foods for school meals.

Due to the pandemic and NY on Pause, traditional committee-sponsored events, such as Dairy Day, could not be held. However, the Agriculture Committee continued to work remotely, and hosted or sponsored several virtual roundtable discussions and events. In June, the Committee hosted a briefing with the New York Farm Bureau for legislators in which farmers from diverse sectors across the state spoke about the impact of COVID on farm operations, markets, farmworkers, and the food system, and discussed the challenges they were facing. In July, the Senate Agriculture Committee participated in a roundtable on racial equity, cultural diversity and inclusion in agriculture, organized by the Catskill Chapter of the Young Farmers Coalition. Participants discussed some of the barriers to diversity in agriculture and policies and programs that could help overcome these barriers. The Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees also hosted a virtual farm tour in October to highlight the importance of supporting a diverse farming community and connecting these farmers to resources that could be helpful to them in the future. During this event, we heard a presentation from Black Farmers

United of New York. Afterwards, we took a virtual tour of Soul Fire Farm in Petersburg, New York and a tour of Rocky Acres Farm in Freeville, New York.

The Senate Agriculture Committee also continued the dialogue in September on soil health and the role of agriculture in mitigating climate change, participating in the Cornell CALS webinar on the release of their comprehensive soil health study.

COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

During the 2020 Session, the Agriculture Committee advanced several pieces of legislation that focused on the urban-rural connection in strengthening the food system, the agriculture economy and food security for New Yorkers. The Committee also voted on legislation that became law to provide relief to farms that receive an agriculture tax exemption and were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the revenue threshold for certification during the affected period. The following key bills were acted on by the committee in 2020:

S251 (Kennedy) - This legislation increases the number of farmers' markets in the state by establishing and expanding regional markets to increase access in regions with poor access to farm products. These regional markets, located wherever possible in areas known as "food deserts," would promote the direct marketing of wholesale and bulk sale of New York farm and food products to local supermarkets and restaurants that sell and prepare foods, fresh foods of higher nutritional quality to consumers in those areas.

S2069 (Metzger) - This legislation directs the Department of Agriculture and Markets to aid in the promotion of holiday items, such as Christmas trees, wreaths, pumpkins and flowers, as well as food products such as turkeys or apples and honey that are used for holidays. These farm products are significant to the State's agricultural economy, and their promotion will help grow sales in large urban and suburban markets, providing greater access to locally-grown farm products.

S2797 (Comrie) - This legislation requires the Department of Agriculture and Markets to report on the number, nature, and geographic location of "food deserts" in the state, as well as any barriers to, and funding sources for, expanding farmers' markets into food deserts. This legislation has an economic as well as a public health benefit by identifying areas where populations are underserved by fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and foods of greater nutritional value, which has significant negative health impacts on these communities. This bill compiles information for policymakers to use to identify and address barriers to access to healthy, nutritious, fresh foods.

S8464-A (Metzger) - This legislation allows for the owner of real property that has previously qualified for an agricultural assessment to retain such certification for the 2021-22 tax year even if they fail to meet the statutory sales threshold for the 2020-21 tax year, if such owner can demonstrate that such reduction of sales was due to the effects of the State of Emergency declared as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, farmers have seen their sales plummet, and in some cases they have had to throw away their product because there was no market for it. This bill ensures that farmers do not lose their agricultural property tax exemption during this emergency health crisis.

S8561-A (Metzger) - This legislation establishes a New York Food Supply Working Group to provide advice, guidance, and recommendations from across the food supply chain on improving the resiliency and self-reliance of the state's farm and food supply, with particular focus on the issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in our food infrastructure and supply chains that must be addressed to protect the state's social and economic wellbeing -- from labor shortages and processing and transportation challenges to market disruptions and an overwhelming demand for emergency food. The purpose of this legislation is to

draw on the knowledge and experience of a broad range of stakeholders to examine lessons learned and identify solutions that will strengthen New York's food supply system and food security.

TWO HOUSE BILLS

In 2020, six of the seventy bills referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture passed both houses of the Legislature, and the Governor has signed all six.

Bill	Sponsor	Summary	Action
S2069	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to the promotion of New York state farm products for holiday celebrations	Signed Chap.224
S4495A	Martinez	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law and the general business law, in relation to automobile tire inflation machines	Signed Chap.231
S6252	Gianaris	An act to amend chapter 395 of the laws of 2008, amending the agriculture and markets law relating to licensing of establishments where animals or fowls are slaughtered, in relation to the effectiveness thereof	Signed Chap.135
S7013	May	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, the public health law and the alcoholic beverage control law, in relation to authorizing the manufacture and sale of ice cream and other frozen desserts made with liquor	Signed Chap.132
S8464A	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to land used	Signed Chap.220

		in agricultural production; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof	
S8561A	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to establishing a New York food supply working group	Signed Ch.316

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

Bill	Sponsor	Summary	Significant Action
S251	Kennedy	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to the expansion of regional farmers' markets	Passed Senate only
S271	Helming	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to establishing a small farm disaster recovery grant program	Reported and committed to Finance
S1085A	Persaud	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to requiring the department of agriculture and markets to post the results of its graded inspections on their website	Reported and committed to Finance
S2069	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to the promotion of New York state farm products for holiday celebrations	Signed Chap.224
S2244B	Sanders	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, the state finance law, and the economic development law, in relation to procurement of locally grown farm and food products and codifying the New York state council on food policy	Reported and committed to Finance

S2797	Comrie	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to annual reporting requirements for farmers markets	Passed Senate
S4495A	Martinez	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law and the general business law, in relation to automobile tire inflation machines	Signed Chap.231
S4655	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to establishing a one-stop farming hotline	Passed Senate
S4798	Jordan	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to state assistance payments for implementation of agricultural and farmland protection plans; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof	Reported and committed to Finance
S5437	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to agricultural custom operators	Passed Senate
S5755	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to certain definitions and agricultural districts and assessments; and to amend the real property tax law, in relation to the farm buildings tax exemption and authorizing farms to challenge the denial of an agricultural value assessment through the small claims assessment review (SCAR) process	Reported and committed to Finance

S5873	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to a public awareness campaign regarding Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases	Reported and committed to Finance
S6252	Gianaris	An act to amend chapter 395 of the laws of 2008, amending the agriculture and markets law relating to licensing of establishments where animals or fowls are slaughtered, in relation to the effectiveness thereof	Signed Chap.135
S6295A	Skoufis	An act to create a moratorium on the annexation of agricultural land by certain localities for an industrial use	Advanced to Third Reading
S7013	May	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, the public health law and the alcoholic beverage control law, in relation to authorizing the manufacture and sale of ice cream and other frozen desserts made with liquor	Signed Chap.132
S7014	Skoufis	An act to establish a 4-H agriculture technology challenge	Reported and committed to Finance
S7046	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to establishing a farmer resource portal to assist farmers in accessing certain information	Reported and committed to Finance
S7827	Metzger	An act establishing the New York task force on agricultural investment; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon the expiration thereof	Reported and committed to Finance

S8464A	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to land used in agricultural production; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof	Signed Chap.220
S8561A	Metzger	An act to amend the agriculture and markets law, in relation to establishing a New York food supply working group	Signed Chap.316



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