

# 2014 Update from the New York State Assembly TASK FORCE ON FOOD, FARM, AND NUTRITION POLICY

Sheldon Silver, Speaker • Ellen C. Jaffee, Chair

## Message from the Chair

Dear Friends of Food Policy,

I was honored to be appointed Chair of the Assembly's Task Force on Food, Farm, and Nutrition Policy by Speaker Silver last year. Food policy is perfectly aligned with my interest in helping to improve the lives of children, older adults, and families.



Hunger and poor nutrition affect personal health, educational outcomes, and independence for the elderly resulting in significant costs for governments. Providing access to nutritious food for those who cannot obtain or afford it has long been an important role of our government. I am proud that the Assembly Majority has taken a leadership role in fighting poverty which is the root cause of hunger.

We also recognize the importance of maintaining and growing food production in our State. Preserving and supporting farms and local food helps all of us by boosting our local economies, protecting our watersheds and open space from development, and supplying consumers with fresh, high-quality food.

This past year and a half we succeeded in securing funding for food and farm programs in the State budget and worked to develop and pass legislation to support the growth of local agriculture in all regions of the State. I was fortunate to work with wonderful advocates for these issues who live in my Assembly District in Rockland County, including one of the founding mothers of the local food movement, Joan Gussow, as well as the Rockland Farm Alliance (RFA) whose mission is to preserve, create and enhance sustainable food production.

I look forward to continuing to work with all of you, and my colleagues in State government, to identify opportunities and overcome barriers to providing nutritious New York-produced foods to everyone. Please contact me with your comments, suggestions, and ideas.

This newsletter provides more details about the Task Force activities and legislation; if you would like additional information, phone my Albany office at 518-455-5118, or email me at [jaffeee@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:jaffeee@assembly.state.ny.us). To sign up for email updates, visit my Assembly website at: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Ellen-Jaffee>.

Regards,

Ellen C. Jaffee  
Chair

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Task Force Chair, Assemblymember Jaffee with Anita Drechler, Rockland Community Against Hunger (RCAH) Coordinator (far left) and Rob Maher, Director of TOUCH-NY Inc. and a founder of RCAH.

## Supporting Food and Farm Programs in the 2014 State Budget

The State budget includes program funding and changes that are integral to efforts to help feed struggling families and seniors, improve nutrition and health, and support the growth of local farms. Task Force Chair, Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee worked to preserve and to expand food and farm program funding over the last two years.

In 2013, the legislature rejected proposals to cut state funding and combine individual food assistance programs, such as food for pregnant women, infants, and children (WIC) and emergency food programs (food banks, pantries and soup kitchens.) Programs that help reduce spending on hospital and doctor visits by preventing nutrition-related health problems such as diabetes and obesity were also threatened. None of the programs faced cuts in the 2014 budget which included an increase of \$750,000 for emergency food programs and nearly \$6 million for home-delivered meal programs for seniors.

The legislature added about \$4 million in new and restored funding for agriculture programs to the Governor's proposed budget in 2013 and \$8 million in 2014. These programs support research to fight plant diseases, help preserve farms threatened by development in areas such as the Hudson Valley, and fund marketing and promotional activities for products such as apples.

The State took administrative action to restore about \$460 million in SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps) benefits to eligible New Yorkers who would have lost them due to Congressional cutbacks adopted in this year's federal Farm Bill. According to Task Force Chair Assemblymember Jaffee, "Although the State will have to give back about \$6 million in federal low-income home energy assistance to leverage the hundreds of millions in SNAP benefits, the overall benefit to needy New York households, and food businesses and farmers, is worth it."

## Jaffee Hosts Briefing on Bolstering Agriculture in the Hudson Valley and New York City's Foodshed

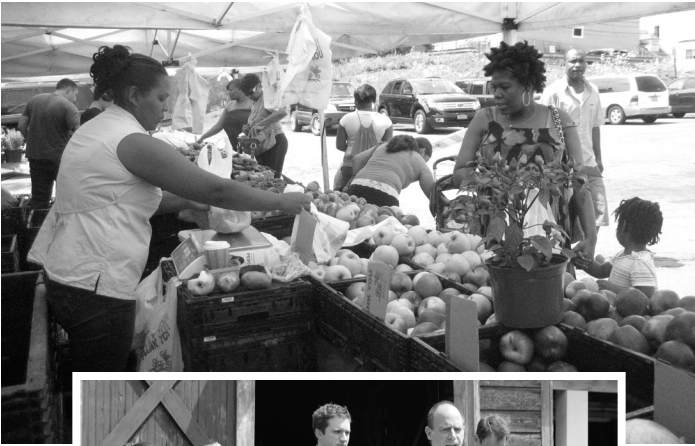


Taskforce Chair, Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee and Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk (D-Duanesburg) (left) hosted a briefing on an innovative new plan to bolster agriculture in the Hudson Valley and New York City's foodshed. Scenic Hudson, a nonprofit land preservation and environmental organization, authored the ground breaking study that for the first time provides reliable data on what Hudson Valley farmland must be conserved to ensure that the people of New York City, the Hudson Valley and portions of the Capital District can continue to count on nearby supplies of fresh food. The farms are major contribu-

tors to the state's agriculture industry and support a robust tourism business sector—both crucial to the state's economy. In recent years there has been a tidal wave of interest in fresh, local food—for public health and food security, and to meet growing demand and the needs of farmers. Scenic Hudson's plan aims to provide a template for advancing public policy strategies that secure fresh, local food for New York City and the Hudson Valley, and can easily be replicated in other areas of the state. The full report can be viewed at: <http://www.scenichudson.org/foodshedplan>.

To update or remove your name from the task force mailing list, email [committeemailinglist@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:committeemailinglist@assembly.state.ny.us). Please include the task force name in the subject line and provide the name and address as it appears on the mailing label and any changes you would like made.

## Assemblymember Jaffee Sponsors Legislation Supporting Local Farms and Farmers



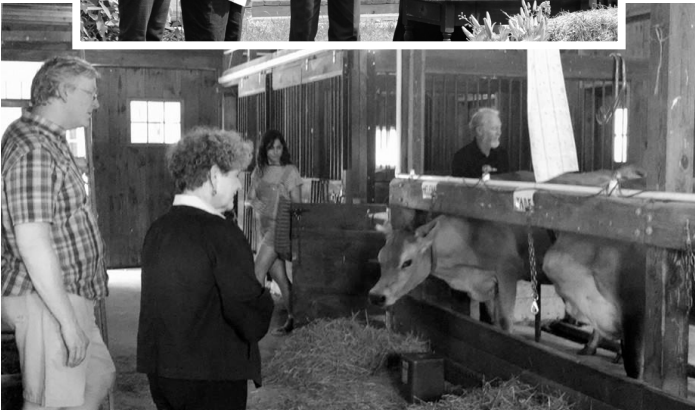
As the demand from consumers, restaurants, schools, and other institutions for local food grows, there has been increased interest in maintaining and encouraging farms, especially in areas where land values are high such as suburban communities. Development pressure, high land prices and dense population in these regions can make farming difficult. Local governments often struggle to accommodate the needs of both farmers and their residential neighbors.

The State's primary program to help maintain farming is the State's Agricultural District Law, Article 25-AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law. The Law authorizes the creation of local Agricultural Districts to encourage and protect farming, by assessing farm land based on its agricultural value rather than market value, and reducing property taxes for farms. In addition, the Law provides some protection from: local laws that unreasonably restrict farming activities; government funded acquisition of, or construction projects on, farmland; and, private nuisance suits involving agricultural practices.

**For farms in some counties, such as Rockland, there is not sufficient farmland acreage to meet the current requirements of the Agricultural Districts Law to create a District. Food, Farm and Nutrition Policy Task Force Chair, Ellen Jaffee, sponsored a roundtable in 2013, inviting farmers, county representatives, and local farm advocates to discuss changes to the Law. As a result, she sponsored legislation (A.8026/S.6360), to lower the threshold for creating a District from 500 acres in a county to 250 acres. The bill passed both houses of the Legislature and is awaiting action by the Governor.**

In addition to A.8026, Jaffee co-sponsored other bills approved by the Legislature to protect and promote farming that would:

- **A.7002:** Provide access to state land that was viable for farming, especially for new and beginning farmers.
- **A.7572:** Create a procurement training program for agricultural business interested in selling to government.
- **A.9118:** Establish a program to assist farmers in complying with new federal food safety rules.
- **A.9140:** Establish agricultural pilot programs to grow industrial hemp.
- **A.9288:** Create a beginning farmer revolving loan fund.



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*Task Force Chair, Assemblymember Jaffee and the Rockland Farm Alliance hosted a Community Education event at Bluefield Farm in Rockland County about the Suburban Agriculture Bill she sponsored. She invited the first grade class from Fleetwood Elementary School, East Ramapo Central School District, Principal, Pat Simmons and teacher, Michelle Devaney, to tour the farm, learn about local food production, and enjoy a picnic lunch prepared from local ingredients by the Rockland Roots Food Truck.*