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Agriculture and Markets

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

**Richard A. Ball, Commissioner
New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets
Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony
Wednesday, January 28, 2015**

Good morning Chairman DeFrancisco, Chairman Farrell, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials.

I am pleased to offer my testimony on the 2015-16 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

New York is an agricultural state and no Governor has paid more attention to the continued growth and development of this sector of the economy than Governor Cuomo. In 2013, New York State farmers set a record for sales with \$5.68 billion in cash receipts, representing a \$1 billion increase in agricultural receipts in just three years. 2011 to 2013 were the highest years on record for on-farm sales here in New York.

The 2015-16 Executive Budget recommends \$164.4 million for the Department. This funding will help maintain our agency's regulatory functions while continuing to advance our state's agricultural sector. The Executive Budget proposes to eliminate some \$30,000 in fees to provide relief to agribusinesses across New York. Licensing and regulatory services associated with these fees will continue at the Department.

The Executive Budget also proposes \$50 million to assist farmers and related businesses in the Southern Tier and the Hudson Valley. \$30 million of this funding would go toward helping businesses in the Southern Tier maintain, develop and grow farm, agricultural and related businesses while \$20 million would go toward purchasing farmland conservation easements in the Hudson Valley region.

A major initiative overseen by our agency is the Great New York State Fair, which had a banner year in 2014, breaking two single day attendance records. In his State of the State address, the Governor cited the fact that it has been more than 100 years since the fairgrounds underwent a major transformational project. The Governor is proposing a \$50 million investment to transform the fairgrounds into a dynamic, year-round facility that would serve as a springboard for development along the Onondaga Lakefront for decades to come.

We are also pleased with the Governor's commitment to strengthening appropriations for the State's Environmental Protection Fund, with overall appropriations increasing by \$10 million. This includes \$14.2 million for Agricultural Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Projects; \$14 million for farmland protection; \$4.775 million for Soil and Water Conservation Districts; and \$5.7 million to fight invasive species – an increase of \$1 million.



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In addition to this funding is \$500,000 for the Agricultural Climate Adaption Program, which would expand our highly successful Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) Program to address environmental concerns beyond just water quality, to include climate resiliency enhancements, new pest management as well as carbon management on farm operations. This program would ensure a comprehensive approach to on-farm environmental management and positions New York farms to remain viable in these times of increasing climate variability.

The Governor also proposes a Commission to Study Protecting Dairy Farmer profits that will evaluate dairy prices and programs that would help maintain dairy farm profitability, including encouraging dairy farmer participation in the federal Margin Protection Program.

This year's proposed budget continues to fund the Taste NY program to the tune of \$1.1 million. The Governor has laid out an ambitious expansion of the Taste NY program in 2015 designed to help the program triple sales for producers through aggressive promotion, online purchasing, and more stores, vending machines, and events. We are hard at work leveraging our existing resources in cooperation with other state agencies to further the expansion of the program and create new opportunities for our producers.

We have also reestablished the Pride of NY Advisory Committee, which will provide feedback on ways we can improve the Pride of New York program. This program has supported New York State agricultural producers, including nursery growers and Christmas tree farmers, for nearly 20 years.

Addressing the issues of food deserts, providing fresh foods for our youth and research into emerging sectors would continue under this year's proposed budget, which includes \$350,000 for the continuation of the FreshConnect Farmers' Market program, \$250,000 for Farm to School, and \$40,000 to evaluate and test hop varieties at the Geneva Experiment Station to assist our State's growing craft beer industry.

Our Department is also hard at work finishing up the recommendations from the Interagency Task Force on Lessening Obstacles for Agriculture. We continue to work with institutions at all levels of government to strengthen procurement of agricultural products. And we'll make great strides in 2015 advancing the deliverables outlined in December's first-ever Farm to Table Upstate Downstate Agriculture Summit, and in the process open up vast new markets for our State's farmers and producers.

There is excitement in this field that I am so proud to represent and that I have not seen in my lifetime. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time. Thank you.