



**Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Joint Budget Hearing Testimony  
Monday, January 27, 2025**

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

Good afternoon, Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, Senator Hinchey, Assemblymember Lupardo, members of the agriculture committees, and elected officials. I am pleased to offer my testimony on the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Executive Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

In this year's Executive Budget, Governor Hochul continues to demonstrate her commitment to New York agriculture. Her first two budgets increased funding for our industry by 60 percent, and I'm happy to see that this year's plan continues to build on that commitment. The Executive Budget recommends \$364 million for the Department, allowing us to maintain our core functions and carry out initiatives to boost our sustainability efforts and food systems; further our workforce and agriculture education goals; and invest in capital projects, marketing, and research to grow the industry.

Agriculture is a cornerstone of the economy in our State, with nearly 32,000 farms numbering among the nation's top producers of more than 30 commodities. Our dairy industry is a big part of that, with dairy farming making up half of New York's agricultural economy. Through the Dairy Think Tank, we know that we share a goal with our dairy farmers: to make New York the most sustainable dairy state in the country. Building on last year's historic investments in New York's dairy community, the Governor, this year, is proposing \$10 million for the second round of the Dairy Modernization Grant Program to update on-farm milk storage and improve dairy supply chain efficiency. An additional \$1 million will support cutting-edge research and further support the implementation of climate-resilient practices on our dairy farms.

These initiatives are vital to our nation-leading fight against climate change. With Governor Hochul's plan to maintain a \$400 million Environmental Protection Fund, the Department will see continued investment in programs that reduce the effects of climate change and protect our water and land. Funding will support farmland and pollinator protection programs, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Climate Resilient Farming program, Cornell Soil Health, and much more. The Governor is also proposing new investments to improve tracking of lost farmland and increase capacity within New York's network of community-led land trusts.

In addition to climate, a top priority for the State is supporting our local food system and expanding access to food for all New Yorkers. This year's Executive Budget includes targeted support to continue this work, including nearly \$4 million for the expanded FreshConnect program and a \$5 million increase for the Nourish New York program. It also supports the Farm-to-School, Farmers' Market Resiliency, and Urban Farms and Community Gardens programs. In addition, Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program benefits will be maintained at its current level. The \$50 million Regional School Food Infrastructure Grant Program will also see another \$10 million to encourage the use of fresh local farm products in school meals and expand markets for New York's producers.



## Department of Agriculture and Markets

**KATHY HOCHUL**  
Governor

**RICHARD A. BALL**  
Commissioner

I am also excited to see support for New York's fiber and maple industries. The \$10 million Food and Fiber Small-Scale Processing Grant Program will fuel the supply of diverse products for New York's local purchasing initiatives such as Executive Order 32. Additional investments in marketing and research will help New York to become the leading innovator in the maple industry. The proposed \$73 million local assistance budget will also support research and promotion for many commodities, including craft beverages, apples, vegetables, honey, hemp, and more.

The Executive Budget also builds on the State's One Health approach, proposing funding to support animal and plant health. Again, this year, \$4.25 million is proposed for Cornell University's Integrated Pest Management Program. In support of companion animal care, \$5 million will continue the Companion Animal Capital Fund, which provides critical upgrades at animal shelters and enhanced care for our dogs and cats.

One Health also encompasses the health and wellbeing of our workforce, who are essential to the strength of the industry. To support our farm workers, I am pleased to say that the Governor has proposed an additional \$5 million for the Farmworker Housing Program. This program will help our farmers provide safer housing for their workforce while continuing to meet their production goals. In addition, \$3.2 million will create safer environments and greater capacity at Agri-Business Child Development, or ABCD, Centers. A total of \$13.5 million will be dedicated to these facilities overall. These improvements will allow ABCD to expand education, health, and nutrition services to roughly 1,000 children whose families make up New York's farm workforce.

To ensure the long-term success of the agricultural industry, we are also working to strengthen agricultural education. We have had many successes in this area, especially this past year. This year's budget will allow us to further those efforts, investing \$1 million for the New York Agriculture In The Classroom program. This is double the amount of last year's investment. Additional funding totaling \$1.8 million is proposed for other education programs like FFA, 4-H, the National Society for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences, or MANRRS, and the Association of Agricultural Educators. Together, these programs help to grow agriculture education and support our next generation. We will join these organizations to kick off the Governor's Blue-Ribbon Panel to Advance Agriculture Education later this year.

Finally, the State is also focusing on our county and local fairs, which are hubs for agriculture education. The Executive Budget includes \$2 million to support these fairs statewide, ensuring they will remain a critical avenue to connect New Yorkers with local food and agriculture. We are also excited that Governor Hochul has proposed a nearly \$51 million investment for capital improvements to The Great New York State Fair. We plan to upgrade our entertainment areas to further position the Fairgrounds as a year-round attraction. This will build on the Fair's ongoing projects, like new barns, upgrades to the Dairy Bar and Youth Building, and more – all of which help the State Fair continue to spotlight our vibrant, diverse agricultural industry.

Thanks to the investments that the Governor, and all of you, have made in New York agriculture over the years, we have a more resilient food system and a stronger industry today. I look forward to seeing that momentum continue as we work together to further our shared goals in the coming year.

Thank you.