

## **Dear New York Representative,**

Food and agricultural policy affects everyone in New York State, from how we access food, to what we eat, and how we grow that food. The 2018 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to support farmers, the food system, and the environmental concerns of our urban, rural and suburban communities in a meaningful and decisive way.

As organizations representing those who serve the food to the insecure and those who grow it, all of whom are concerned with environmental impacts, we are sharing with you our priorities regarding the next Farm Bill. This unique group of undersigned organizations has worked together to share and develop ideas on overarching needs of the next Farm Bill to ensure national and state food security, increased access to and availability of healthy and affordable foods for all residents, and the long-term success of our farmers and sustainability of our farms, regional food systems and our environment.

Despite the well-known intentions to reduce spending by the current administration, Congress' focus should not be on just cutting the price tag of current Farm Bill programs. During the drafting and passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, \$23 billion was cut for deficit reduction, and we believe that the Farm Bill is not the place to continue to look for cuts. Neither the struggling farm economy nor the millions of New Yorkers, who despite low unemployment still rely on our nutrition programs, can afford to sustain further cuts to the safety-net systems in place.

While we are hopeful that there will be a timely passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, we are concerned that passing a rushed or incomplete bill could weaken existing programs, or fail to address shortcomings in existing programs.

Furthermore, this is not a time for political gamesmanship by splitting or threatening to split the Nutrition Title from the Farm Bill. We support a unified Farm Bill that addresses all aspects of the food system. Whether from a rural, urban or suburban district, we all have a stake in the policies developed in the Farm Bill and want to ensure a safe, affordable and reliable food system.

## **Goals for Healthy Communities**

New York State is fortunate that it has diverse agricultural production. We grow fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products and whole grains, all of which help make up a healthy diet. Unfortunately, too many New Yorkers face both geographic and financial barriers that limit access to these healthy food products produced by New York farmers.

According to the U.S. Census, New York State's population is 19.8 million, with 8.5 million residing in New York City. Approximately one in eight New York State residents (12.7 percent) are food insecure, including 17.3 percent of children and 8.7 percent of seniors. Although we know New York farmers cannot feed all of our residents alone, approximately 35,500 New York farms produce more than \$5.33 billion in agricultural products each year. Additionally, New York farmers have demonstrated a commitment to fighting hunger, consistently ranking as one of the top three states for food donation with over 9 million pounds of food donated in 2017.

Farm Bill programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) help to link our farms to urban, rural and suburban families in need of healthy foods.

Our shared goal is a food system that increases the production and distribution of healthy foods -- including fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, and whole grains -- in our communities, homes, schools, and institutions. Such a food system supports jobs and will improve the long-term health for downstate and upstate communities alike.

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** – SNAP is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger. It enables more than 2.8 million low-income New York State residents to afford needed food, with more than \$4.7 billion annually to our state. We urge that SNAP retain its status as a means-tested entitlement program, and we strongly oppose proposals to switch the structure to a block grant. One of the greatest strengths of SNAP is its ability to respond quickly to changes in need. We saw SNAP adapt to need during the recent recession, with enrollment peaking at more than 3.2 million New Yorkers as our state was recovering; now enrollment continues to decline as employment rates increase and the economy improves. While SNAP is highly effective, the following improvements will strengthen the program to better achieve its goal of ending hunger:
  - Addressing the insufficiency of current benefit levels, which provide less than \$1.40 per meal, on average, by such measures as changing the basis for SNAP benefits from the Thrifty Food Plan to the Low-Cost Food Plan, which is approximately 25 percent higher;
  - Maximizing access to healthy food choices through continued investment and research into technologies that increase the ability for SNAP participants to redeem their benefits via smartphones and online at multiple points of sale; and
  - Preservation of states’ ability to request waivers and options to ensure food assistance is easily available to eligible households while simplifying and streamlining administrative processes.
- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**—TEFAP provides healthy food to low-income Americans through the emergency food system of regional food banks and community-based soup kitchens and food pantries. Last year, TEFAP provided almost 20 percent of the food directly distributed through local hunger-relief agencies. The 2014 Farm Bill included increased funding for TEFAP commodities for fiscal years 2015-2018. Given that the aggregate food budget shortfall for American families continues to rise, Congress should authorize sufficient funding for food purchases, storage and distribution to ensure that the emergency food system can meet growing need.
- **Farmers Market Program**— We support continued funding to promote farmers markets. Building off previous Farm Bills, the 2014 Farm Bill helped to provide access to fresh farm products by many people who would normally have limited access. These programs include the Farmers Market Promotion Program and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. While these programs are available across the state, they often help address nutrition needs by benefiting both urban and rural communities at the same time.
- **Nutrition Education** – When access to healthy food is paired with effective nutrition education, we can maximize federal investments in nutrition assistance. Nutrition education programs empower Americans to make healthy choices on a limited budget and reduce the risk of chronic disease. The Farm Bill includes funding for two nutrition education programs that offer distinct approaches and serve distinct purposes: the SNAP Nutrition Education Program (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). The current structure within USDA allows for synergy between the two programs. SNAP-Ed is the largest nutrition education and obesity prevention initiative in New York State; in 2017 the state received \$20.9 million in

SNAP-Ed funds. SNAP-Ed participants have reported eating more vegetables, consuming fewer calories from added sugars, and cooking more frequently.

- We strongly support maintaining funding for the SNAP Nutrition Education Program (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), as well as support continued innovation of science-based nutrition education. We also support enhancing USDA's capacity to provide training and technical assistance and share best practices between states and implementing agencies to ensure that science-based nutrition education programs are available to eligible individuals and families.
- **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants (FINI)** – To further encourage SNAP participants to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, we strongly support continuation of FINI grants, which were first introduced in the 2014 Farm Bill. These grants allow eligible entities to access federal matching funds to expand programs like “Double Up Food Bucks” and New York City’s Health Bucks. Further, we believe that a “local emphasis” should also be given to further help farmers and nearby communities.
- **Food and Nutrition Research**—The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) supports vital research on nutrition, hunger and food security, obesity prevention, and sustainable food systems. This research forms the basis for policymaking and programmatic implementation. We support maintaining funding for NIFA’s important work.

## Goals for Healthy Farms

We need a strong safety net for our agricultural producers. Since the 2014 Farm Bill was enacted, the farm economy has suffered. Net farm income is down sharply, 52 percent from the high-levels experienced in 2013.

Despite changes in 2014, the safety nets for the types of products that we grow in New York—fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy and other specialty crops—are seriously inadequate. The 2014 Farm Bill Dairy Margin Protection Program (MPP) and the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) are examples of the challenges New York farmers still face in insuring their crops.

- **Margin Protection Program (MPP)**—Created in the 2014 Farm Bill, MPP was intended to protect dairy producers when the difference between the all-milk price and the average feed cost – the margin—falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer. Unfortunately, MPP failed to provide an adequate safety net for New York dairy farmers despite several consecutive years of low milk prices and consistent losses by producers. During the 2018 Farm Bill negotiations, we need reasonable changes to MPP that better reflect the losses that dairy farmers face to protect dairy production in this state.
- **Whole Farm Revenue Protection Program (WFRP)** – This program was created with the intent to insure New York’s diversified specialty and livestock farms. Unfortunately, New York participation levels have been lower than expected. Going forward, we would like to see this program continued with a pilot program status. Since 2015, USDA has had the flexibility to make many changes to address producer’s concerns. As a pilot program, USDA can do more without requiring legislative or significant regulatory action. We urge your support of WFRP and to maintain its pilot status, and work to ensure that it is accessible to and meeting the needs of New York’s farmers, including beginning farmers.
- **Organics Research and Programs** – We support continued funding for the National Organic Program, Organic Research Initiative and the Organic Certification Cost Share Program. Organics continue to be a growing sector of agricultural production in New York State. In light of recent

news that questionable standards or falsely labeled organic products are being imported into the United States, it is important to continue to fund these programs. These programs provide our organic producers with the resources they need to compete and instill consumer confidence in the products they purchase.

- **Specialty Crop Block Grant**—We strongly support the continued funding of the Specialty Crop Block Grant, which provides assistance to crops like fruits, vegetables, and horticulture and nursery crops. From 2008 through 2015, New York State received \$8.4 million to fund 91 projects to increase competitiveness and profitability of New York producers.
- **Research and Extension Programs**—Programs that support applied research and extension education are included in a number of titles of the Farm Bill. Research and the technical assistance and education offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension are invaluable to farmers and to communities developing stronger food systems. These programs ensure that farmers receive the necessary research and technical assistance to deal with emerging issues like pest management, using cover crops to help reduce agricultural runoff, and the urban agriculture sector. We support continuation of funding for these programs.
- **Disaster Programs**—With the increased frequency of adverse weather events, disaster programs are vital to New York farms. In 2016, New York received \$3.5 million in supplemental and ad hoc disaster assistance programs. We urge you to support these programs at current funding levels.
- **New, Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Programs**—These programs provide the special support that developing farmers need. These farmers struggle with affordability of education, student loans, land, and other capital resources needed to get a farm business started. They may be working in either a rural or urban setting, but they are responding to the needs of their communities and preserving this support helps address the problem of New York's aging farmer population (now averaging 56). We support the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development program, and the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program, as well as the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program which, according to a recent Federal Reserve publication, provides vital market opportunities for young and beginning farmers.
- **Rural Development**—We also continue to support several grant and loan opportunities for businesses and rural communities including the Rural Business Development Grants program; Rural Cooperative Development Grants; Value-Added Agricultural Marketing Development Program; the Business and Industry Direct and Guaranteed Loan Program; and the Water, Waste Disposal and Wastewater Facility Grants and Loans.

## Goals for a Healthy Environment

The Farm Bill also provides means to protect our environment. With more than 25 percent of the landmass of New York in agricultural production, farmers are the stewards of the air and water coming from those lands. Providing farmers with the tools they need to safeguard these resources helps to protect it for everyone. Further, farmland provides an opportunity to help address climate concerns through carbon sequestration and farmland protection, but continued research and funding is needed to help farmers adapt techniques to address these impacts.

- **Land Conservation Programs**—We urge you to adequately fund the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). EQIP is the most widely used conservation program in New York, it helps farmers develop practices to protect water quality. In 2015, New York State Farmers received \$15.4

million in EQIP payments to provide financial and technical assistance to plan and implement conservation practices that improve their land. Another useful program is CSP, which applies a whole-farm approach to environmental protection. New York farmers received \$6.4 million in CSP payments in 2015 to help implement conservation practices. CRP is designed to protect highly-erodible and environmentally sensitive land by removing these lands from agriculture production, which helps both farmers and the environment. It provides payments to farmers to compensate for the loss of the land. As of 2015, New York had over 38,000 acres enrolled in CRP. We believe adequate funding for these programs is a priority.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) –** ACEP is a program that is critical to preserving productive farmland, particularly those lands that are vulnerable to suburban development. This program also ensures farmland affordability for beginning and young farmers, preserves wildlife habitats, natural resources on agricultural lands, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions associated with sprawling development. We support adequate funding in the 2018 Farm Bill to preserve the commitment to the important goals of this program. We also recommend improvements to broaden eligibility for participation and improve program efficiency for states, such as giving leeway to certified entities to use their own deed terms if statutory requirements are met, improving coordination with state Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) requirements and addressing stakeholder concerns about the ALE plan requirements.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**—Created in the 2014 Farm Bill, RCPP leverages federal dollars while placing emphasis on locally-led conservation targeted towards a regional or watershed approach. We believe that the goals of the program are worthy and will be beneficial to the many multi-state watersheds we have in New York. Therefore, we support continuing funding for this program. We also encourage USDA to provide additional information and tools to RCPP project partners to allow them to better measure their environmental impacts.

Each of our organizations support these goals and hope that you will work to advance them during Farm Bill negotiations. We may each individually advocate for additional goals and look forward to sharing those with you also. Please feel free to contact any of the undersigned if you have any questions.

The Farm Bill impacts the lives of New Yorkers all across the state and has a lasting impact on the agriculture and food economies. Thank you for your time in considering these joint concerns for the 2018 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

**American Farmland Trust- New York**

**Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY**

**Centro Corazon de Maria**

**Childcare Council of Nassau**

**Food Bank Association of New York State**

**Food Bank of the Southern Tier**

**Foodlink, Inc.**

**Health and Welfare Council of Long Island**

**Hunger Action Network of New York State**

**Hunger Free America**

**Hunger Solutions New York**

**Just Food**

**Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Program in Nutrition, Teachers College, Columbia  
University**

**National Young Farmers Coalition**

**New York Farm Bureau**

**New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**

**Northeast Organic Farming Association - New York (NOFA-NY)**

**Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG).**

**New York League of Conservation Voters**

**Peace Valley Haven**

**Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York**

**The Legal Aid Society**

**The Safe Center Li, Inc.**