May 28, 2019

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

An Act to Amend the Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program (S.5715)

Founded in 1983, the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY) is the premier statewide organization growing a strong organic and sustainable agriculture movement in New York State and is part of a regional network of seven Northeast Organic Farming Associations. NOFA-NY provides education and assistance to local organic and sustainable farmers; connects consumers with organic and sustainable farmers; advocates policies that support a sustainable food and farm system at both the state and federal levels; and is the largest USDA-accredited organic certifier in New York certifying over 1,000 organic operations in the state.

S.5715, introduced by Senator Jennifer Metzger, would update the Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program, to more fully meet its mission of alleviating the burden of student loan debt for qualified young farmers. This update will allow the State to invest in retaining more young farmers who are pursuing successful agricultural careers in the state, but struggling under the burden of student loan debt. NOFA-NY strongly supports passage and enactment of S.5715.

The New York State Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program, administered by the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, provides much needed debt relief to qualified young farmers. However, many young farmers who are otherwise excellent candidates for State investment, do not currently qualify. Under the current eligibility requirements, successful applicants must graduate from a New York university or college, decide to pursue a career in farming, and gain enough experience to operate a farm or a component of a farm—all within only two years after graduating. Due to the very narrow timeline and eligibility requirements, many experienced young farmers committed to farming in New York, are not currently able to benefit from this important program.

S.5715 would update the program by limiting eligibility based upon years of agricultural production rather than when an applicant graduated. Many young farmers do not benefit from traditional pathways to a farming career because they are not from farm families. Student loan debt forgiveness is a valuable tool in helping young farmers to get started and grow a successful farming business. S.5715 would provide a timely and necessary update to help keep young farmers farming in New York.

Signed,

Andrianna Natsoulas
Executive Director
NOFA-NY