May 28, 2019

MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT
An Act to Amend the New Farmers Grant Fund Program (S.5716)

Founded in 1983, the Northeast Organic Farming Association – 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.5716, introduced by Senator Jennifer Metzger, would update the existing New Farmers Grant Fund Program to support smaller projects that will help young farmers to jump start their farming businesses. This is of particular benefit for the many young farmers who are growing on leased land. The Act will also direct the Empire State Development Corporation to consider farm assets in addition to farm income when evaluating applications. NOFA-NY strongly supports passage and enactment of S.5716.

The New Farmers Grant Fund Program has funded a wide variety of projects from farm equipment to on-farm commercial kitchens. It has been an important resource for many young farmers getting started in New York. The program has directed $3.27 million in support of new farming operations since 2014. However, the current program framework excludes potential applicants who would benefit from smaller awards, and who have limited access to capital. S.5716 would direct the Empire Development Corporation to establish additional award tiers to allow projects of less than $15,000, and to fund those projects worth $5,000 or less with an up-front payment.

Access to land is the number one barrier to entry facing the next generation of farmers in New York. In many areas—especially those closest to valuable consumer markets—farmers cannot compete with the high prices and pace of real estate sales markets. Leasing is often the only available option for many young farmers seeking to establish their operations. Construction or improvement of non-portable farm structures is not currently eligible for funding if the applicant is farming on leased land. S.5716 would address this issue while protecting the applicant’s stake in the investment if they choose to move their operation.

Signed,

Andrianna Natsoulas
Executive Director, NOFA-NY