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Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York Statement on 2019 Legislative Session

Legislative session closes with gains and losses for farmers and environment

Syracuse, NY— New York State’s 2019 legislative session closes this week with a flurry of last-minute actions on pending legislation. A number of bills passed this session that will impact the agricultural community statewide.

“New York State made some progress towards better support for organic food and farming. We applaud the move to be the one of the first states to ban chlorpyrifos, a harmful pesticide that is especially damaging to child development,” commented Andrianna Natsoulas, Executive Director of NOFA-NY. “We also congratulate the Green Light NY Coalition on their hard work and leadership to advance S1747/A3675, which allows drivers licenses for all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status. This legislation will make our roads safer, reduce the number of uninsured drivers, and grow our economy.”

Two bills introduced in previous legislative sessions passed this week: the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CCPA) and the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act (FFLPA). Both bills passed with some adjustments, which NOFA-NY believes do not go far enough.

“CCPA was watered down and is not aggressive enough to mitigate climate change,” said Liana Hoodes, NOFA-NY Policy Advisor. “Farmers are on the front lines of climate change. This bill was a missed opportunity to support land use practices, specifically in organic agriculture, that provide both energy efficiency and significant carbon sequestration.”

Members of the Senate Agriculture and Labor Committees organized several public hearings on FFLPA across the New York, where NOFA-NY presented testimony with suggestions for changes to the bill. The final bill language included a compromise on the threshold for overtime pay, increasing it from 40 to 60 hours per week. Other provisions include one day of rest out of seven, mandatory housing inspections for less than five units, and requirements and changes to Unemployment Insurance levels and worker’s compensation.

NOFA-NY members have long supported the principles laid out in FFLP and stand for fairness for all who work on farms: farm owners and hired workers alike. But last month, NOFA-NY testified that we could not support the bill as written. “While we are appreciative of the adjustment of overtime hours, we are concerned about the effect of a short implementation
“We are committed to both expanding farmworker rights and to the economic viability of family farms.”

Unfortunately, the New York State legislature did not reintroduce the Birds and Bees Protection Act. This bill would have protected pollinators, which are critical to a vibrant agricultural economy in New York, and we hope to see it reintroduced in 2020.

Members of NOFA-NY vote each January to set the organization’s policy priorities for the year. To learn more, visit www.nofany.org/policy.

NOFA-NY looks forward to the next legislative session and working with our legislators to better serve New York’s farmers, consumers, and the environment.

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Founded in 1983, the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York is the premier statewide organization growing a strong organic and sustainable agriculture movement in New York State. NOFA-NY provides education and assistance to organic and sustainable farmers; connects consumers with farmers; advocates for policies that support a sustainable food and farm system; and, is the largest USDA-accredited organic certifier in New York, certifying over 1,000 organic operations in the state. Learn more at www.nofany.org.