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Testimony from Kelly Young, New York Farm Bureau  
Joint Legislative Hearing on the Governor's Proposed  
2015-2016 Agriculture/Environmental Conservation Budget  
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On behalf of New York Farm Bureau, thank you for providing our organization the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Kelly Young and I serve as the Deputy Director of Public Policy. New York Farm Bureau is the state's largest general agricultural advocacy organization with 22,000 family farm members representing all size farms, all production methods and all commodities.

We are pleased to see that the Governor's proposed Department of Agriculture and Markets budget includes funding for critical statewide programs relating to animal and public health. The agricultural community and consumers across the state depend on these critical programs as the foundation of a healthy and safe food supply in the state.

We are concerned, however, that industry promotional and research programs for the many commodities in the budget that serve as the economic development engine for the farm industry were either partially funded or not funded at all in the Governor's proposal.

For a minimal amount of state investment, these programs help to market New York products to our own New York consumers, as well as nationally and internationally. For instance, the Christmas tree growers partnered with the Green Markets in New York City this past year and trees grown here in New York State are actually replacing trees that were typically sold from North Carolina and Canada. Maple producers are developing new products each year and appealing to new customers. In the fall, consumers are specifically looking for New York's apple varieties at farm stands and in grocery stores. And our wineries are attracting 5 million tourists a year to locations all over the state.

Similarly, the research funded in the Agriculture and Markets budget is essential to making sure our growers continue to meet the new challenges they face, whether it's developing the next value-added product to better sell what they grow, finding ways to grow products better, or dealing with emerging threats to what they raise. For example, the berry industry is developing what look to be promising methods to exclude the spotted wing drosophila, which can devastate a fruit crop. I can't overemphasize how critical research funding is to our apple, berry, maple, corn, vegetable, honey bee and Turfgrass growers in the state.

We also would like to see two new programs that are important to farms in the state and the next generation. We are asking for \$1.5 million for Agricultural Education that will help preserve and allow new agricultural programs, such as FFA chapters, in our schools. These programs provide agricultural

education on the secondary level and serve as a great training ground for the next generation of farmers and agricultural professionals. It is a bridge to our agricultural colleges at Cornell University, Cobleskill, Morrisville and Alfred, as well as high-tech careers at other state schools. Right now several chapters providing valuable educational resources are at risk and at least 40 new schools would like to start agricultural programs, so this funding would help create the funnel for our next class of beginning farmers.

The second new initiative we would like to see is \$5 million in county fair infrastructure funding. Our county fairs across the state serve to connect consumers to the farmers in their communities and get up close and personal to agriculture. Many of our fairs, located in the center of their communities, are dilapidated and overdue for significant improvements. This funding would be used to update basic needs like sewer and water systems, bathroom facilities and to provide handicapped accessibility. This will not only make the summer fair experience safer and more pleasant, but help these fairgrounds draw other events to ensure their long-term sustainability. After a \$50 million investment in our flagship New York State Fairgrounds last year, this funding is equally important to invest in our local fairs.

New York Farm Bureau was very pleased to see the Governor's significant expansion of the Environmental Protection Fund from \$177 million to \$300 million and we encourage the Legislature to support this proposal. The EPF champions the partnership between agriculture and the environment by funding farm environmental programs and protecting working lands.

The proposed expansions to the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement Program and Soil and Water Conservation District services is key this year as our livestock farmers look at further enhancing environmental stewardship to meet compliance with new Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permits that go into effect mid-year. Increases to the Farmland Protection Program will help ensure that we have resources to protect irreplaceable farmland from encroaching development statewide. The funding for Invasive Species eradication protects our natural resources from the pests that could wipe out the native species and diversity of species that our state enjoys. The Agricultural Waste Management Program remains important farmers as well.

The Integrated Pest Management program has been doubled by the Governor in his budget proposal to \$1 million and we support both this increase and moving this line from the Agriculture and Markets budget into the EPF, which makes sense. This program has been severely underfunded for years and provides valuable information to farmers so they can better manage pesticide applications to limit frequency, best target the specific threat and decrease input costs.

We also appreciate the Governor's proposed funding dedicated to Soil and Water Conservation Districts to assist farmers with climate resiliency. This \$2.5 million will build on the first-year funding of \$500,000 last year to assist farmers in better addressing environmental protection and sustainability when experiencing more intense weather events. Farmers enjoy the partnership with the state created by all the agricultural-related programs in the EPF so they can better care for the 25 percent of the land in New York for which they are responsible.

While the EPF is a true highlight of the Governor's budget, there are some other aspects that are distressing. We have concerns about the Governor's plan to move the agricultural and dairy orders from the authority of the Department of Agriculture and Markets into Empire State Development and encourage the Legislature to carefully consider this proposal. These orders are for the promotion, research and development of specific commodities in the state, approved by the growers of that commodity in an official vote. They have entrusted their own money—yes, this is money that producers access on themselves for the betterment of their industry—to the Department which understands their business, their challenges and their long-term goals. While ESD has been very helpful and has made significant contributions to promoting New York food and beverages in recent years and we hope for many more successes led by the Corporation, the expertise for things like research into cabbage harvest methods and dairy nutritional education really lies with the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

We are also extremely concerned by the Governor's plan to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2021 in Upstate New York. Our farmers support the ability of every individual in this state to excel and they want to help their employees do so as well, but this proposal is just not compatible with farming in this state.

Not only would this be a 67 percent increase in the minimum wage, but \$15 an hour would be \$5 per hour more than the highest state minimum wage in the country, which is \$10 per hour in California. In fact, this wage would be more than double the wage in our neighboring state of Pennsylvania, which is still at the federal minimum of \$7.25. Many of the other states that our specialty crop and dairy industries compete with are below our current minimum wage of \$9 per hour. Farms are pricetakers operating on already thin margins and this would make it nearly impossible for them to compete against much lower cost states in this country, let alone farms abroad.

We have calculated that this minimum wage increase would cost farmers \$500 million each year. Our farmers are already paying above minimum wage, \$12.36 on average, to farm workers in the state. This increase would also completely destroy the job market for young people and those just entering the work force, who may start out at minimum wage before moving up the wage scale as they learn the job and new skills.

With dairy farmers producing milk for a price below the cost of production right now—meaning they lose money on every gallon of milk that goes to the grocery store—it is difficult to imagine how they could absorb this kind of increase in this business climate. When our fruit and vegetable farmers exist on a sometimes razor thin margin to be competitive due to our already higher business costs, we are going to penalize the very farms that can least afford a wage increase. Quite frankly, this will put farms out of business. We believe the solution to setting the minimum wage is doing so on the federal level so our farmers are not automatically priced out of the market.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have today or at any later time.