



NEWS FROM NEW YORK FARM BUREAU

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NEW YORK FARM BUREAU RELEASES 2017 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

New York Farm Bureau released its 2017 state priorities today that seek to address a significant loss in farm income across the state. These priorities will include supporting reinvestment into the state's family farms as well as opening up new markets for New York farm products.

The past two years agriculture has been under additional economic pressures with low commodity and milk prices and rising labor costs. The Governor has been quick to highlight when times are good for the agricultural economy, but new numbers just released by National Agricultural Statistics Service show the value of farm production in New York dropped by a billion dollars in 2015 to \$5.33 billion. That is a significant loss in farm income, and anecdotally Farm Bureau members are saying that farm income will likely drop even further when 2016 numbers are released.

"The 16% drop in farm income highlights why it is imperative that New York Farm Bureau advocate for common sense laws, regulations, and tax policies that support the state's family farms," said David Fisher, New York Farm Bureau President, in a press conference call with reporters this morning.

The first priority for the organization is to enact a refundable investment tax credit for farmers. Because of the down farm economy and the weather-related crop losses many farmers experienced last year, farmers are extremely short on cash flow and many do not have the savings to reinvest back into their businesses. This initiative would incentivize farm investment to meet the needs of global competition.

"It is important for farms and the rural economy, that farmers stay on top of equipment needs, structural repairs and new technology in order to meet consumer demands and business needs. We cannot let our farm infrastructure take a hit during an economic downturn," said Fisher.

Another top priority is doubling the minimum wage tax credit for farms, from \$30 million to \$60 million. The first step of the wage hike climbed at the beginning of the year on its way to \$15 for farms on Long Island and \$12.50 for upstate farmers. New York Farm Bureau led the way in opposition to the hike last year, resulting in a \$250 tax credit per employee for this first year of the increase. That will cover only a small fraction of what it will cost family farms to implement

the wage hike. The minimum wage increase will also push all wages up across the board, including for those who currently make well above the minimum. The average farm wage in New York is around \$12.40/hour.

“Farms cannot just increase their prices to make up for that growing gap. They have to compete against farms in neighboring states and around the world. If the state is going to force a higher wage on farms, they should be prepared to offer greater assistance, especially when farm income is down 16%,” said Fisher.

Securing State funding for critical farm programs is also a top priority for New York Farm Bureau. The Governor included a number of positive things in his budget plan, which will be beneficial to agriculture. This includes strong funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, which will assist farms with water quality, conservation and farmland protection programs. There is also money to support agricultural education and FFA programs that will assist in job and skills training to meet future employment demands in agriculture.

New York Farm Bureau will also work with the legislature and Governor to restore important funding for things like research, technical assistance and promotion dollars that support the diversity of New York’s farms. In addition, the organization is hopeful the Governor’s \$2 billion plan to improve the state’s water infrastructure and water quality will include significant money for conservation projects on farms across the state.

“New York Farm Bureau has pushed for this important investment with the administration. It will improve on our strong record of environmental stewardship in New York,” said Fisher.

The buy local movement continues to grow across the state, and New York Farm Bureau believes New York residents should not be the only ones to turn to their farmers first. The State of New York should do so as well.

That leads to the organization’s fourth priority, advocating for legislation that will provide a procurement preference for New York grown food for state institutional purchasing. This would be for food served in universities, prisons, and other New York State run facilities. There has been a greater focus on procurement by the administration, but we believe more should be done to make New York products a priority.

“This will open up new markets for New York’s farmers. For only pennies more, the state can support its farmers and get more fresh, local food into the state system,” said Jeff Williams, New York Farm Bureau’s Public Policy Director.

Finally, another top priority for farmers is a state tax credit for donations of locally grown food by farmers to food banks. The Governor has vetoed this bill twice. While he expressed support for the idea, his major objection was that the legislature passed it outside of the budget. New York Farm Bureau is asking the Governor to fund it this time around.

The tax credit would be for 25% of the wholesale value of the donated food and no more than \$5,000 per farm. The impact to the overall budget will be quite small in comparison to the \$152

billion spending plan. We estimate it would be around \$700,000. However, its impact will be far reaching.

“It will help farmers offset a portion of the costs of picking, packing and transporting the food to regional food banks. More importantly, it will allow more locally-sourced food to be shared with those in need all over the state,” said Williams.

In 2016, farmers donated more than 13-million pounds of food to their regional food banks, which is more than 10 million meals. This is a new record for the state’s farmers and demonstrates their generosity. However, the “Farm to Food Bank” bill would incentivize even greater food donations and that record number would climb even higher.

New York Farm Bureau establishes its priorities every year. Members of 52 county Farm Bureaus voice their opinions and vote on public policy resolutions at the county level. Those make their way to the State Annual Meeting each December where farmer delegates cast their votes that determine the organization’s positions on legislative issues. The State Board of Directors then establishes the priorities for the year.

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New York Farm Bureau is the State’s largest agricultural lobbying/trade organization. Its members and the public know the organization as “The Voice of New York Agriculture.” New York Farm Bureau is dedicated to solving the economic and public policy issues challenging the agricultural community.