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## **NEWS FROM NEW YORK FARM BUREAU**

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## **NY FARM BUREAU UNVEILS NATIONAL PRIORITIES**

### *Immigration reform is among the major agenda items for 2015*

While in Washington, DC meeting with members of the state's congressional delegation, New York Farm Bureau released its national public policy priorities for the year. The agenda originated at the grassroots level and is member approved.

### **IMMIGRATION REFORM**

Immigration reform remains a top priority for the state's farmers and their employees. NYFB has long pushed for a flexible guest-worker visa program that addresses both seasonal and long-term needs of New York agriculture. There is of special concern as the House of Representatives is looking to move ahead with an enforcement only action that American Farm Bureau Federation estimates could cost the country's farmers as much as \$60 billion and raise food prices by 5-6%. New York Farm Bureau is calling for a comprehensive approach to immigration reform that also takes agricultural labor needs into account.

"We need a stable workforce on our farms that benefits the rural economy and the local food supply," said NYFB President Dean Norton during the conference call with reporters. "It must be comprehensive. Enforcement-only reforms put the chicken before the egg so to speak. They all need to go together."

### **FOOD SAFETY**

The implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is also a public policy priority. New York's farmers already participate in a host of food safety programs and audits, but the FDA is instituting new food safety rules. This past year NYFB submitted comments to the FDA over its planned rollout of FSMA. NYFB is pleased that many of the concerns were addressed relating to proposed requirements for animal feed and the commodity value threshold that would trigger the new regulations on an individual farm. However, there are additional changes that NYFB would like to see before the rules take effect.

This includes reworking the unscientific standards FDA has established for irrigation water. The organization will continue to work with the FDA and fellow stakeholders so the final rules address the real risks that exist and can be successfully implemented on our farms. In the end, both public health and agriculture will benefit.

## **CLEAN WATER ACT EXPANSION**

New York Farm Bureau has long been in opposition to proposed changes to the Clean Water Act that it believe broadens the jurisdiction from navigable waters to dry land. This month farmers had a partial victory in their campaign when the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers withdrew their interpretive rule as mandated by both Congress and the President. Contrary to what the agencies had claimed, the farm exemptions provided in the Interpretive Rule actually narrowed “normal farming and ranching” exemptions by imposing burdensome new requirements for farmers and ranchers.

NYFB will continue to advocate for the repeal of the full rule through Congressional action to stop the EPA and the Army Corps from expanding federal jurisdiction onto New York farms.

## **FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION**

NYFB has been closely monitoring the USDA’s rollout of the 2014 Farm Bill. It is imperative that the new programs and expanded crop insurance follow the intent of the law that was passed.

Nearly half of the dairy farms in New York State have signed up for the new Margin Protection Program. This will offer a safety net should dropping milk prices fall below a selected margin, which is the gap between the price of milk and the cost of feed. Over the past few months, lower milk prices have underscored the need for effective risk management. NYFB will work with lawmakers to insure that it is meeting the needs as it was intended.

The organization will also review the development of new and enhanced programs for specialty crops, including the NAP buy-up crop insurance program.

## **TRADE**

With a growing export market for a number of things that farmers produce in New York, New York Farm Bureau will continue to support the next generation of trade negotiations that remove unscientific barriers and high tariffs and provide new opportunities for our farms.

This includes renewing the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA). It is imperative that the White House and Congress be on the same page during trade negotiations. Swift passage in Congress without additional individual member amendments to already negotiated pacts is essential to having successful trade policy.

NYFB will also continue to oppose limitations based on the use of geographic indicators. New York is a big dairy producing state, but if farms and cooperatives can’t market cheeses based on how they are known around the world, like parmesan for instance, this will put New York products at a serious competitive disadvantage.

## **LOCAL FOOD AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

NYFB's final top priority will be to support additional funding for school and local food purchasing programs, food infrastructure initiatives and food-based entrepreneurship programs. Funding was for these was allocated in the Farm Bill and it serves many important needs. For one, it connects farmers with those who often have limited access to healthy food. This includes children and seniors in low income communities or urban food deserts. Not only do these programs put food on the table but they also support local farms in New York.

This priority also includes efforts to increase farmer food donations. Last year, New York's farmers donated a record amount of food, more than 10-million pounds, to regional food banks across the state. NYFB would like to see that climb even higher.

Its members support the Fighting Hunger Incentive Tax Act that would help offset the costs of harvesting, packaging and transporting the food to the donation site. Corporations, like big box stores, receive a similar tax credit for food donations, and they are not the ones actually growing the food.

"We want to encourage greater donations and provide an important source of fresh, local food for low-income New Yorkers who may not have access to this food otherwise," said Elizabeth Wolters, NYFB's Associate Director of National Affairs. "It's a win-win for our communities and our farms."

"New York agriculture is a large part of the state's economy. Over \$5 billion in direct farm receipts and more than 200,000 jobs are created by agriculture. These issues are important to us as we strive to move the economy forward. We look forward to working with our congressional representatives to make sure that happens for us on the national level," said Norton.