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NEWS FROM NEW YORK FARM BUREAU

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NEW YORK FARM BUREAU RELEASES 2015 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

“Investing in agriculture is investing in New York”

New York Farm Bureau outlined its 2015 state priorities today that will create a stronger economic climate for every farmer in the state. NYFB President Dean Norton laid out the legislative agenda during a press conference call with the media that included NYFB’s Public Policy Director, Jeff Williams.

“Investing in agriculture is investing in New York,” said Norton. “Our farms make large contributions to their rural economies and the character of their communities both upstate and on Long Island.”

President Norton highlighted a couple of initiatives that look to drive the farm economy including support for a refundable investment tax credit. This would encourage greater investment into equipment and also be helpful for younger farmers who may be in greater need of capital to handle the startup costs of owning a farm. That money typically stays right in their communities. Purchasing construction supplies, machinery, or new technology has a multiplier effect supporting additional local businesses and jobs.

In addition, Norton called for reforming New York’s inherent risk law for equine operations. Many horse farms across the state are increasingly concerned about the rising costs of insurance for horse boarding operations and riding stables. Many 4-H clubs no longer can house horses because of the insurance liability. 46 states recognize this concern and it is time for New York to join their ranks. Without reform, running a horse related business that also supports tourism and the joy of riding is becoming more difficult.

A number of NYFB priorities for this year look to expand access to local food. This includes support for regional food hubs and requiring the NYS Office of General Services to provide OGS warehouse space to house local food product for transport to state institutions and schools. A stronger food distribution system will help connect farms with more consumers, especially in urban areas.

To encourage even greater farmer participation in donation programs and to get more food to low-income New Yorkers who need it, NYFB is advocating for a tax credit for locally grown donations by farmers to food banks. This will help offset some of the production costs while also supporting some of New York's neediest families who are looking to put healthy food on their dinner tables.

NYFB has long been a supporter of the State's Environmental Protection Fund. This money provides for the cost-sharing of a number of critical programs farmers use to protect water quality. It is also earmarked for Soil and Water Conservation Districts, farmland preservation, and efforts to combat invasive species. NYFB is encouraged by the funding increase in Governor's Cuomo's budget and will work with the legislature to secure even more money for these necessary programs. The same goes for additional dollars to fund research and promotion programs for many different commodities including wine and grapes, apples, maple, bees, turf grass and Christmas trees.

NYFB also is asking the legislature to reestablish funding in the state budget for Quality Assurance and Quality Control programs for CAFO planners across New York. These are the people who design and implement certified nutrient management plans on farms to help safeguard the environment and public health. It is essential that we invest in the planners so they can all perform at the same high standards. In addition, this would support continued conservation efforts on dairy farms across the state.

Finally, growing locally produced food means nothing if farmers cannot get the goods to market. That is why NYFB is encouraging additional funding for infrastructure improvements. Some municipalities have had to lower weight limits on bridges instead of addressing real structural issues. This causes large farm equipment and transport trucks to go miles out of their way, wasting fuel and driving up transportation costs.

On a similar note, NYFB would like to see the creation of a "Farm E-Z Pass" that would provide a discount to farmers hauling product along the Thruway. This would again reduce road and bridge tolls for farms delivering food to places like New York City, making the trip, and ultimately the food, more affordable for farmers and consumers alike.

"We are the largest industry in upstate New York and we can help a lot of local communities with their job growth and tax base by investing into food and farming programs," said Jeff Williams, NYFB Public Policy Director, during the press conference call.