

2022 NYFB .Congressional

Candidate Questionnaire

New York Farm Bureau • 159 Wolf Rd., Suite 300, Albany, NY 12205 • 1-800-342-4143 •
<http://www.nyfb.org>

Election Day is rapidly approaching, and as New York's largest farm advocacy organization, New York Farm Bureau invites you to complete the enclosed agricultural issues survey and share your opinions regarding a number of farm and rural issues impacting the New York agricultural industry. As you are well aware, there are a number of important public policy issues confronting farmers and our members need a clear understanding of how candidates plan to address these issues. Your responses to the survey questions will be printed in the October 2022 edition of our newspaper, Grassroots, a Farm Bureau publication sent to our membership, industry leaders, and local libraries, with a circulation of close to 21,000. In order to ensure that your survey response is included in the October issue, please respond by Friday, September 9, 2022 and please keep your responses to a maximum of 150 words per question as space is limited. Anything beyond the 150-word limit will not be printed. As always, it should be noted that a failure to respond, by any of the candidates, will be noted in Grassroots as well.

Please return your responses along with a headshot to: lwilliams@nyfb.org

Should you have any questions regarding the survey or farm issues in general, please do not hesitate to contact Lauren Williams at (518) 588-6338 or lwilliams@nyfb.org .

1. What do you think is the largest issue facing farmers in this district?

No one issue seems to apply to all the farmers in the district. Loss of family farms is an often-voiced concern. I fear unless we support family farms, we will lose them forever. Beginning farmers need capital. Demographics show the average NY farm producer is over 55 years of age. Without help, younger people will be unable to carry on the legacy of family farms in the Southern Tier and Western NY. Congress can help by providing access to long-term, low-interest loans.

One other thing Congress can do to help small agricultural producers: reward family farms for their efforts to improve their land. Topsoil is a precious resource. It is estimated we lose about 1% of our topsoil every year. It seems we should incentivize our farmers to protect our soil by appropriate use of cover crops, landscaping, pesticides, and fertilizer. By doing so, an additional benefit would be to improve our nation's wetlands.

2. One of the biggest challenges for New York agriculture is having access to reliable, skilled labor when domestic workers cannot meet this need. Delays in the H-2A program have frustrated farmers and led to loss of crops and unknown legal status of current workers are all concerns that farmers have when it comes to a dependable workforce. How do you see Congress moving forward to address agricultural immigration in a bipartisan manner?

Immigration policy is currently one of the most divisive issues in our country. There are problems with our immigration system, and we need to fix them, but we should continue to open our doors to people from all over the world who want to join our great country. Anything less is un-American.

Even if the H-2A program functioned well, it would not meet our dairy farmers' needs because it's a seasonal worker program. Dairy farming is a year-round, 365-day-per-year industry. There are migrant workers willing to sign on for a year or multiple-years-at-a-time to work in the industry, pay taxes and social security and send money to their home country. Congress would serve the industry well to create such a program and perhaps create a path to citizenship.

3. Despite growing and raising diverse agricultural products in New York, farmers still face challenges in getting food from the rural areas of our farms to the suburban and urban locations of so many consumers. What would you do to help bridge this divide? What efforts would you take to ensure farmers are able to have reliable markets for their goods?

This is a complex logistics, communication, and marketing problem. Agricultural products are often perishable, and no single small farmer has marketing, storage, distribution, and transportation capabilities to distribute and sell products without adversely affecting their efforts to plant, grow and harvest their crops. Small farmers do not individually produce the breadth and variety of what is needed by individual consumers, grocery stores, or restaurants. So, despite the fact locally grown agricultural products are of generally higher quality (from a taste and nutritional standpoint) purchasers of these goods gravitate to larger producers through large distributors. There has been some limited success in affluent areas where niche distributors provide locally sourced agricultural products (e.g., Ithaca/Finger Lakes Region) but success requires great effort, results in increased costs, and is highly seasonal. At the same time large urban areas are fruit and vegetable deserts. Congress may be able to partner with food banks to provide support for the farmers and support for those urban dwellers of more modest means in desperate need of these agricultural products.

4. Farmers are known as stewards of the land, and agriculture plays a critical role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through conservation practices and renewable energy. As Congress works to address climate change, how will you ensure that agriculture is part of the conversation?

As I am not a farmer myself, I know when I do not have all the answers. I've found I learn more when I listen, an attitude I think Congress could greatly benefit from. So, given the opportunity, I would engage the Farm Bureau as a valuable resource to learn of specific needs, to discuss potential solutions, and to hear from the stakeholders. When in doubt, defer to the experts—a partnership that is long overdue.