



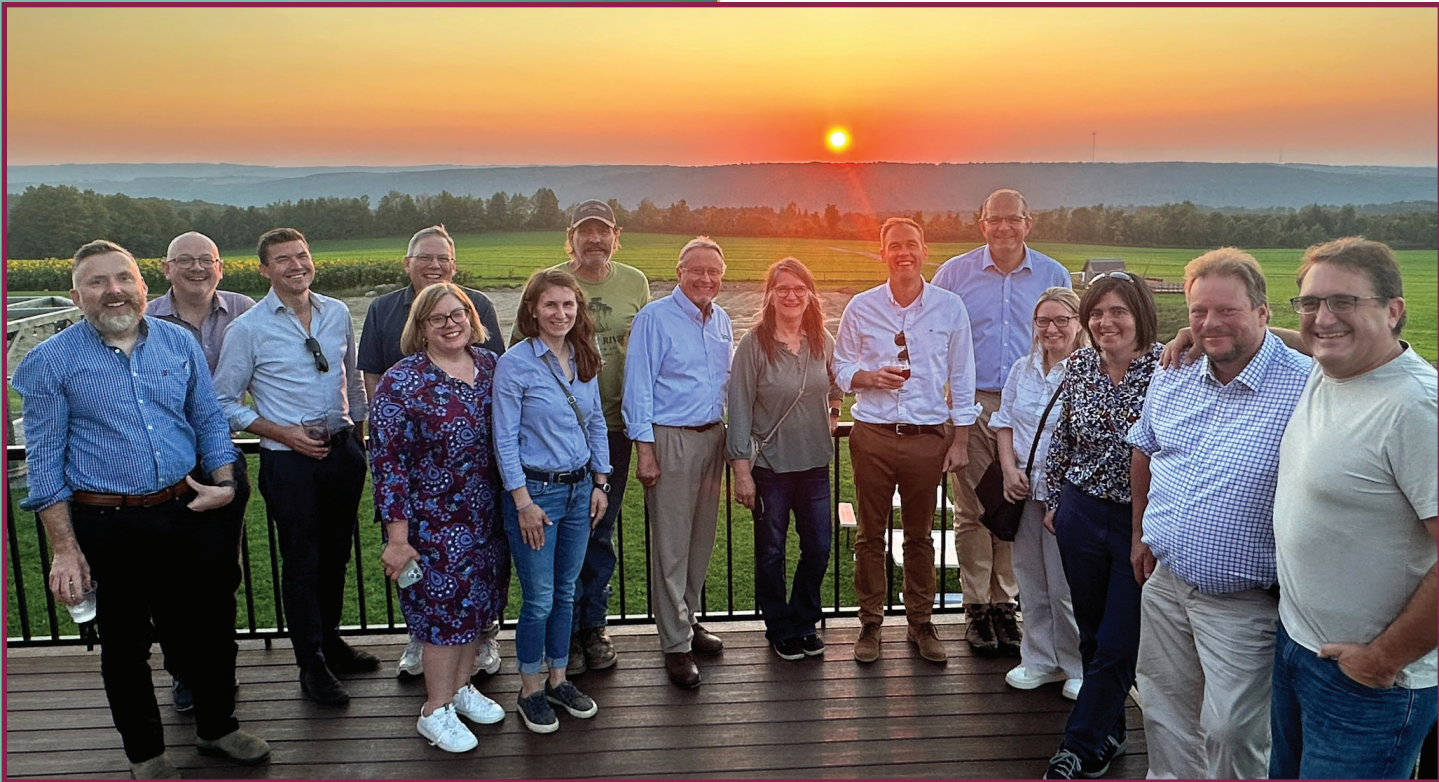
NEW YORK FARM BUREAU

# ANNUAL REPORT

2024







Members of U.K.'s National Farm Union enjoyed a sunset at Palladino Farms with New York State farming representatives in September.



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518-436-8495

## NYFB Hosts Farm Tours for U.K. Group

NYFB was honored to host a four-day tour of farms across New York State for members and associates of the National Farm Union (NFU) of England and Wales, our counterparts in the United Kingdom.

The whirlwind tour of 14 member farms covered hundreds of miles, from Syracuse to Rochester. Participants also visited several farm-to-table restaurants, breweries and vineyards, enjoying a wide variety of New York specialty products. Most importantly, NYFB and NFU shared strategies and tips, proving the event to be a valuable exchange of information.



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# PRESIDENT FISHER'S MESSAGE

Behind everything we do at New York Farm Bureau is you: our members. As the strongest advocacy organization for farmers in the state, we are committed to putting our members first. That means everything from offering webinars, forums and other educational opportunities to serving as lead advocates on public policies critical to the agricultural industry in New York.



Over the course of the year, I have been thinking a lot about our County Farm Bureaus and how they are a critical link to our membership. Without our county managers and staff, we wouldn't have a lifeline to connect our members to resources in real time. A great example of that is when TreeTops Cidery was nearly blocked from doing business when the Town of Jerusalem revoked their operating permit and attempted to have them removed from the agricultural district. The owners reached out to Yates County FB leaders, who lobbied the Farmland Protection Board to keep TreeTops within the district. Their efforts were ultimately successful, and TreeTops was able to keep its doors open.

Whether it's local issues like this one or statewide priority legislative issues – such as the successful passage of the Direct to Consumer bill, which allows distilleries and cideries to ship their products – Farm Bureau is the voice of farmers involved in every commodity, large or small.

From our annual Young Farmers & Ranchers Conference and our popular Taste of New York reception to our ever-growing State Annual Convention – which saw a record attendance this year – we help make connections in the industry and, together with our dedicated members, keep farming strong.

This Annual Report represents the hard work of our members, leaders and staff. But we can't keep growing without you. I'm always open to hear your suggestions on how we can improve.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Fisher'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

**David Fisher, NYFB President**

## NYFB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**President:** David Fisher

**Vice President:** Kim Skellie

**District 1:** Lavern Warriner

**District 2:** Brad Macauley

**District 3:** Ryan Akin

**District 4:** Darleen Krisher-Meehan

**District 5:** Dan Palladino

**District 6:** Adam Miner

**District 7:** Michael Murphy

**District 8:** Paul Molesky Jr.

**District 9:** Steven Smith

**District 10:** Tim Dressel

**District 11:** Karen Rivara

**Chair, Promotion and Education Committee:**  
Bill Zalakar

**Chair, Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee:**  
Rich De Meyer

## NYFB AG ALLIANCE MEMBERS

**Agri-Mark Cooperative Inc.**

**New York State Turfgrass Association**

**NYS Maple Producers Association**

**Upstate Niagara Cooperative Inc.**

**Hop Growers of New York, Inc.**

**NYS Vegetable Growers Association**

**Dairy Marketing Services LLC**

**Northeast Dairy Producers Association Inc.**

**New York Wine & Grape Foundation**

**New York Apple Association Inc.**

**Empire State Forest Products Association**

**NYS Association of Agricultural Fairs**

**Farm Credit East**

**New York Thoroughbred Breeders Inc.**

**NY Association of Agricultural Educators**

**NYS Agribusiness Association**

**NYS Horticultural Society**





## STATEWIDE FARM TOUR

NYFB was proud to host 55 members from Kentucky Farm Bureau in June as part of their annual livestock commodity member tour across the state. The group visited 11 NYFB member farms to learn about production methods across the state, including touring several beef farms. The tour provided a valuable opportunity to learn from one another and showcase New York agriculture. Above: Jeff Harvey, a wine maker at Ventosa Vineyards in Geneva N.Y, gives a tour.

## Our Organization in Action

**N**ew York Farm Bureau continues to be the leading advocacy group for farmers across the state. Through active participation, members propose and vote on public policy positions, ensuring grassroots input in shaping the organization's direction. These positions reflect Farm Bureau's stance on both state and national issues, with additional support from county-level Farm Bureau activities.

The organization also offers valuable networking opportunities, leadership training, and educational resources to help members enhance the success of their farms and agribusinesses. With over a century of strength and influence, NYFB remains a vital and enduring force in the agricultural community.



## NATIONAL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

At the 2024 American Farm Bureau Federation Convention in Salt Lake City, NYFB members and staff cheered on as our organization won four excellence awards for outstanding programming in advocacy; coalitions and partnerships; engagement; and outreach. AFBF President Zippy Duvall also spoke about the success and teamwork of this great organization.





On March 1-2, farmers from across the state spent two days in Albany visiting with lawmakers to highlight New York Farm Bureau's public policy priorities for the year.

Kicking things off was the popular Taste of New York Reception at the Empire State Plaza, which welcomed state lawmakers, commissioners and staff.

**TASTE OF NEW YORK RECEPTION**

# Connecting Farmers and Lawmakers



**LOBBY TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.**



**PRESIDENT FISHER AT THE STATE CAPITOL**

**Above:** NYFB President David Fisher was a special guest at the New York State Senate Agriculture Committee Meeting in April. He spoke about a number of important legislative priority issues, especially as state budget negotiations were wrapping up in Albany. He also discussed the state of New York agriculture and the pressures farms are facing.

**Left:** Leading the charge for New York's agricultural community, NYFB National Affairs Coordinator Ashley Oeser (center), NYFB Vice President Eric Ooms (right) and NYFB Member Dale Hemminger converged in our nation's capital in June to champion the interests of the state's hard-working farmers.





2024 NYFB Legislative Tour attendees gathered in Schoharie County on a beautiful fall day.

# Public Policy Department

## STATE ACTIVITY

New York Farm Bureau's public policy team has had a busy year working on policy issues impacting NYFB members. The team continuously met with legislators and staff along with coordinating lobby days for agricultural alliance members and attending lobby days on specific advocacy efforts supported by NYFB policy.

The team also spoke at several press conferences. The NYFB Taste of New York Reception was highly attended, including a visit from Gov. Kathy Hochul. NYFB members from all over the state continued the advocacy efforts by meeting with legislators during NYFB Lobby Day.

The state legislative session ended with multiple successes for New York agriculture, including important funding for agricultural programs in the state budget and, most notably, legislation providing craft spirit and cider makers the ability to directly ship to their customers. Also, NYFB was able to stop two bills that would negatively impact farms: the Extended Producer Responsibility Act, which would negatively impact agricultural producers and food processors, ultimately making food more expensive in the state, and the TEMP Act, which would have set new workplace standards when temperatures top 80 degrees, hardly a heat extreme.

Throughout the summer and fall, NYFB's public policy staff attended farm tours and met with legislators to discuss ongoing policy issues impacting farms. This year, the NYFB Legislative Farm Tour was held in Schoharie County. More than 45 people attended, including state legislators as well as staff from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, USDA-NRCS, NYSEDA, the Governor's Office, the Senate, the Assembly and the NYC Mayor's Office of Food Policy.

The tour stops were SUNY Cobleskill, Stone House Farm, Schoharie Valley Farm/Carrot Barn, Central Bridge

Farm, Shaul Farms, and Barber Farm. This event is a great opportunity for attendees to not only visit farms, but also to learn about legislation and regulation impacting New York agriculture.

The NYFB public policy team continues to build and strengthen relationships with leaders in the state legislature and state agencies. NYFB thanks all the NYFB members who share their policy ideas during the policy development process and participate in grassroots advocacy by meeting with legislators and their staff.

## FEDERAL UPDATE

New York Farm Bureau's interactions at the federal level are a critical part of its grassroots advocacy, which includes working with members of the New York Congressional delegation and advocating for sound regulatory reforms with agencies and the administration.

In 2024, New York Farm Bureau members continued to advocate for passing a farm bill that meets the needs of our farmers today. We also continued to lobby for agricultural immigration reform, especially for that of the H-2A program, that recognizes the unique needs of farms in the Northeast.

In addition, New York Farm Bureau submitted regulatory comments on various proposed agency rules, including the restrictions on Mancozeb and Captan, the Northeast Federal Milk Marketing Order, the Department of Labor Farm Labor Survey, treated seeds, animal waste air emissions regulations and amendments to Commercial Driver's License requirements. Through these efforts, New York Farm Bureau was able to achieve policy priorities.

New York Farm Bureau was able to accomplish these measures by hosting a number of Washington, D.C. lobby events this year. Our farmer members traveled to the Capitol with support from the state organization. Many Farm Bureau members also met with and interacted with their Congressional representative in their district offices.



# County Farm Bureau Relations and Development



NYFB Board member Steven Smith leads a CHAT meeting.

## NEW IN 2024: CHAT MEETINGS

Our 52 County Farm Bureaus in New York State utilize almost 550 volunteer members to carry out the programming of their local county Farm Bureau organizations. During a very busy fall harvest season, 112 participants, representing 20% of total board members across the state, attended County Health Assessment Training (CHAT) meetings. Six counties – Clinton, Cortland, Genesee, Long Island, Tompkins and Wayne – each sent more than five participants.

The sessions were designed to boost segments of Farm Bureau's key objectives that were deemed deficient by a survey of county boards completed earlier this year. Because areas of national advocacy, membership plan implementation and committee use fell short of our desired level of execution, New York Farm Bureau's training staff set to work developing resources and providing instruction on these topics at 10 locations across the state.

Our training materials were designed with the assistance of New York Farm Bureau Associate Director of Public Policy and National Affairs Coordinator Ashley Oeser; Associate Director of Membership Development and Engagement Thomas Denman; and County Managers/ Training Specialists Todd Heyn and Tim Bigham. The organization was a recipient of a strategic action fund grant from American Farm Bureau that was used to defray some of the costs associated with this training.



Wayne County Farm Tour



St. Lawrence County's Day at the Farm



Kentucky Farm Bureau Tour



Tioga County's booth at Sundaes at the Farm event.



Business  
Solution  
Partners:

# Member Advocacy



Membership is at the heart of our New York Farm Bureau. Our success lies in the strength of our members. As an organization, it's imperative that we remain focused on providing value to current members while planning for the needs of the farmer of the future. For the past 12 months, we have focused on a campaign called Membership Matters. The campaign goals were to prioritize member value, increase retention and provide tools to help attract new members.

We have expanded our member savings and business solutions offerings. At the state level, we have numerous partnerships with statewide organizations that, if used, will put dollars back in our members' pockets. We launched a County Value Discount program to expand the value offered locally to members. This program empowers County Farm Bureaus to partner with local businesses to offer additional members-only savings. In our first year, we were able to bring on 42 new partners. These programs have been regularly promoted in *Grassroots* and in our weekly e-news alerts.

The 2024 year brought a fundamental shift in our membership cycle when we switched from a calendar year membership to an anniversary membership. The new structure presented an opportunity to strengthen our retention efforts by creating an efficient, effective and scalable renewal communication plan. Our "No Member Left Behind" campaign automated a 105-day renewal cycle with for each renewal month. Renewing members receive print, email and phone communications at strategic times during their renewal cycle. Our goal through the plan is to create easy opportunities for members to renew their membership and continue their commitment to New York Farm Bureau.

New York Farm Bureau is committed to the success of farms of all sizes and commodities. In 2024, we focused on promoting specific value to different segments of agriculture across New York. We now have a suite of resources, including an updated membership toolkit, to help our members tell Farm Bureau's story and share with



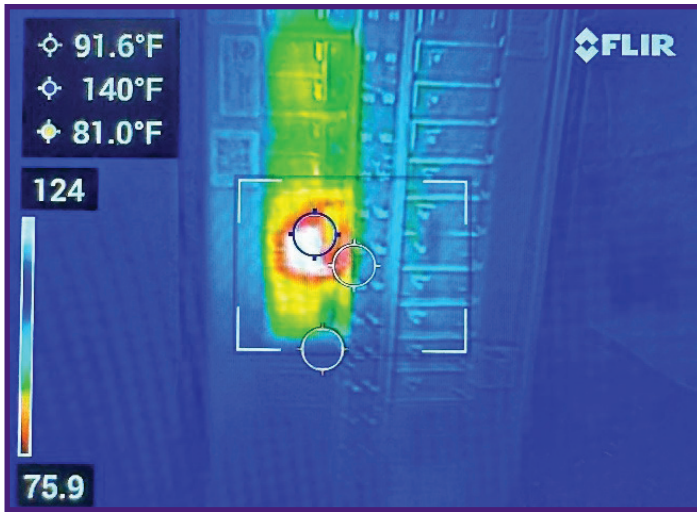
Associate Director of Membership Development and Engagement Thomas Denman represented New York Farm Bureau at the Christmas Tree Farmers Association of N.Y. conference in Sodus.

others the value of our organization.

In addition to new collateral, we expanded our efforts to help County Farm Bureaus find success in membership. We identified more than 5,000 prospective members and helped counties develop outreach plans. Outreach included member testimonials and policy-related items particular to their commodity or farm type. We were able to engage with more than half of our counties to help communicate directly with more than 2,500 prospective members.

We have generated an excitement around membership in 2024 that has us on a path to success. We will continue to grow our suite of resources in 2025 as we strive to help County Farm Bureaus thrive.





This image from a thermal imaging device shows a hot spot in a fuse box using infrared technology.

## A Strong Partnership for a Brighter Future

As we celebrate our thirteenth year of partnership, the bond between the New York Farm Bureau and Nationwide® continues to strengthen. In 2024, we remained dedicated to empowering farmers across New York with innovative risk management solutions that safeguard their livelihoods and ensure the continuity of their operations.



This year, we took a significant step forward by introducing cutting-edge technology into our farming community. Through a groundbreaking field trial, we equipped farmers with Teledyne FLIR thermal imaging cameras, enabling them to experience technology to monitor their farms. County managers distributed these cameras to members, setting the stage for a transformative approach to risk management that will continue into 2025.

Nationwide is committed to providing our members with comprehensive personal and farm insurance coverage, as well as access to essential financial services like Land As Your Legacy®. This invaluable program is designed to help farmers navigate the generational transfer of their farms, ensuring that their hard work and heritage are preserved for the future.

Together, Nationwide and the Farm Bureau are planning for a future that prioritizes the needs of our members while fostering growth and resilience in our agricultural community.

## LOCAL ENGAGEMENT 2024



**8.2 million**  
pounds of food  
donated to Harvest  
for All, plus 200  
volunteer hours

**105**  
County Farm  
Bureau  
events across  
the state

**\$85,000**  
donated to community activities,  
such as FFA, 4-H and food banks

**\$37,000**  
awarded in youth scholarships



Chris Kelly received the Golden Owl award during the New York FFA State Convention.

## Kelly Named Golden Owl Winner

Chris Kelly, an agricultural teacher at Greenwich Central School, was named New York's grand prize winner and 2023-2024 Ag Educator of the Year.

Nationwide, in partnership with the New York Farm Bureau and New York FFA, recognized Kelly as the Golden Owl Award grand prize winner during the New York FFA State Convention. In addition to the title of New York's Ag Educator of the Year, Kelly will receive the coveted Golden Owl Award trophy, and Greenwich Central School will receive a \$3,000 donation to further its agricultural education efforts.

Kelly's nominations described him as hardworking, selfless and caring. One nomination read, "No matter what class you take with him, it will be your favorite class. He always makes a fun learning environment for his students and offers to help them succeed."



# Communications Department



From left: Brooks Brown, Steve Ammerman and Seth Moser-Katz in Waco.

New York Farm Bureau's communications team won two American Farm Bureau Communications Awards at May's AFBF National Communications Conference in Waco, Texas. The awards included Best Audio News Story, Feature Story or Commentary/Editorial for the NYFB News Bytes Podcast featuring a conversation with former NYFB President Dick McGuire, and Best Video News Story for a piece that featured the use of treated seeds.

**1,200**  
press mentions

**266,000**  
videos viewed on  
social media

**1.7 million**  
people reached on  
social media

**80,712**  
people engaged  
on social media

**50**  
weekly digital  
newsletters



**Amanda Powers**



**Erik Flora**

**T**he NYFB Communications Department works closely with all departments in the organization to promote Farm Bureau to its members and beyond. Throughout the course of the year, we have increased our focus on telling member stories through beautifully produced social media videos, news articles in our *Grassroots* publication and press releases. In this way, we embrace farmers of all commodities, large or small, and share their success stories as well as their challenges.

We work with our public policy team to promote state and federal legislative priorities. This work includes holding press conferences, writing opinion pieces, meeting with legislators and encouraging members to help us lobby for issues critical to the success of agriculture throughout the state. We also work closely with the events team to promote major initiatives like the NYFB State Annual Convention (StaCon), the

Taste of New York Reception and Lobby Day. And, we work hand-in-hand with the membership team to create cohesive messaging to current and prospective members.

In the spring, we launched a very successful campaign called "Share the Road," a statewide initiative shared and promoted by County Farm Bureaus. Using toolkits provided by American Farm Bureau Federation, we produced signage and press materials to underscore the critical importance of slowing down for farmers on the road, especially during planting and harvest seasons. We also created a stunning video that told the poignant story of a farmer seriously injured in an accident involving a farm vehicle.

Two new team members joined the department this year: Amanda Powers, director of communications, and Erik Flora, assistant director of communications for content creation and digital media.



# Safety Group 486

In 2024, NYFB Safety Group 486 added workers' compensation codes 2081 (Butchering or Slaughtering) and 2089 (Packing Houses). As the definition of agriculture in New York State evolves, SG486 will continue to expand to meet the needs of all members. This year, \$7.776 million was paid to policyholders, representing the 2023 dividend of 45%.

The five-year average dividend is 42%. Plus, eligible policyholders receive the maximum 20% NYSIF upfront discount and an additional 5% through NYFB SG486.

With more than 2,130 active policies and \$914 million in payroll, NYFB Safety Group 486 is the largest NYSIF safety group by policy count. We continue to work with NYSIF Out of State Coverage (OSC) in offering our New York-based business coverage options for locations outside the state.

We are also working with the New York Compensation Insurance Ratings Board in providing more defined operations descriptions for agritourism and aquaculture, with the goal of more appropriate class codes for workers' compensation purposes.



Monica Cody, right, of Farmstead 1868 shows her lavender products to conference participants .

## Food & Farm Experience in Central New York

Farm and Food Experience (FFX), a three-day conference hosted by NYFB in mid-October, welcomed 30 guidance counselors and several presenters to the Craftsman Inn in Fayetteville, N.Y. With a focus on careers in agriculture, the conference featured keynote speaker Monica Cody of Farmstead 1868 and several expert panelists, plus tours of nearby farms, agribusinesses and orchards. The conference was organized by Laurie Beach, NYFB director of events; Johanna Bossard, Barbland and White Eagle Dairy co-owner, ag teacher and FFA advisor; and Katie Carpenter, director, N.Y. Agriculture in the Classroom at Cornell University.



FFX participants at the Milton CAT facility tour.

*"This was one of the best professional development opportunities I have attended. Each session was extremely informative and engaging. The presenters were so passionate about their work! Once I returned to school, I scheduled a meeting with our assistant superintendent to discuss how we can take next steps!"*

FFX participant

## MEMBER SAVINGS 2024



**\$7 million**

paid in dividends to Workers' Compensation Safety Group 486 members

**1,310**

members saved on members-only programs such as Budget, Cat, Choice Hotels, Grainger, Ford and John Deere

**2,150**

members enrolled in Safety Group 486

**\$421,000**

members saved on purchases with Case IH and Caterpillar



# Young Farmers & Ranchers

**T**he NYFB Young Farmers & Ranchers (YF&R) Program continues working to offer programming to our state's young farmers and agricultural professionals. Our state committee meets virtually on a quarterly basis to discuss program planning. This year's annual in-person committee meeting was held on Long Island and included farm tours along with an interactive panel discussion of local leaders.

The state committee continues to work in conjunction with the Harvest for All program by volunteering their time to regional food banks and collecting donated goods. The group partnered this year with Nationwide Insurance to offer informational webinars on topics like risk management and financial planning.



**YF&R members sorted and packaged donated canned goods for Ithaca Kitchen Cupboard food pantry at their winter conference.**

Summer 2024 programming also included a policy picnic and rodeo in Central New York.

NYFB YF&R members joined the State Committee at a leadership conference held on Cornell campus. Several NYFB young farmers, including our 2024 Collegiate Discussion Meet contestant, attended the AFBF YF&R leadership conference in Nebraska. Young farmers participate in monthly AFBF YF&R connect calls to learn more about programs for young farmers and different commodities, and to network with other young farmers from across the country.

They also participated in the YF&R competitive events, the Achievement Award, the Excellence in Agriculture Award and Discussion Meet contests at this past year's AFBF Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.

NYFB works with three active collegiate chapters: Cornell, SUNY Cobleskill and SUNY Morrisville. The chapters conduct regularly scheduled meetings, participate in campus events and offer other activities for students, including farm tours and attendance at NYFB events.

The NYFB YF&R continues to support the youth involved in New York State FFA and 4-H chapters. In the spring, an NYFB representative spoke at the FFA convention, and NYFB offered interactive workshops for FFA students.



**YF&R committee members at Fresh Greens Long Island, a hydroponic operation growing leafy greens in a container.**



**The YF&R committee sponsored tickets to the rodeo for the policy picnic attendees.**



# Promotion & Education

The New York Farm Bureau Promotion and Education (P&E) Program had a successful year of programs and activities. The 2024 State P&E Committee members were Bill Zalakar (Chair), Kathleen Rossette, Jeanette Miller, Jami Thompson, Nikole Watts, Emily Olsenwik, Karen K. Howard, Mary Jeanne Packer, Steven Smith, Courtney Roberts, Laurie McBride, Mallory McCullouch, Chelsea Jones and Edith Skellie.

The committee met virtually multiple times during the year. They also met in July at the NYFB office to discuss current promotion and education activities in the counties, along with the future role of the committee in connecting County Farm Bureaus with promotion and education resources.

The featured book this year was “I LOVE Strawberries” by Shannon Anderson. Thank you to all the NYFB members who visited local classrooms during the week and read this book to elementary students along with doing an educational activity.

AFBF Senior Director, Advocacy and Grassroots Program Development Tom Donnelly attended the meeting and presented on Advocacy, Story Telling and Farm Tours. New York Agriculture in the Classroom Director Katie Carpenter also presented at the meeting on programs her organization offers. During the meeting, the committee toured a freight farm at Broadview Federal Credit Union in Albany and learned how hydroponic container farming is providing produce to local communities.

In March, Bill Zalakar, Mallory McCullouch and Laurie McBride, along with NYFB Senior Associate Director of Public Policy/P&E Program Coordinator Renée St. Jacques, attended the American Farm Bureau Federation Target Training in Columbus, Ohio. They received training on consumer engagement and strategies to help communicate with the public about agriculture. Bill Zalakar continues to represent New York on the AFBF Promotion and Education Committee. In July, Renée St. Jacques attended the AFBF Leadership, Education and Engagement Staff Conference in Savannah, Ga., where she received training on leadership development, facilitation/education and member engagement.

After participating in the Field to Fork Face-Off at the AFBF Target Training, the P&E committee suggested using this event as a P&E fundraiser at the 2024 NYFB State Convention. The event was a success! Thank you to



FFA members at Romulus CSD read this year’s chosen book, “I LOVE Strawberries,” to their classes and presented a hands-on lesson on the strawberry life cycle.



From left: NYFB Senior Associate Director of Public Policy Renée St. Jacques and Promotion and Education Committee members Bill Zalakar, Mallory McCullouch, and Laurie McBride attended the AFBF Target Training in Columbus, Ohio.

everyone who competed in the game show and attended the event.

The NYFB Agricultural Youth Scholarship program had another successful year, with more than 40 applications submitted by high school seniors. Lilly Mills in District 5 received first place and a \$3,000 scholarship. Cameron Stanton from District 11 received second place and a \$2,000 scholarship. The other nine district winners received cash prizes. Finally, New York’s Agricultural Literacy Week was held March 18-22.



## NYFB's Legal Referral Service

NYFB's Legal Service and Referral Plan continues to assist members who may be in need of legal counsel. This includes members who have legal questions or concerns and are looking for attorneys who specialize in the area of law that matches their needs. In 2024, the free referral program provided information to 34 NYFB members who called the state office. As part of the program, participating attorneys offer Farm Bureau members a 15% discount on their fees.

NYFB continues to grow the Legal Defense Fund to be ready to protect farmers' rights in the legal arena. The Fund is utilized in cases that involve a Farm Bureau policy issue and stand to have a far-reaching effect on agriculture and impact farmers throughout the state.

The NYFB Legal Library sold issues of its Farmer's Guide to Truck & Farm Implement Laws & Regulations and the Farmer's Guide to ICE and Law Enforcement Activities to help employers know their rights and responsibilities.

## NYFB ADVOCACY 2024



**\$6 million**

in ag promotion in the State Budget from our lobbying efforts

**\$18 million**

in agriculture research in the State Budget from our lobbying efforts

**1,300**

legislative bills monitored

**1,423**

e-lobby letters sent to legislators by members

**200+**

topics lobbied on at the local, state and federal levels

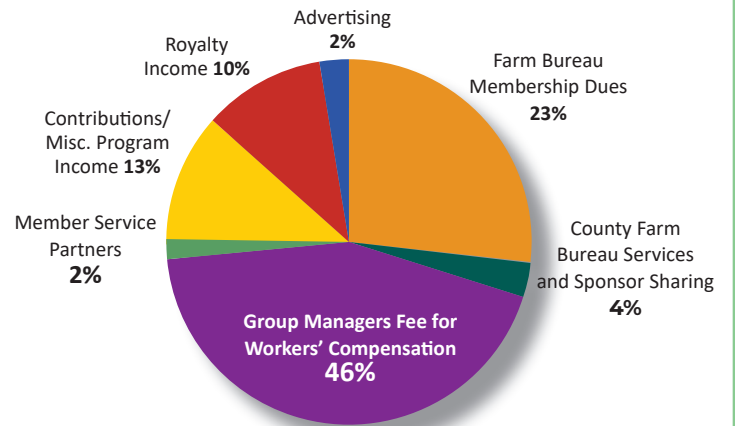
**\$77.5 million**

in farm environmental programs in the State Budget from our lobbying efforts

## BY THE NUMBERS:

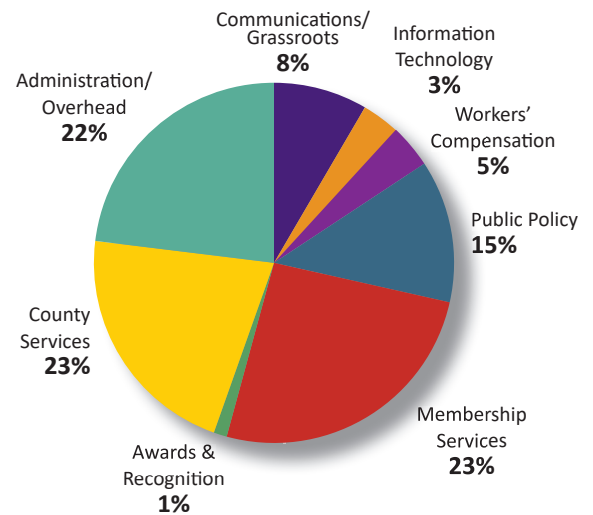
### Revenue based on FY 2024

(includes Farm Bureau and Member Services)



### Expenses based on FY 2024

(includes Farm Bureau and Member Services)



### Washington County Summer Farm Tour

NYFB board members and staff enjoyed a gorgeous June day in Washington County for the annual state board tour.



# NYFB Delegates Debate Policy for 2025



**N**ew York Farm Bureau attracted a record-breaking 400-plus attendees and nearly 70 sponsors to its State Annual Convention (StaCon) in Verona, N.Y., held Dec. 3-5. This was the 68th annual meeting of the organization.

The theme for this year's convention, "Farming Forward: Diversification, Innovation, Leadership," brought together

members, agribusinesses and thought leaders to share new technology, learn ways to farm smarter, promote the agricultural industry and more.

The event included nine educational workshops that focused on zoning, permits and assessments; changes in predictive weather science; advocating for agriculture; thriving through diversification; harnessing digital technologies;

adaptive leadership in agriculture; adapting a systems approach to farm performance; diversifying the market with Farm to School; and ensuring fire safety.

Delegates from 52 county Farm Bureaus engaged in robust discussions of a variety of new policies at the State Annual Meeting, including issues related to maple, dairy, equine, labor and renewable energy.



JORDAN FLEMING/NYS ASSEMBLY

## NYFB Participates in Healthy School Meals for All Event at Capitol

NYFB Senior Associate Director of Public Policy Renée St. Jacques spoke at a coalition press conference on Jan. 29 at the New York State Capitol in support of the Healthy School Meals for All legislation. It was part of an advocacy day for the bill, which would expand funding to cover school lunches for all students and increase the purchasing of local farm products for school meals.



## NYFB Applauds Passage of Direct-to-Consumer Bill

Gov. Kathy Hochul signed the Direct-to-Consumer Shipping bill (S2852A / A3132A) on Aug. 19, which authorizes the direct intrastate and interstate



shipment of spirits, cider and mead. NYFB had strongly supported the bill, which provides parity to New York's small craft manufacturers.

"We are excited for our farm distillers and farm cideries, who will now be able to expand their market by shipping their products directly to consumers. This is a lifeline for many struggling distilleries and cideries throughout the state. This will help strengthen the fruit, grain and potato industry in New York and is a huge win for agriculture," said New York Farm Bureau President David Fisher.

"We are very happy that the DTC legislation made it across the finish line. Thank you again to Assemblymember Lupardo and Senator Skoufis for their hard work in making this happen. This is a great lifeline for many struggling distilleries and cideries, as well as the farmers who supply them with their locally grown ingredients," said Kyle Wallach, NYFB Associate Director of Public Policy.

# Yates CFB Successfully Defends Local Cidery

A dream of producing cider and opening a cidery has become a reality for the Geertz family in Jerusalem, N.Y.

Jean, Syd, Doug and Eric Geertz are the owners of TreeTops Cidery, located on the Bluff on Keuka Lake.

Eric and Doug began making cider as a hobby, sharing their creations with friends and family. Jean and Syd purchased a small farm in 2001.

In 2020, they officially launched their business, and in the spring of 2022, they received their license from the NYS Liquor Authority. Shortly thereafter, they received an operating permit from the Town of Jerusalem.

Neighbors began sharing concerns about their cidery and farm with the town zoning and planning boards. In July 2022, the town denied a special use permit and revoked their operating permit.

Because they are located in a county-approved, state-certified agricultural district, they requested a review from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets.

In November 2023, Jean was speaking with a dairy farmer friend about their issue with the town, and he suggested she contact Yates County Farm Bureau.

Coincidentally, the agricultural district in which the farm is located was scheduled for an eight-year review.

The Town of Jerusalem requested that the county Ag and Farmland Protection Board remove their farm from the district.

Yates County Farm Bureau leaders met with the Farmland Protection Board and lobbied them to keep TreeTops Cidery within the district.

County Farm Bureau Vice President Jason Henderson testified before the Yates County Legislature and asked them to approve the board's recommendation to keep the cidery as part of the district.

In May 2024, the county legislature approved the ag district with the cidery included.

The NYS Department of Agriculture



Eric Geertz, a co-owner of TreeTops Cidery.

***"Farm Bureau was key to our success. They not only prevented the town from overstepping through proposed zoning changes, but they protected our right to use our agriculturally zoned land."***

**Jean Geertz**  
Co-owner, TreeTops Cidery

and Markets issued a final opinion in May 2024, in which they found that TreeTops Cidery was a startup farm, and that the town was unreasonably restricting them within an agricultural district.

The town responded in June, saying that while they dispute the department's findings, they will not seek to push the issue any farther. Shortly thereafter, the Geertz family received their operating and sign permits from the town, allowing the business's doors to stay open.