



RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

TO: Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary to the Governor
Elizabeth Fine, Counsel to the Governor

FROM: Richard Ball, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture and Markets

RE: Transparency Plan

DATE: October 20, 2021

I. PURPOSE

In a memorandum dated September 20, 2021, sent to the Department of Agriculture and Markets (“Department”) by Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary to the Governor and Elizabeth Fine, Counsel to the Governor, the Department was directed to assess internal policies and practices to increase transparency. The following details the findings of the Department’s review of existing policies and practices and outlines possible areas for further development.

II. AGENCY POLICY AND PRACTICE

a. Website Accessibility and Transparency

Goal: Making additional information available to the public on the Department’s website or through the use of social and/or other media, while upholding the State’s commitment to language access

In the fall of 2018, the Department began a website redesign. The new website was launched November 12, 2019. A focal point of that redesign effort was accessibility. The Department’s Public Information Office (PIO team) worked closely with ITS’ WebNY team and the Governor’s Digital team to ensure that the Department followed current guidance to make the site accessible. The Department’s content management system, Drupal 8, has built-in measures to ensure that accessibility is a priority; for example, each time a photo is uploaded, the website requires alt text and a description. There are also limits to how certain web components may be used, to ensure that people accessing the site from mobile devices or via assistive technology can accurately take in the information on a given page. The PIO team has worked hard to ensure that text is visible whenever it appears over photos.

During the redesign, the PIO team put significant thought and consideration into making the website and mission of the Department easier to understand to the public at large: all acronyms were spelled out; insider industry and government jargon was avoided; clear, plain language was used; and pages were written to ensure consumers could easily figure out what action they need to take – i.e., “apply now for this license” rather than “to ensure compliance with regulations, you must first fill out this application form which will then be sent to the Department...”

The PIO team has also received training on website accessibility. The skills obtained from that training are used every day when an item is posted to the website or an edit is made to a page. This includes:

- making sure that there is no white text over a white or light colored photo,
- removing links written as “click here” and replacing them with more descriptive text (i.e., “access the application for X”),
- adding alt text and descriptions to all uploaded images, and
- ensuring that photos on the site have captions where feasible.

The PIO team also uses a platform called SiteImprove to monitor the website regularly and make fixes including:

- ensuring that language is at an appropriate reading level,
- fixing areas that are problematic for people who use screen reading technology, and
- updating broken links.

In addition to the Department maintained website, the Great New York State Fair (the Fair) has two dedicated websites: one for the Fair and one for non-Fair events. These websites provide information on historical data, spaces available for rent, amenities, rental structure, schedules, etc. Likewise, the Department’s NYS Grown & Certified program maintains a comprehensive website of program rules and applications and advertises program details in print, radio, and in participating retail establishments. The Department’s Taste NY page connects the public to an online retail portal for quick and easy access to locally grown food, beverages and gifts, details fun experiences on New York’s craft beverage and cuisine trails, and lists out the Taste NY store locations.

As for social media outreach, the Department considers social media a cornerstone of its communications strategy. In addition to highlighting the latest news and events attended by the Commissioner, the PIO team regularly showcases the daily work of the Department’s divisions. The PIO team strives to promote what the Department does and how hard its employees work to help the public at large, provide necessary services, and keep people and animals safe. The PIO team posts behind-the-scenes pictures of field staff, FAQs, and “did you know” style posts to highlight the depth of the Department’s mission. The Fair also maintains dedicated Facebook (230,000+ followers), Flickr (almost 10,000 photos), Instagram (26,000+ followers), and Twitter (51,000+ followers) accounts. These pages are used for everything from promotional support to traffic reports while an event is going on. The Fair receives a large amount of feedback from this social media presence, and it looks at every comment and follows up as needed. The Taste NY and NYS Grown & Certified programs also continually provide information regarding local New York State products available to the public through social and other media, including digital, print, billboards, radio, events, etc.

Regarding language access, the Department uploads document translations as requested, and the Language Accessibility page is kept up-to-date per the latest State guidelines. The Division of Animal Industry also uses grant funding to meet ADA accessibility standards for the NYSCHAP (New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program) website. In addition, the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs create program materials in several languages to ensure that as many New Yorkers as possible have access to important benefit information.

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- The Department will continue to take all the steps listed above to ensure that the website is accessible and will keep up-to-date with any changing requirements.
- The Department will continue to explore the promotion of language access.

- The Department will perform continuous review of Department issued guidance, concentrating on simplification and language access needs.
- The Department could expand media outreach and social media on emerging issues, e.g., invasive species and pest issues where public involvement is appropriate and helpful, or the promotion of animal health concerns.

b. Public Integrity Reform Act of 2011: Project Sunlight

Goal: Ensuring use of the Project Sunlight database in accordance with the Public Integrity Reform Act of 2011

The requirements of Project Sunlight are set forth in the Department’s Employee Manual, available on the Department’s intranet site, AgriNet. Staff are also able to access Project Sunlight training through the New York Statewide Learning Management System.

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- The Department will enhance tracking of mandated Project Sunlight training, including the substantive and technical training offered through the New York Statewide Learning Management System.
- The Department will lead a coordinated review of all Department policies concerning Project Sunlight and perform a biennial review thereafter.
- The Department will implement routine reminders to all Department staff of Project Sunlight rules and requirements.
- The Department will regularly review the roster of all covered employees and assess its potential publication.

c. Freedom of Information Law

Goal: Improving response time for all Freedom of Information Law requests, including by tracking monthly backlogs of outstanding requests and new requests, and by proactively posting frequently requesting information or completed requests online

In January 2020, the Department was onboarded into the Open FOIL workflow solution. This solution allows the Department to better manage document review and response time between the divisions and the FOIL team. The Department’s FOIL team strives to provide prompt responses to FOIL requests received, with few FOILs outstanding at any one time.

Notably, FOILs received by the agency have steadily increased since 2019, with the trend projected to continue through 2021. Despite the upward trajectory, the FOIL team has kept the number of outstanding FOIL requests open to a minimum. In a review of completed FOILs received from January 1, 2021 to September 27, 2021:

- 45% of FOILs received were responded to in the first week,
- 92% of FOILs received were responded to in the first month,
- 97% were responded to in the first two months, and
- the median response time for 2021 FOILs was nine calendar days.

The number of FOIL requests received and responded to are reviewed at least once a month by Department staff to ensure prompt response and resolution.

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- The Department suggests the development of a comprehensive statewide FOIL training. Given the historic significance of FOIL in New York State and its ever increasing importance in promoting transparency, training would help educate the workforce by contextualizing the process.
- To handle the increasing FOIL workload, the Department could use additional staff for the FOIL team as well as in those divisions that receive the bulk of the Department's FOIL requests. Due to retirements and general attrition, the Department may be forced to divert resources from FOIL responses to contend with other critical public health and safety work. Additional staffing at the division level could improve FOIL response time.
- The Department will undertake an annual review of the FOIL subject matter list to ensure it is kept up-to-date with new and emerging issues.
- The Department will undertake an annual review of the most frequently requested documents to assess if the documents should be published on the agency's website.

d. Data Accessibility and Reporting Requirements

Goal: Complying fully with Executive Order 8.95 "Using Technology to Promote Transparency, Improve Government Performance and Enhance Citizen Engagement" regarding Open Data NY

Goal: Ensuring the timely preparation of legally mandated reporting and identify ways to make to make useful information available to the public

Goal: Reducing or eliminating the costs associated with providing data or records

In an effort to proactively address areas of frequent inquiry and in promotion of full transparency, a number of data sets are publicly available through the agency's website, including:

- [Licensed Pet Dealers](#) – Listing of the name, address, phone number, license number and inspection reports for all licensed pet dealers in New York State.
- [Certificate of Veterinary Inspection](#) – Listing of the number, category, species, origin state, destination state, and report for all veterinary inspections in New York State.
- [Nursery Growers and Greenhouses](#) – Listing of all certified nursery growers and greenhouses that are licensed by the Department.
- [Certified Plant Dealers](#) – Listing all certified plant dealers that are licensed by the Department.
- [Home Processors](#) – Listing all individuals registered as home processors, including the last name of the individual, the Tradename, the county in which the individual is located, the products processed, and the Processor ID.
- [Current and Prior Food Safety Alerts/Pet Food Recalls](#) – Listing all food safety alerts and recalls in New York State.

Furthermore, a comprehensive listing of [hemp authorized research partners](#), a subject of frequent inquiry, is posted to the Department website and is updated monthly.

Other relevant datasets are made available through [Open Data NY](#), including:

- Retail Food Stores – [Listing](#) and [map](#) of all retail food stores licensed by the Department. This data set is updated annually.

- [Food Safety Inspections – Current Ratings](#) – Listing of all food safety inspections conducted in the last 24 months. This data set is updated on a quarterly basis.
- [Farm Product Dealer Licenses Currently Issued](#) – Listing of all licensed dealers who buy or receive an excess of \$20,000 of New York farm products from New York State producers for resale. This list of licensed dealers includes business name, trade name (where different), address, phone number, and commodities dealt.

The Department's Division of Land and Water Resources (Land and Water) sets a strong example of transparency and data access. Land and Water created a unique interactive funded project mapping to identify a variety of installed conservation practices across the state to create a better-informed public. They also publish determinations, guidelines, and mapping content pertinent to Agricultural Districts that are easily viewable by the public and or municipal governments and that are available for viewing on multiple different platforms. Land and Water has proactively undertaken several exercises to improve the data efficiency of its program, including the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control (AgNPS), Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM), Ecosystem Based Management (EBM), Farmland Protection Planning and Implementation (FPIG, FPPG), and Climate Resilient Farms (CRF) programs. Lastly, the Division of Land and Water Resources is actively working with Cornell University to provide a mapping platform that identifies sewer and water infrastructure that is governed by a municipally adopted restricted use in the Agricultural Districts. The project is expected to be completed by 2025 and involves approximately four decades of data. It will better inform residential development in New York State as it pertains to restrictions imposed on public utilities.

The Department also authors numerous quarterly, annual, and biennial reports ranging from the Department's own Annual Report to the Division of Milk Control and Dairy Services' Milk Producers Security Fund. Many of these reports can be found on the Division specific webpages and can additionally be gathered in one location on the [Department's About Us page](#). Notably, in the Division of Agricultural Development:

- The Farmers' Market Nutrition program does an in depth analysis of all program data to determine the number of participants served and to make informed decisions about the coming year's benefit allocations
 - This information is shared and discussed at multiple meetings each year with program stakeholders and partner agencies.
- Nourish New York does extensive analysis on a weekly basis to provide weekly sales reporting, including a breakdown of sales by commodity group type, number of producers impacted by the program, and the number of meals provided to New York residents in need.
- Contracting and claim payments have recently developed several mechanisms that allow for quick and comprehensive spending information on hundreds of contracts across the division. Specific financial data on contracts or groups of contracts can be mined often within moments of the request for information.

In addition, the Department performs Good Agricultural Practices audits, a voluntary certification program that verifies, through an independent third party audit, that sound food safety practices are being used on a farm or produce handling facility. The audit results are posted on the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service [website](#) and are additionally linked [on the Department's website](#).

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- The Department is undertaking an initiative to develop a more robust tracking solution for statutorily mandated reports. As part of that initiative, the Department will be reviewing what reports, if any, are not available online.
- The Department will take an inventory of all data sets maintained and utilized by the Department with an eye towards further utilization of Open Data NY. This will include an inventory of all inspections completed by the Department and the results thereof.
- The Department will review the feasibility of establishing a webpage dedicated to Department administered penalties, a subject of frequent inquiry.
- The Department will explore what program and division level statistics are tracked and the feasibility of publication on the agency's website.
- The Division of Agricultural Development will undertake a review of the research reports received in the Division. The Division will develop a policy and procedure for report publication to ensure key stakeholders are able to utilize the findings for the betterment of the industry.
- The Division of Land and Water Resources will assess the resources needed to print and reproduce annual reports for publicly attended meetings, training sessions, and tradeshow.
- The Division of Animal Industry will propose a description of all cooperative agreement funding for website publication, including the amount of funding and what it is being used for.
- Resources permitting, the Division of Land and Water Resources will explore the development of a document management system, as well as a digital platform, for real time document posting as it pertains to Division investigations. This would provide greater efficiency in retrieving documents as well as reduce FOIL requests pertinent to the investigations. This system may also be used for the permanent perpetual records, including but not limited to agricultural district creation/modification, farmland protection project files (subject to amendment in perpetuity), official minutes, and sound agricultural practice determinations.

e. Open Meetings Law

Goal: Posting documents required for meetings open to the public at the same time the agency is posted, to the extent practicable

The Department chairs and/or serves on numerous boards, councils, and commissions, including but not limited to the Advisory Council on Agriculture, Apiary Industry Advisory Committee, Climate Action Council, Dairy Promotion Order Advisory Board, Milk Marking Advisory Council, New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee, and Wood Products Development Council.

The Department strives to promote public awareness of and interest in agriculture through the promotion of open meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law. To that end, the Department posts advance notice on the Department's website of each upcoming meeting. An advisory appears on the Department's page dedicated to the Board, Council, or Committee informing the public of the date and time of the meeting, physical location (if applicable), and the technical means to join the meeting (e.g., WebEx). The advisory is also sent to a media distribution list. In addition, the following can be found on the respective webpages:

- [Advisory Council on Agriculture](#): Council overview; listing of members; most recent meeting minutes; and the latest biennial report

- [Apiary Industry Advisory Committee](#): Committee overview; the most recent meeting agenda; the most recent meeting recording; and contact information for Plant Industry
- [Climate Action Council](#): Listing of members; upcoming meeting agenda; and a chronology of previous meeting agendas, presentations, minutes, recordings, and recommendations
- [Dairy Promotion Order Advisory Board](#): Board overview; listing of board members; a chronology of previous meetings, including recordings; contact information for the board; and industry related materials
- [Milk Marking Advisory Council](#): Council overview; listing of members; and the previous meeting materials
- [New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee](#): Committee overview; listing of voting members; listing of advisory members; goals of the committee; previous meeting materials; reports and publications; and contact information for the committee

In addition, through the Division of Agricultural Development, Market Orders administer order advisory board meetings on an annual or semi-annual basis dependent upon the order. Meeting minutes are recorded and shared with the committees and Commissioner's office and are stored in files to be produced as requested.

The necessity of the boards, councils, and commissions did not end with the COVID-19 pandemic. The boards, councils, and commissions continued to meet aided by remote capabilities. The Department found greater accessibility and transparency with remote participation, particularly for those living or working in more geographically remote regions of the state.

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- The Department will explore the continuation of a hybrid meeting structure to allow for both in person and remote participation. This model has proven successful in reaching those most impacted by the policies and practices of the Department and has allowed greater flexibility for staff.
- The Department will review the feasibility of setting up a tracking system to ensure full compliance with the notification timelines set out in Open Meetings Law § 104(1).
- The Department will continue to review enhancements to the Department's website to promote awareness and meeting access.
- The Department will develop and implement a more robust apiary webpage, beyond the activities of the Apiary Industry Advisory Council.

f. New York State Archives and Records Administration Record Retention Requirements

Goal: Updating records retention policies, including ensuring the timely transfer of pertinent records to the State Archives

The 2016 "General Retention and Disposition Schedule for New York State Government Records" is available on the Department's intranet site, AgriNet, along with the State Archived Records Center Transfer List. Divisional record retention policies are maintained on a Department shared drive.

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- The Department will institute quarterly reminders to all staff regarding record retention requirements.
- The Department will institute an annual review of divisional record retention requirements to ensure they are up-to-date with State requirements and accurately capture the scope of work performed in the Division.

g. Community Outreach and Participation

Goal: Increasing participation of agency personnel in community events and town meetings and providing new avenues for public participation in government decision making

Agricultural Development

The Department's Division of Agricultural Development oversees several programs aimed at strengthening New York's agricultural industry. The majority of the work is public facing and therefore necessitates a comprehensive approach to engaging and recruiting agricultural industry organizations and leaders. Below is an outline of some of the Division's efforts related to the transparency of the programming:

- The Division is the lead coordinator of the Department's presence at trade shows and conferences within New York State and nationally.
 - The Division coordinates with industry leaders to allow and, in many cases, fund their participation in such events.
 - Division managers attend these events to recruit industry participants into Department programming with marketing materials and face-to-face interactions.
- The Division administers the annual Farm-to-School Coordinating Committee annually in different locations across the state.
 - This committee brings together stakeholders from across the state to discuss and inform policy decisions and facilitate best practice sharing.
 - The meeting allows Farm-to-School stakeholders to interact with the Commissioner and elected officials.
- Twice a year, the Department convenes the Specialty Crop Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from all specialty crop industries to prioritize needs and decide how the federal Specialty Crop Block Grant is spent.
- Taste NY, with regular and ongoing input from stakeholders, creates policy and procedure resources for Welcome Center partners to assist with operations and internal financial controls.

Animal Industry

The Department's Division of Animal Industry is responsible for ensuring animal and public health through control and eradication of infectious and contagious diseases in New York State livestock and poultry and implementation of pre-harvest food safety measures at the farm level. The Department has

staff in Albany and inspectors and veterinarians located across the state who administer animal disease programs and conduct surveillance for animal diseases of significance to agriculture.

The Division maintains strong lines of communication with federal, state, local, and industry partners through a variety of means, including but not limited to:

- The Division collaborates with state partners (e.g., the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), New York State Department of Health (DOH)) on public outreach when a zoonotic disease is detected in the state.
- The Division notifies DEC and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services of any occurrence of animal disease that may affect wildlife health.
- The Division notifies USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and/or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention if a World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) reportable disease is detected.
- The Division regularly sends animal health alerts to New York State accredited veterinarians with pertinent updates and any animal disease concerns.
- The Division publishes equine disease outbreaks on the Equine Disease Communication Center website to alert equine owners about disease risks in their geographic area.
- Prior to the commencement of fair season, the Division publishes pullorum clinic information and hosts meetings with New York fair officials for county fairs and the Fair to assist in meeting animal health requirements.
- Division field veterinarians provide information and continuing education meetings to private, accredited veterinarians in their territory, including information on rules and regulations.
- The Division hosts producer meetings in various areas of the state to provide information about animal health concerns, current rules and regulations, and new programs and opportunities available to New York producers.
- The Division participates in and presents information as requested at various stakeholder meetings, including for farm groups, Cornell Cooperative Extension, milk cooperatives, and veterinary practices.
- NYSCHAP regularly cooperates and interacts with numerous industry organizations, including milk cooperatives that work in New York, National Milk and their Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) program group, dairy producer groups, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University, the New York State Veterinary Medical Society, New York Beef Producers, and Beef Quality Assurance Program Advisory Council.

Land and Water Resources

The Division of Land and Water Resources administers programs to prevent or reduce water pollution, enhance soil health, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, and increase agricultural and community resiliency to a changing climate, in partnership with the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee (State Committee). Staff assist 58 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in a wide array of operations, programs, and project areas. Division field-based staff work closely with SWCD staff to prioritize decisions for the advancement of conservation programming.

- All funding solicitations are described and announced across multiple platforms including grants gateway; public press releases; an interested applicant electronic contact list; and the Department's website under "[Funding Opportunities](#)".
- The Division participates in public events and training sessions annually.
- The Division encourages program managers to problem solve in the field whenever possible.
- Field Staff attend public hearings, local conservation district board meetings, and various workshops.

- The Division periodically holds stakeholder meetings on a variety of topics.
- The Division hosts a wide variety of recorded webinars for grant applicants.

Plant Industry

New York's plants and land are some of its most precious resources. The Department's Division of Plant Industry administers many programs to protect these resources, from environmental planning, to invasive species eradication, integrated pest management, seed and fertilizer regulation, and more.

The Division has regular meetings with stakeholder groups including the Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Committee, the Greenhouse Program Work Team from Cornell, Empire State Forest Products, and the nursery association, turfgrass association, and others. The Department maintains a strong presence in the greenhouse and nursery commodity groups. In addition, in the last five years, staff have been at numerous hemp events and participated in several bee club meetings. The Division also held stakeholder meetings with fruit growers regarding plum pox virus and European Cherry Fruit Fly and has actively engaged the media and the public on spotted lanternfly.

State Fair

The Great New York State Fair team has regular meetings and calls with vendors, promoters, agency partners, contractors, sponsors, and fairgoers. They also send out regular updates to each of these groups so they are aware of any new information from changes in parking to the concerts being booked to the hours the Fair will be open. The Fair is also a member of the New York State Association of Agricultural Fairs and engages with the membership as both a member of the group and a member of the Board of Directors. Likewise, the Fair belongs to the International Festival and Event Association and engages with that membership.

- The Agriculture Director regularly has meetings and phone calls with superintendents and other agriculture groups involved in the holding of competitions during the Fair.
- The Guest Relations Supervisor goes through the comment cards several times a day during the Fair to gauge problem areas as well as prioritize action.
- The Director and Public Relations Director routinely engage with the media directly to provide answers to their questions as well as pitch stories to them.
- The Director and Public Relations Director routinely engage with fairgoers on social media and follow up with them directly as needed.
- Regular meetings are held with all of emergency response partners including the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, New York State Department of Transportation, State Police, Solvay Fire Department, American Medical Response of Central New York, DOH, Office of Fire Prevention and Control, and many more.
- The Director attends Geddes Town Board meetings to go over events and issues.

Counsel's Office

The Department's Counsel's Office follows State policy and practice for contracting goods or services. The solicitation for a full Request for Proposal (RFP), Request for Applications, or Invitation for Bids for procurements/grants is published either on the Department's website or on Grants Gateway. Information for procurements is published in the Contract Reporter and the selection criteria is included in the documents. For Contract Reporter Exemption Requests, the Department selects a vendor because of single or sole source, the justification for which is vetted by the Office of the State Comptroller. The Division of Fiscal Management puts a notice in the Contract Reporter. For those contracts within the Department's discretionary threshold, the Department typically does a request for

quotes in the contract reporter and goes with the lowest bid. All three contracting categories are available either through FOIL or Open Book NY.

For RFPs, the Department distributes a press release and the RFP to industry groups interested in the scope of work. Industry lists are compiled and maintained by division teams. The Department also does proactive outreach to Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (MWBES) with respect to contracting opportunities. The Department's Supplier Diversity Liaison evaluates the opportunity for goalsetting and provides a list of certified entities applicable to the procurement.

In addition to compliance with contracting requirements, Counsel's Office posts Agriculture and Market Law 305-a Orders and Sound Agricultural Practice Opinions to the Department's website on the Division of Land and Water Resources pages.

Division of Human Resources

The Division of Human Resources posts all hiring opportunities that do not require existing New York State employment externally on StateJobsNY.com, LinkedIn, Department social media channels, and often on sites such as Monster.com and Indeed.com. All promotion opportunities for existing New York State staff are posted on the Department's intranet site and on StateJobsNY.com.

Other

The Department routinely seeks assistance and advice from stakeholders, including but not limited to Farm Credit, Farm Bureau, and Cornell University, when responding to new legislation or researching new innovations in the industry. This collaboration allows for the maximization of resources while developing a more comprehensive proposal, to the benefit of New York's entire agricultural community.

Possible Areas for Further Development:

- While the Division of Plant Industry has a strong presence with certain commodity groups, more outreach and engagement can be done with orchards, vegetable farms, and field crops. The Department will explore ways to further engage these key stakeholders.
- The Department will assess new and innovative ways to solicit comments, critiques, and ideas for the Fair. The Department will review the feasibility of increasing the number of public informational meetings held to garner feedback and the creation of a portal to solicit input.
- Should fill levels and resources allow, the Division of Land and Water Resources will increase capacity to provide direct technical assistance to municipalities and other stakeholders.
- The Division of Animal Industry will explore publishing a list of upcoming informational and outreach webinars on the Empire State Animal Response Team website and on social media pages.

h. Public Officers Law 73-a

On an annual basis, the Department reviews and certifies the list of mandatory filers pursuant to Public Officers Law 73-a. The Department is also notified if an employee fails to meet the filing deadline and works with the employee to ensure completion of the financial disclosure statement.

The Department is also monitoring training compliance for mandatory filers and alerts those individuals nearing the training deadline of upcoming opportunities.

i. Inspections

On a daily basis, Department inspectors are visiting farms, facilities, and stores across the state to ensure the health and safety of New York’s food supply. Of the Department’s 449 permanent employees, 253 (56%) of the team serve as inspectors.

Division	Number of Inspectors
Animal Industry	28
Food Safety and Inspection	130
Milk Control and Dairy Services	45
Plant Industry	34
Weights and Measures	16
Total	253

Additionally, 46 hourly employees serve as inspectors for the Divisions of Plant Industry and Food Safety and Inspection.

Not only do inspectors serve a critical health and safety function, but they serve as ambassadors for the Department. As the “boots on the ground” representatives of the Department, inspectors are often the first line of education on new or upcoming federal or state regulatory or statutory changes; and are the collaborators for new invasive species and defenders against prolific animal disease. Thanks to the Department’s inspectors, regulated entities have an open line of communication into the agency. The questions inspectors receive or the observations they make often serve as generators for training opportunities, policy development, and regulatory proposals.

III. CONCLUSION

The Department is committed to the principals of transparency and accountability and stands ready to implement any necessary changes to further that goal.