



**State of Agriculture Address
Commissioner Richard A. Ball
January 12, 2023**

Good afternoon and thank you for that introduction. I first want to thank our Governor, who was able to join us earlier today for a truly exciting presentation. Governor Hochul has long been a strong ally to agriculture—I always say it’s a tossup as to which one of us has spent more time on farms over the last few years. But in all seriousness, our Governor knows the value of agriculture and the work we do, and she is committed to supporting our industry, just as she is committed to doing the right thing for New Yorkers. We live in difficult times, and there is no shortage of issues and disruptions to worry about in our industry. However, there are solutions, and we have a Governor who cares and is fighting for you.

I want to extend my sincerest thanks to our hosts, the New York State Agricultural Society Board, for their tremendous work organizing and putting together this event.

I look forward to sharing more about the opportunities on the horizon for our community in a few minutes, but first, I would like to take a look back. Given this is the 191st year of the NYS Agricultural Society Forum, I found my way to the Transaction of the NYS Agricultural Society from 1850 and found a passage that speaks to the history and importance of this organization and our shared industry. This quote stood out to me: “It is submitted to the consideration of the farmers of New York with a hope that it may tend to lighten their labors, elevate in their own minds in their profession, and eventually lead them on to higher attainments in all that constitutes a successful farmer.”

You were important then and you are important today.

Dean Houlton, this next piece is for you: Interestingly enough, in this same book, it was clear, over a lengthy number of pages, that agricultural education was a priority, as we know it still is today. The quote reads: “There is one thing that is lacking....an agricultural college directly connected with an experimental or model farm.” This was 15 years before the establishment of Cornell but it sure sounds like the NY Ag Society had the correct vision for New York State. They envisioned the best land grant system for agricultural education in the country—Cornell University and Cornell Agri-Tech. I can only hope that in another century, our descendants will look back and see that we addressed the challenges of our time with equal passion, and that we created a lasting legacy.

I also want to thank all of you for taking the time to join us for the New York State Agricultural Society Annual Forum, and the annual State of Agriculture address. It is always great to be here. As I always say, this is the largest and the best of family reunions. Year after year, this event brings New York’s agricultural family under one roof to not only plan for the future and discuss our challenges, but also to celebrate and reflect on all that we’ve achieved together in the last year. I am honored to work alongside all of you in our shared mission of protecting and strengthening this industry.

Thank you to our presenters and panelists that spoke earlier today, and to all of our awardees this year: congratulations, well done. Thank you for your service to this special

agricultural community. We are honoring and celebrating our Century Farm awardees and two Tricentennial Farms today that both hail from Montgomery County: Dygert Farms in Palatine Bridge and Nellis Acres in Fort Plain. Both farms were established in 1723, before even the formation of our country, and still stand today as functioning dairy farms. It is an unbelievable achievement for a farm to have been in continuous operation by the same family on the same property for three hundred years. These farms show how deeply ingrained agriculture is in New York State. It's inspiring to see these folks carrying on a tradition that began centuries ago.

I have to say another congratulations for Dick Church. When we brought our daughter Sarah Jess (then in high school) to visit CALS, I had no idea that I had met a true friend, a future mentor, a historian for all of us, and an inspiration for me still today.

I would also like to acknowledge Pat Hooker, former Deputy Secretary, former Commissioner, and a good friend. Kevin King, our current Deputy Secretary in the Governor's Office, is also here. I would like to acknowledge Senator May and Senator Mannion, thank you for being here. Last but certainly not least, I'd like to take a moment to recognize all our staff at the Department who help advance New York agriculture. I am fortunate to work with some of the best minds in the industry, who day in and day out show their dedication, who make my life easier, and who consistently help the agricultural community continue to grow however they can. Thank you all. Please help me in giving a round of applause to our staff:

- First Deputy Commissioner, Steve McGrattan
- Deputy Commissioner, Nicole Leblond
- Deputy Commissioner, Jen Trodden
- Deputy Commissioner, Elizabeth Wolters
- Assistant Commissioner, Damali Wynter
- Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Geoff Palmer
- Director of Public Information, Jola Szubielski
- Assistant Director of Public Information, Hanna Birkhead
- Public Information Specialist, Julia Mason
- Food Policy and Outreach Coordinator, AmeriCorps VISTA Taylor Goodell

From Agricultural Development:

- Kelly Young, Division Director
- Laura Smalley
- Jessica Henesy
- Teia DeCarlo
- Mark McMullen

From Milk and Dairy:

- Casey McCue, MCDS Division Director

From our Food Laboratory:

- Dr. Maria Ishida, Food Laboratory Division Director



From Food Safety:

- Dan McCarthy, Division Director
- Steve Schirmer
- Wendy Ingersoll

From Land and Water:

- Judy Littrell

From Animal Industry

- Dr Beth Ann Shane-Holser

From the Fair:

- Sean Hennessey, New York State Fair Director
- Dave Bullard
- Spencer Kenney

Please give these folks a warm round of applause. They work very hard for you.

Just a few months ago, I had the honor, as the 2022 NASDA President, of standing in front of some of you, and the commissioners and secretaries of agriculture from across the United States at the 2022 NASDA Annual Meeting in Saratoga Springs, to provide an update on New York agriculture. NASDA, as you may know, advocates for solutions to some of the most critical issues facing our shared industry. The theme of this year's NASDA conference was "Still Growing," and I wanted to bring that message here today. I'd like to show you the video that we created for NASDA– it's pretty exciting stuff.

I'm energized when I watch that video and look at how our industry continues to *Grow*, despite some of the challenges we face.

The last couple of years have been difficult, there's no doubt about it. We have navigated uncertainty and adversity brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the loss of markets, disruptions to our food supply systems, labor challenges, and financial hardships on an individual and global scale. We have continually had to reckon with the ever-increasing impacts of climate change and their effect on our industry and the people we serve. We have struggled with market challenges and skyrocketing inflation, watching with deep concern as a war rages on, on the other side of the world. Agriculture has felt under siege by special interest groups from the marketplace and even by our own government. Our old recipe for success, which was 1) be a good manager 2) stay current with the best technology and methods and 3) have a little marketing skill, is not working.

Yet, you have continued forward, still finding ways to farm, still feeding people – *still growing*.

In the last few years, we have learned valuable lessons, including that we have an urgent need for a more resilient and reliable food system.

Our Governor talked about it earlier, and you heard it from her during her State of the State address on Tuesday. She wants us as a state to be self-reliant, to strengthen supply chains and increase demand for New York products through unprecedented investments in the industry, and to make sure that all New Yorkers have an opportunity to experience agriculture.

One of the most exciting announcements in the Governor's State of the State address was her proposal of making the 20% Investment Tax Credit for farmers a reimbursable refund for five years. This refundable tax credit will provide an incentive for additional on-farm production investment, and is an opportunity to modernize our farms, allowing them to better compete and ensure future growth.

Additionally, building off of the success of our initiatives like Farm to School, the 30% Initiative, and Nourish New York, as you heard from the Governor, she has set a goal to increase institutional and agency buying of New York State food at 30% by 2028. We currently spend almost \$4 million on New York food. This effort would aim to procure and purchase nearly \$400 million worth of food from our farmers, who should always be our first and best customers. I think that deserves a round of applause.

The Governor also announced a \$50 million investment over five years to support "scratch" cooking facilities that will facilitate the use of fresh New York State farm products in meal preparation for K-12 school children. This also supports the 30% initiative the Governor announced. Currently, many school districts rely on heat-and-serve methods for highly processed foods because they lack the equipment and time to cook from scratch. The School Food Infrastructure Grant Program will support regional food assets to store, process, and prepare farm products to provide students with fresh-made food, reduce food insecurity, increase market opportunities, and strengthen the resilience of our state's food system.

Understanding that labor is a critical component of the supply chain, the Governor has pledged to build a strong agricultural workforce pipeline and address the food supply workforce shortage. We have tremendous programs in New York when it comes to agricultural education and helping our young people get excited by the careers in agriculture, whether it be farming or in animal health or working in food manufacturing. But we need to make sure we're connecting the dots from secondary education to higher education, and beyond by ensuring training and educational programs are readily available for current employees and for future generations.

The Governor is proposing to have the Department work with key stakeholders to identify internships and apprenticeships for young people and those interested in a second career in the areas of horticulture, dairy management, crop production, food manufacturing, food distribution, and more. And we're going to make sure we're connecting with workforce development entities to match and place the new workforce, including migrant individuals and asylum seekers, directly with industry opportunities.

We made some great strides in this area this past year for sure. Thanks to our Dairy Think Tank members, we have collaborated with the NYS Dept. of Labor to put together some compelling videos that highlight New York's dairy industry and provide insight on the exciting opportunities available for young people across this sector.

To address the need for additional agricultural processing capacity to help alleviate the gaps in the supply chain, the Governor also announced an interagency team with Empire State Development and Ag and Markets that will work with new and expanding food manufacturers to ensure that obstacles and solutions are identified during project development, to evaluate existing incentives, and to make recommendations for new programs to spur further investment in food manufacturing in the State.

In this new year, we have new opportunity and I want to thank Governor Hochul for moving this work forward, and proposing these bold initiatives that will have a real impact, strengthening our food system from the agricultural community to the consumer.

These initiatives build on some of the great work our Department has been doing, as we have focused on these gaps in the food supply chain, and I am proud to say that over the last year, we have doubled down on our efforts to make sure that we have enough local New York food on the tables of New York families.

Norman Borlaug, a hero of mine, said: "The first essential component for social justice is adequate food for all of mankind. If you desire peace, cultivate justice. But at the same time, cultivate the fields to produce more bread, otherwise there will be no peace." I think that captures the critical mission that is in front of us today.

One of our greatest accomplishments of the last few years has been the creation of several new programs that connect New York's farmers with New Yorkers who are struggling. One of these programs is Nourish New York, which has helped New York's food banks and emergency food providers purchase New York agricultural products and deliver them to New Yorkers in need.

Through this multi-agency effort, to date, food banks and other emergency food providers have purchased more than 74 million pounds, or approximately 62 million meals, to communities across the state. The food banks' purchases have supported 4,320 farms and agribusinesses, many of which lost markets for their products during to the pandemic. This program was created in a matter of days, and as a way to respond to an immediate and pressing need and I could not be prouder of its incredible success. A little over a year ago, Governor Hochul signed Nourish New York into law permanently in our state. I think that deserves a round of applause.

In 2022, the Department also launched a statewide study of urban agriculture to better understand the industry and to provide policy recommendations for the future. Thanks to the Governor's 2021 State of the State and Executive Budget, we also launched an Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program. Supporting community growing spaces such as community gardens, school gardens, and urban farms will help make local food accessible to more residents. It will also help invite more growers to the table and expand

our agricultural industry as a whole.

Another fantastic initiative supported by our Governor last year was the re-funding of a Farmers' Market Resiliency Grant Program that supports and promotes local food purchasing at farmers' markets. This grant funding helps farmers and small businesses with things like moving to online sales and delivery and investing in infrastructure to make local food more accessible to more consumers.

Our Farm-to-School program is now in its seventh round, and has been critical to helping our schools increase the volume and variety of locally grown and produced food on school menus. To further incentivize New York food purchases, last year we also successfully transitioned the state's 30% New York State Initiative to be administered at the Department. The initiative increases the reimbursement schools receive for lunches to 25 cents per meal for any district that purchases at least 30 percent ingredients for their school lunch program from New York farms. So far, a total of 51 school districts across the state have reached this goal and we are working on helping more schools attain the 30% threshold every day.

Further strengthening our work with the food supply chain, the Department was fortunate to be awarded nearly \$26 million through USDA's Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program to implement a new initiative that we are calling New York Food for New York Families. This program will create a more resilient statewide food system that supports local farms and provides high quality, nutritious food to communities facing food insecurity.

And, I am also excited to share that the Department is leading a collaboration with other state departments of agriculture, land grant universities and other key partners to develop a comprehensive application for a Northeast Food Business Center, which would be funded by USDA. Our Northeast application includes the 10 states in the Northeast Association of State Departments of Agriculture's region. If funded, a Northeast Center will be a tremendous step forward for coordination and economic development within our regional food system.

Another crucial part of boosting our economy and strengthening our food supply chain is promoting New York growers and food producers through programs like NYS Grown & Certified and Taste NY. These programs have been doing great work for a long time – in fact, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Taste NY program.

For 10 years, the Taste NY program has worked to highlight the quality, diversity, and economic impact of food and beverages grown, produced, or processed right here in New York State, the result of which has created new opportunities for producers to get their products in front of new markets. In 2022, Taste NY partnered with SUNY Cobleskill and we are excited to continue working with other SUNY campuses this year. We also have been working with the New York State Thruway Authority to add various Taste NY products to service area convenience stores and gift shops as they are redeveloped and reopened. This program has seen tremendous success, and this is only the beginning. We plan on celebrating this milestone in a big way...so stay tuned.



The NYS Grown & Certified program has continued to grow and expand over the last year, with more than 3,000 producers participating on over 750,000 acres. We're excited that NYS Grown & Certified farms have been a critical component of the Nourish New York program and our Farm-to-School program. This year, New York State Grown & Certified farms also got a promotional boost with the launch of a new marketing campaign seen by consumers across the State. The campaign highlighted New York's diverse array of specialty crops and encouraged consumers to "Look for the Label" and find New York State Grown & Certified products near them. We have such a great story to tell about New York agriculture and we're excited that the campaign helped us to continue telling that story to consumers across our state. And more is yet to come.

County fairs are the bedrock of agricultural education and tradition for families across New York State and can even inspire the youngest among us to find their passions. This year—following the Governor's excitement about reimagining our county fairs to have more of a focus on agriculture—we announced that the State will convene a series of roundtable discussions with county fair representatives from across New York to further strengthen these community events. The more we can work together to grow these important cultural and educational touchstones, the better off our state will be.

Furthering the State's commitment to listening to and collaborating with you, as the Governor mentioned earlier today, she and Lieutenant Governor Delgado held a series of roundtable discussions with members of the agricultural community this summer to hear directly their concerns about the agricultural industry in the state. Many of you here participated in those, and I thank you again for being a part of these important conversations.

After hearing your feedback, the Governor announced a special working group of state agencies and agricultural community stakeholders who will continue to collaborate to help streamline business for New York's farmers. I am honored to chair the Strategic Interagency Task Force Lessening Obstacles to Agriculture Working Group – SILO – and am excited for our opportunity to take action on some of our industry's most pressing challenging issues, beginning with our first meeting, which is next week.

We're also listening and learning as we tackle the issue of racial inequity in New York agriculture. I am optimistic about our efforts to effect positive change in our industry on this front. Since we issued our 2021 Diversity and Racial Equity Working Group report, we have worked to strategically expand our outreach to better connect with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers, advocacy organizations, and related stakeholders.

We were proud last year to receive funding from the 2022-23 State Budget for a \$1 million Beginning Farmer Fund and a \$4 million Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmer Fund, which we are preparing to launch. The budget also included funding for Black Farmers United – New York State and for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences, or MANRRS. I am proud of the work that we accomplished together with our Working Group members and know that there is still much to do to take on the urgent challenges that have been identified.

One of the biggest challenges that we are tackling as an industry, a nation, and as a planet is, of course, climate change. As part of New York's nation-leading Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, I am chair of the Agriculture and Forestry Advisory Panel of the New York State Climate Action Council. As we all know, farmers are the original environmentalists, and agriculture is not only at the table in these discussions but also playing a crucial role in achieving our collective climate goals.

The Council recently adopted its final Scoping Plan, which provides a roadmap to achieve New York's aggressive climate targets under the Climate Act. I was so pleased to see our farmers and foresters, conservationists, academics, and environmentalists all come together and find consensus on a path to help meet the targets set, while recognizing the unique challenges faced by our agriculture and forestry industries.

The Scoping Plan outlines an incentive-based approach for agriculture and forestry, which will support farmers and foresters while more work is done to help producers adapt. Recommendations for the agricultural and forestry industries include promoting sustainable forest management; protecting forests and farmland; advancing livestock management strategies; improving soil health, and more. I look forward to working with all of you as we implement this plan and lead New Yorkers toward a greener future.

Governor Hochul also just announced a Cap-and-Invest Program in her State of the State address that offers us flexibility, so we can focus New York's efforts on the biggest polluters and ensure families, farms and small businesses aren't crushed by costs. The program will help improve resiliency and ensure sustainable, competitive farming. I want to assure you that there will be resources available to help implement and adapt to these changes, and we will also be holding extensive stakeholder outreach on the program.

And that's just a piece of the larger picture in our work to support our environment. We have long been working with our partners, the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee and Districts, to help our farmers better handle the effects of these severe weather events while also helping them to mitigate agriculture's impact on climate change.

I am also proud to announce that in September, New York State was awarded a \$60 million grant from USDA. This funding will build on our state funding programs to help foster farm and forest landowner adoption of climate smart practices, and more.

Farmers have always been stewards of the land, and we are most certainly part of the solution.

This my 10th State of Agriculture address. When I delivered my first address, I hadn't even officially started at the Department yet. I stood in front of you all then and asked you to put your faith in me. It is still my great honor to be serving you, the one percent of our population that feeds the other 99. Ours is a noble profession and our cause is correct. And we are *Still Growing*.

Our farmers are essential. Their work growing food for everyone and our work supporting this industry is essential. While we still have much work to do, I am incredibly proud of the



way our agricultural community has risen to meet the challenges of the last few years with incredible strength, creativity, and innovation. For this reason, and despite all the change and uncertainty we face, I remain optimistic about the future. I like our chances.

I look forward to the future of agriculture in New York.

Thank you.