

**Request for Information**  
**New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets**  
**Agriculture Workforce Development**

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets seeks information from vendors and entities with expert knowledge of workforce development regarding a potential agriculture workforce development project. The Department's objective in issuing this Request for Information is to identify potential qualified vendors and receive feedback on the proposed project scope and services.

The following entities are eligible to submit a response:

- Municipalities
- Public benefit corporations
- Local development corporations
- Not-for-profit organizations

This Request for Information (RFI) is not a solicitation of actual bids. A Request for Proposals (RFP) may be developed, and bids may be solicited at a later date. All responders to this RFI will be sent the RFP, if it becomes available. Your response to this RFI may be as short as a request to be included on the bidders list if you believe you can provide the desired services, or you may answer one or all of the questions. Your participation or lack of participation in this RFI process will not advantage or disadvantage you upon potential solicitation of the RFP or evaluation of bids.

**Background**

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets' (The Department) mission is to promote New York State agriculture and its high-quality and diverse products, foster agricultural environmental stewardship, and safeguard the state's food supply, land, and livestock to ensure the viability and growth of New York's agriculture industries.

New York State is home to a thriving agricultural industry. Over a quarter of the State's land mass is dedicated to agriculture – about seven million acres – from the field crops that feed New York's 630,000 dairy cows, to apple orchards, vineyards, and vegetable farms, to the maple trees harvested for syrup in the spring.

New York is known for having a diverse mix of home-grown farm goods, with over 650 farmers' markets and farm stands across the state. New York State ranks in the top ten in production of over 30 commodities. It is first nationally in the production of cottage cheese, sour cream, and yogurt; second in maple syrup, apples, cabbage, and snap

beans; third in grapes; fourth in floriculture; fifth in milk production, green peas, and squash; and more.

New York State's food system is made up of a series of food supply chains developed over decades and evolving with marketplace, product, and technological changes. New York ranks second nationally in the number of food and beverage processing plants. New York food manufacturers process farm products that originate from New York farms and from farms outside of the State.

Food production in New York is reliant on an aging workforce. At the same time, labor availability continues to be a challenge. The extended family has traditionally been a large part of New York farms' workforce, as are local, seasonal and migrant workers. However, cultural and societal changes have made a large-scale impact on worker availability as the number of family farmworkers has declined and farm owners face a limited labor market for hired workers.

Labor availability and workforce development are also a high priority for food manufacturers in New York, particularly in the dairy sector where plants tend to be located in a mix of rural and aging areas. Skilled workers are and will continue to be needed across the food manufacturing sector, especially as current skilled employees retire, new technologies emerge and the use of robotics increases, requiring the need for new employees with new skills and knowledge bases.

## **Goal**

New York State's agricultural and food industries need to continue to attract and retain future generations of skilled agricultural and food workers who are prepared to participate in a workforce that is rapidly developing alongside emerging technologies and ever-changing consumer demand. The Department is interested in working closely with agricultural and food sectors to create a program that will identify clear pathways for jobseekers and connect them to high-quality employment across these sectors to strengthen and grow our food supply system in New York State. The Department hopes to achieve this goal using the program vision, project scope and services outlined below.

## **Program Vision**

The Department plans to engage with a workforce organization, association, or similar, using a whole systems approach to address the current workforce gap and needs, and develop a framework that will build diverse and sustainable workforce development pipelines to prepare skilled workers for the food and agriculture industries in New York State.

## **Proposed Project Scope and Services**

### *Development Phase*

The workforce organization (vendor) will be, or become, an agricultural workforce association that financially supports and sustains its organization using a blend of a membership fee structure and state and federal funding. The vendor will create an agricultural workforce advisory committee of industry leaders representing the State's agricultural and food industries (ex: dairy, apple, grape, horticultural, produce), with sub-committees of representatives from state agencies, educational entities, and academia that informs the larger committee. The goal of the advisory committee will be to help the vendor create a strategic vision that attracts and engages with New York's future workforce in the agriculture and food sectors. The vendor will be expected to work closely with the advisory committee to identify:

- Current and future industry needs
- Barriers to finding employees in the agriculture and food sectors
- Barriers to retaining a skilled workforce
- Existing workforce development programs

### *Engagement Phase*

Following the development phase, the vendor will be expected to:

- Identify short-term and long-term steps that are needed to address current and future industry needs
- Identify and collaborate with existing workforce development efforts/networks and/or organizations to understand where synergies may exist
- Review existing workforce programs and their effectiveness as they relate to food and agricultural industries
- Identify a framework/system that closes the gap between employers having jobs and employees looking for work
- Identify existing support systems and/or systems to communicate information across the industry

### *Delivery Phase*

Create a whole systems approach to developing an agricultural workforce by actively engaging with industry leaders to create, implement and continuously maintain a framework to recruit and retain employees in the agriculture and food sectors. Examples of such activities include:

- Create a workforce development pilot program for the top ten New York agriculture commodities to pilot the framework
- Create a virtual agricultural recruitment center by partnering with industry leaders and participating in job fairs at schools, colleges, conventions, and agricultural and food industry meetings to identify skilled and new workers that can be part of the pipeline

- Create a system to actively recruit, coach, track and mentor new workers and build a system to retain existing workers to remain within the agricultural and food sectors

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## Statements of Interest

Responders may answer one or more questions:

1. **Experience** – Describe your organization and its experience with workforce development projects, particularly any activities related to the agricultural and/or food sectors.
2. **Qualifications** – Describe your organization’s interest and capacity in undertaking such a project.
3. **Proposed project scope and services** – Provide comments on the proposed project scope and services, including the feasibility and/or challenges of the proposed project as well as the estimated annual budget for providing the project services.
4. **Other Considerations** – Provide general comments or suggestions related to agriculture workforce development and/or the proposed project.

Statements of interest will be accepted via email only. Please ensure your organization’s full contact information, including website and point(s) of contact are provided. **Please submit your response by November 1, 2023 to:**

Antonia Giuliano  
Senior Policy Advisor for Food and Dairy  
[antonia.giuliano@agriculture.ny.gov](mailto:antonia.giuliano@agriculture.ny.gov)

Questions about this RFI must be submitted via email by October 4, 2023 to:

Antonia Giuliano  
Senior Policy Advisor for Food and Dairy  
[antonia.giuliano@agriculture.ny.gov](mailto:antonia.giuliano@agriculture.ny.gov)

Responses to these questions will be posted by October 11, 2023 on the Department’s website.

**This RFI will not result in a contract but is intended to gather information for future decision making.**