



New York Farm Bureau • 159 Wolf Road P.O. Box 5330 • Albany, New York 12205 • (518) 436-8495 Fax: (518) 431-5656

Testimony from Steve Ammerman, New York Farm Bureau
Joint Legislative Hearing on the 2018-2019 Executive Budget for Elementary and Secondary
Education

February 6, 2018

On behalf of New York Farm Bureau, thank you for providing our organization the opportunity to submit comments on an important education budget item. New York Farm Bureau is the state's largest general agricultural advocacy organization with around 20,000 family farm members representing all size farms, all production methods and all commodities.

We are pleased to see that the Governor's proposed Department of Education budget includes \$10 million in funding to increase the school lunch reimbursement rate. The rate would increase from \$.06 a lunch to \$.25 a lunch if a school district has purchased at least 30% of its total cost of food products for its food services program from New York State farmers, growers, producers or processors in the preceding school year. This would be the first such reimbursement increase in more than 40 years.

New York Farm Bureau is supportive of this budget item. It would expand market opportunities for farmers to get more farm fresh food into school lunch programs across the state. In addition, it would also benefit students who will have greater access to healthy, minimally processed food. In many cases, the school lunch may be a student's only dependable healthy meal all day.

Dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, beef and poultry are all great sources of nutrition that can be provided by New York's farmers, and the focus of this effort should remain on New York grown or produced food, even if it is processed out of state. For example, culled dairy cows are a great source of affordable hamburger meat, but the animals may be processed across the border in Pennsylvania. Schools that purchase that meat will still be supporting New York's family farms.

We encourage the Senate and Assembly to include the funding, along with the \$1.5 million Farm to School Grant program, in the final 2018-2019 New York State Budget. These initiatives will encourage school districts to support their local farms and in turn circulate taxpayer dollars back into the rural economy where they are needed. For each dollar invested in Farm to School initiatives, on average, an additional \$1.67 is generated within the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and serve as an important resource for any questions that the committee may have on the matter.