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**Testimony from Elizabeth Wolters, New York Farm Bureau
Joint Legislative Hearing on the Governor's 2019-2020 Executive Budget
For Agriculture/Environmental Conservation
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On behalf of New York Farm Bureau, thank you for providing our organization the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Elizabeth Wolters and I serve as the Deputy Director of Public Policy. New York Farm Bureau is the state's largest general agricultural advocacy organization with approximately 20,000 family farm members representing all size farms, all production methods and all commodities.

First, we would be remiss not to mention the current agricultural economy. Nationally, net farm income is down 12% from last year, and New York has lost over a \$1 billion in the value of agricultural production since 2014. The state's largest agricultural sector, dairy, has been hit particularly hard as it is in the fourth year of low milk prices, but many other commodities like beef, corn and soy are also impacted. This makes the programs I am going to mention today even more important.

Through a lump sum allocation, the Executive Budget commits the largest allotment from a governor for statewide animal and public health, promotion and research funding for agriculture. In this proposal, these funds will be spent pursuant to a plan by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets and approved by the Director of the Budget. This is a new approach, however, the important issue for our members is ensuring that the central programs that they rely on are funded, whatever the language may look like.

In the Governor's briefing book, the executive narrates his commitment to specialized technical assistance, industry promotion and research investment to reduce exposure to economic and climate inconsistency statewide. Further, it highlights core investments to support workforce development, farm safety, food access, agricultural education, migrant child care and farm family assistance, and calls attention to supporting funding for vegetables, apples, berries, grapes, maple, honey, Christmas trees, animal disease control, wine and craft beverages and others.

Through this language, we are pleased to see that the Governor has continued his commitment to critical statewide programs relating to animal and public health. Programs like the Diagnostic Lab and Pro-Dairy at Cornell University. The agricultural community and consumers across the state depend on these critical programs as the foundation of a healthy and safe food supply in the state.

We are also pleased that the Governor has also set a priority to fund several promotional and research programs for the many commodities in the budget that serve as the economic development engine for the farm industry. We gather that some of these programs will be fully funded through the Executives proposal, however, not all.

For a minimal amount of state investment, these programs help to market New York products to our own New York consumers, as well as nationally and internationally. For instance, the Christmas Tree Growers Association collaborates with the Green Markets in New York City, and trees grown here in New York State are

actually replacing trees that are sold from North Carolina and Canada. Maple producers are developing new products each year and appealing to new customers. In the fall, consumers are specifically looking for New York's apple varieties at farm stands and in grocery stores. And our wineries are attracting 5 million tourists a year to locations all over the state.

Similarly, the research funded in the Agriculture and Markets budget is essential to making sure our growers continue to meet the new challenges they face, whether it is developing the next value-added product to better market what they grow, finding ways to grow products better, or dealing with emerging threats to what they raise. For example, in order to meet the growth in the craft brewery sector, and to make sure that New York Farmers are capitalizing on the consumers love for local beer, researchers at Cornell University have used state funds to establish a malting barley research and extension program. After four years of trials and selective plant breeding, researchers are currently growing seed for the first spring malting barley crop that will be a New York adapted variety that can better withstand the rigors of New York's growing season. I cannot overemphasize how critical research funding is to all of our agriculture sectors including dairy, apple, berry, maple, corn, vegetable, honey bee, onion and turfgrass growers in the state.

New York Farm Bureau was very pleased to see the Governor maintain last year's funding levels for the Environmental Protection Fund at \$300 million. We encourage the Legislature to support this proposal, especially for farm programs that support environmental health. As you know, the EPF champions the partnership between agriculture and the environment by funding farm environmental programs and protecting working lands.

The funding for the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement Program and Soil and Water Conservation District services is key this year as our livestock farmers look at further enhancing environmental stewardship to meet compliance with Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permits. Funding for the Farmland Protection Program will help ensure that we have resources to protect irreplaceable farmland from encroaching development statewide. The funding for invasive species eradication protects our natural resources from the pests that could wipe out the native species and diversity of species that our state enjoys. The Agricultural Waste Management Program remains important to farmers as well.

In addition, in the EPF proposal is continued funding for the Integrated Pest Management program of \$1 million, and we support this continued funding amount. This program has been underfunded in the past and provides valuable information to farmers so they can better manage pesticide applications to limit frequency, best target the specific threat and decrease input costs.

The Environmental Protection Fund also provides \$500,000 for the State's Pollinator Protection Plan. The Plan is a vital component in protecting the state's pollinators and helps to fund research and education on the state's pollinator populations including bees, butterflies, and pollinating flies. The research conducted at colleges, like Cornell University, ensure that beekeepers have best management practices (BMPs) on how to optimally raise their bees and produce honey but also provides information to farmers on pollinator habits and how best to protect them. Pollinators play an essential role in agriculture by providing \$344 million annually in pollination services to crops like apples, berries, vegetables, and melons, just to name a few. Continuing to fund implementation of the Pollinator Protection Plan will not only ensure the security of our pollinator population but the security of New York's food system as well.

We are also encouraged that the EPF has continued funding to fund DEC's Clean Sweep program. This program, funded in the past through dwindling consent settlement funds, helps farmers, municipalities and school districts safely dispose of unwanted, unregistered or expired pesticide products. I know many farmers

who were able to remove dozens of expired pesticide products from their farms, making their farms safer for the environment and for their workers and families.

Our farmers are on the front lines of the adverse weather our state has been experiencing over the past several years, and we are encouraged in not only the investment of research dollars for climate adaptation, mitigation and soil health, but also the Governors Climate Leadership Act proposal. We look forward to working with all of you in further developing this language to ensure that agriculture has a seat at the table.

NYFB has some concerns with the Congestion Pricing proposal in the Executive Budget and the costs that it may have on our farmers trying to bring goods to market. Our farmers already travel great distances and face high tolls and other expenses to bring their products to market that farmers in some of our neighboring states do not face.

We would also like to weigh in on the Bottle Bill proposal, this is an issue that our farmers support as trash often ends up in farm fields and can pose a threat to our livestock. Although we were pleased to see milk containers exempt from the bill, we feel that fruit juices face similar challenges and do not want to tax that industry.

Lastly, NYFB appreciates the language that was included in the Cannabis Regulation and Taxation Act that includes that ability for farmers to grow cannabis and the expansion of the state industrial hemp program. We see both of these crops as an opportunity for our farms to diversify and appreciate the ability to be part of this conversation.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have today or at any later time.

