

**Spring 2020  
Rural Futures**



**NEWS OF INTEREST ABOUT  
RURAL NEW YORK STATE**

A Publication of the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

The NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources is a joint bipartisan commission of the State Legislature with a mission to promote the viability of rural communities.



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**Thoughts from the Chair**

On April 3, 2020, we enacted a State Budget to keep the government open, pay our first responders, support our schools, maintain our infrastructure, and continue the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. It was an incredibly difficult budget, with the State facing up to a \$15 billion revenue shortfall due to the near-total freeze of our economy. No one took pleasure in voting for cuts in a time of crisis, and many of us had deep reservations about some of the rulemaking included in this budget. In the end, I reluctantly voted for it because (a) it's our job to keep the government running, (b) had we failed to pass this budget, the Governor would have had broad latitude to issue his own austerity budget, which could have been much worse, and (c) there are a few things to celebrate.

**The good:**

We allocated \$18 million for permanent farmland protection as part of a \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund. We enabled the State to issue a \$3 billion bond act (pending voter approval) to fund flood mitigation, water infrastructure, and real action on climate change. We were able to maintain funding for Farm to School. I was also able to secure funding for regional support systems like FarmNet, which helps distressed farmers.

**The not-as-bad-as-it-might-have-been:**

**On K-12 Education:** We fought successfully to prevent any cuts. In my Senate district, public schools overall will see a gain of nearly \$18 million. This is a long way from the \$1 billion statewide increase I have called for, to bring our schools closer in line with the court-mandated levels of funding, but it is a remarkable win in a terrible budget cycle.

**On Medicaid:**

The Governor had proposed \$2.5 billion in cuts, on top of \$800 million in cuts that went into effect January 1, 2020. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, we were fighting against this plan that included cutting aid to safety-net hospitals and shifting a near billion-dollar burden onto counties, which would have resulted in huge property tax increases. As the public health emergency grew, we pushed harder, and the final budget reduced the cuts almost in half. Some of the cuts are offset by new federal aid, and others will not take effect until after the current emergency ends. I don't pretend to like cutting Medicaid, but I worked hard to make the cuts less damaging, particularly for hospitals that care for low-income communities.

**The bad:**

The budget cuts are painful, including across the board cuts to local agencies and the above-mentioned Medicaid cuts. There were also changes to last year's bail reform law, which have succeeded in keeping large numbers of people out of jail while they await trial. Notably, there were some offenses added to the list of bail-eligible crimes. However, the Legislature resisted adding any dangerousness criteria to the law. And we delayed implementation so we are not increasing prison populations during a public health crisis.

I continue to advocate for another round of investment from the federal government to help our schools, boost employment, and make sure State and local governments can serve critical functions, like holding fair elections. I also believe we should require the wealthy to pay their fair share to cover some of these cuts, and I will continue to voice my support for sensible revenue items like adding additional tax brackets for those earning \$5 million a year or more. As we move forward, I will be monitoring the developments of both our revenue situation and the response by the federal government and pressing for improvements to ensure New York's long-term success.

Overall, my votes on these budget bills were agonizing decisions. I worked furiously with my colleagues to improve several proposals on the table and am proud of the changes we were able to achieve. My "yes" vote was not an endorsement of everything in the bill, but an acknowledgement of the good-faith effort we made in negotiations to move the Executive's proposed budget in the direction of justice and fairness at a very challenging moment. The budget is not what we wanted, but it's better than it was originally and better than it would have been, had we failed to act.

Senator Rachel May

## Thoughts from the Co-Chair

I know this has been a difficult time for everyone. New Yorkers are being asked to make enormous sacrifices to help slow and stop the spread of COVID-19. With all non-essential businesses closed in New York State, many are facing new challenges, especially in our rural communities.

Even before the current pandemic, rural communities were critically underfunded and lacking important resources like high speed broadband, needed now more than ever to access important information, obtain health and legal services, for education, and the transition to working at home.

Our rural communities provide us with a safe and affordable food supply. Despite the inequities they face, New York is still a leading agricultural state in a range of commodities, including dairy, apples, maple syrup, and wine. They also serve an essential role in providing the natural resources we all depend on not only for food, but also energy, water, and recreation.

During these unprecedented times, know that the work of this Commission will focus on important resources needed in rural communities to rebuild their economies and to continue to battle COVID-19.

I wish you good health and offer my deepest sympathies for those who have been affected by this current health crisis.



Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara

# COVID-19

## Commission Action During COVID-19

During these unprecedented times, the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources has worked tirelessly and creatively to assist those populations, industries, and businesses impacted by COVID-19. Unfortunately, it has primarily been a waiting game with eyes on the federal government to act. To spur federal action, the Commission has sent several letters to federal representatives on a variety of topics. On March 24, 2020, Chair Senator May and member Senator Metzger, who also chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, sent a letter to highlight the importance of the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Program and to request that it continue to allow applications to be processed and workers to enter the United States safely. The letter was sent to several federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Labor, and Department of Homeland Security. The letter was also sent to Congressional representatives, including Senator Schumer, Senator Gillibrand, Congressman Katko, Congressman Delgado, Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney, and Congressman Brindisi. Shortly after, we were very pleased to see that the State Department announced that it would relax its original restrictions and that consular officers can now waive the visa interview requirement for eligible first-time and returning H-2A applicants. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security, with the support of USDA, announced a temporary final rule to change certain H-2A requirements. We continue to urge the federal government to continue to monitor this program and to ensure that workers safely arrive at New York farms. The agricultural industry is subject to the command of Mother Nature and cannot afford any delays in planting or harvesting of crops.

*(Continued on page 3)*

### Inside This Issue:

- Thoughts from the Chair ..... 1
- Thoughts from the Co-Chair ..... 2
- COVID-19 ..... 2-6
  - Commission Action During COVID-19.. 2
  - Rural Schools Tasked with COVID-19 ... 3
  - The Agricultural Industry Battles COVID-19 ..... 4
  - COVID-19 Disrupts Dairy ..... 5
  - Farm Safety During COVID-19..... 6
  - Building Farm Resilience During COVID-19 and Beyond ..... 6
- Legislative Priorities ..... 7-12
  - Broadband: The Digital Divide..... 7
  - Understanding 5G and FCC's Regulations Affecting Small Wireless Facility Siting..... 7
  - Rural Transportation: Critically Needed and Critically Underfunded ..... 8
  - Renewable Energy Projects Siting, 2020-2021 NYS Budget ..... 10
  - Rural Health Efforts Performed by Seven Valleys..... 10
  - New York Cannabis Legalization and Farming..... 11
  - New Report Outlines Opportunity for New York to Revolutionize School Food .... 12
- Recent Events ..... 13-15
  - Promoting Agriculture's Great Stories!..... 13
  - 7th Annual Sip & Sample New York Wine Event ..... 14
  - Soil Health Roundtable..... 14
  - Flooding Hearing ..... 14
  - Farm Labor Wage Board Hearings .... 14
  - New York Farm Bureau Hosts Popular Reception in Albany ..... 15

Additionally, on April 9, 2020, Senator May, Senator Metzger, Senator Breslin, and several members of the Senate Agriculture Committee sent a letter to USDA regarding the impact of COVID-19 on New York's dairy industry and to request federal action. The dairy industry is the largest sector of New York's agricultural industry. The State is home to over 4,000 dairy farms and 335 dairy processing plants, ranging from major global companies to small, family-run operations. New York battles between placing third and fourth as the largest producer of milk in the Nation. The State ranks first as the largest producer of yogurt, cottage cheese, and sour cream. We were pleased to see that on April 17, 2020, USDA announced the \$19 billion Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). This Program will provide \$16 billion in direct support based on actual losses for agricultural producers, including \$2.9 billion for dairy. USDA will also purchase \$3 billion in fresh produce, dairy, and meat products under the Program to provide to food banks, community and faith-based organizations, and other non-profits serving Americans in need. USDA will purchase \$100 million per month in a variety of dairy products. We continue to urge USDA to use funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation to make and direct dairy purchases to emergency food service operations that have seen demand skyrocket. Due to insufficient cold storage capabilities, we also request that USDA initiate a voucher system to allow recipients to redeem products from their local stores. These systems already exist in New York and have been piloted by several food banks.

Lastly and most recently, the Commission sent a letter on April 22, 2020 to the New York Congressional delegation requesting funding in the next federal economic stimulus package for states and localities with a focus on rural communities. Rural New York is home to approximately 17 percent of New Yorkers, or 3.3 million people. Rural areas provide natural resources that much of the country depends on for food, energy, water, and recreation. Yet, despite the essential role they serve, rural areas are notoriously forgotten and critically underfunded. The letter included an endorsement of Senator Gillibrand and Congressman Delgado's efforts to include \$50 billion based on their Rebuild Rural America Act introduced in October 2019. Administered through flexible block grants, this funding would allow small towns, counties, and rural communities to rebuild their economies and to continue to battle COVID-19. We also endorse the idea that USDA should form a rural task force to prioritize the needs of rural communities.

The Commission continues to advocate for rural communities across New York State. Any constituent inquiries can be directed to [ruralres@nysenate.gov](mailto:ruralres@nysenate.gov) or 518-455-2631.

## Rural Schools Tasked with COVID-19

*Article Courtesy of David Little, Executive Director of the Rural Schools Association of New York State*

The State's response to the COVID-19 crisis contained a daunting directive to its public schools. Shut down now. Immediately switch from classroom instruction to providing each student with daily instruction at their home. Continue to feed them, no matter where they are. Finally, set up day care for the children of all those health care workers on the front lines of fighting the pandemic. For rural schools, the challenges were particularly daunting. In an ever-evolving environment (with few answers to the multitude of questions, few community partners, and fewer financial resources than their counterparts in more populated areas), rural schools were far from exempted from the State's demand. Indeed, in many communities they were and are the only hope of addressing community-wide problems. So they waded in.

To comply, New York State's rural schools would have to overcome significant logistical challenges. Unlike their urban and suburban counterparts, rural students would be located across vast stretches of land, often in remote locations. They would frequently lack sufficient internet access to regularly receive instruction electronically. Multiple meals would need to be prepared and provided throughout those broad geographic regions. Staff would need to be hired or reassigned to provide day care, developing daily activities on a moment's notice. Everyone in rural communities, where schools are often the focal point, would look to their schools to lead during this unprecedented crisis.

The result? Rural schools have delivered and then some. Despite the loss of staff and students to their homes, lessons have, in fact, continued. Teachers learned overnight how to teach online. They prepared packets of written materials for those students without internet service and began everything from Facebook counseling and





individualized instruction to Zoom class meetings. Recognizing the emotional impact of isolation on children and adults alike, they've gone above and beyond the call to provide tension-breaking messages of hope and reassurance. Some have hosted parades past student homes, where teachers and administrators have driven by playing music and shouting out encouragement in cars filled with pets and festooned with signs. In some communities, they've been joined by police, fire vehicles, and ambulances.

Cafeteria staff have turned into take-out specialists, preparing and packaging multiple meals for regular delivery, often driven by the school's bus drivers. Teachers' aides, no longer able to work side-by-side their charges have become day care providers and have shown that teachers aren't the only classroom professionals with creativity and the ability to innovate seemingly on a whim (or the courage to continue

working in a group setting!). Everything from science to physical education is proceeding unabated, bringing students, families and communities together virtually, if not physically.

All of this has occurred without knowing how long the crisis will last, how long staff can be retained or where the extra needed resources will come from. The State Education Department has been diligent in finding answers to questions related to State testing and others, as well as interpreting regulations in light of the State's current circumstances. Nonetheless, questions remain, particularly for seniors in high school. Everything from what will be required for graduation and college entry to whether there will be a senior prom remain unanswered.

The list of questions for rural schools when the pandemic has passed will be both numerous and profound. As homeschool groups have (by necessity) sprung up as parents become instant teachers, will the rate of homeschooling exacerbate the already declining enrollment in rural schools? Will the State realize the impact of the disparity in the provision of broadband internet and focus on providing it to rural students? Will it loosen the many restrictions on digital learning in the State? Then there are the financial implications. At present, the State is without revenue as the economy has shut down to maintain social distancing. Next year's State Budget is subject to periodic reductions in State aid to schools if sufficient revenues don't arrive. What will that mean to fiscally challenged rural schools that already struggle to meet even the State's minimum curricular standards? Will the State respond by allowing regional high schools, the two generation old (and successful) model of all of our neighboring states? Will it require small and struggling schools to merge, despite the often great distances involved? Time will tell, but for now, the one aspect of this crisis that has not been a surprise is that rural schools have shown themselves to be resilient, resourceful, and ready to lead their communities.

*Photos courtesy of Genesee Valley Central School featuring their meal prep and delivery to students in the district.*

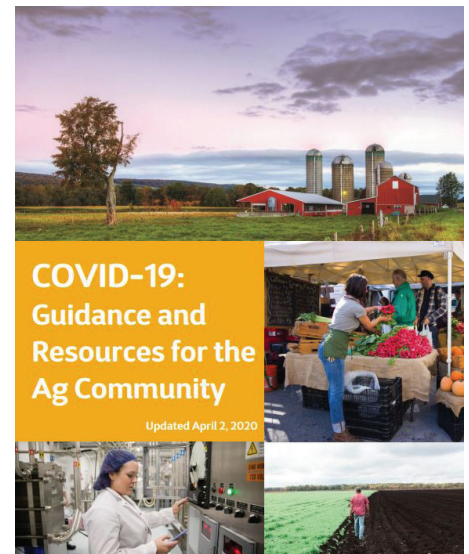
## **The Agricultural Industry Battles COVID-19**

*Article Courtesy of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets*

We are facing unprecedented and challenging times with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the agricultural industry has been affected in many ways. The Department of Agriculture and Markets is taking several steps to assist our farmers during this time: advocating for funding, working with our retailers to ensure limits are not placed on dairy or other agricultural products, and encouraging consumers to remain strong in their support of local farms and agri-businesses during this time.

Additionally, the Department is working to keep the agricultural community informed with the latest resources. [Agriculture.ny.gov/coronavirus](https://agriculture.ny.gov/coronavirus) has guidance for the agricultural community, including workforce reductions, mass gatherings, business waivers, and more. The web page is updated frequently, so be sure to check back often.

In addition, you can always ask New York State's experts for guidance on all topics by calling the New York State COVID-19 hotline at 1-888-364-3065 or submitting a question online using the following link: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/form/ask-us-a-question>.



**COVID-19:  
Guidance and  
Resources for the  
Ag Community**

Updated April 2, 2020

Finally, New York State's agricultural promotion programs have also adjusted to meet customer needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learn more below.

**Taste NY**

Taste NY Markets continue to adjust their hours and product selections to best support the communities, farmers, and businesses that are a critical part of New York's food supply chain. Consumers can visit one of the State's Taste NY Markets to find local pantry staples like milk, eggs, and bread, along with a variety of shelf-stable goods and specialty items, such as honey and maple products. Please note that selections and availability varies by market location. Find updated hours for each location using the following link: <https://taste.ny.gov/new-york-state-welcome-centers>.



Additionally, Taste NY Market operators are also helping consumers and supporting local producers through a new online outlet, [ShopTasteNY.com](http://ShopTasteNY.com), and by promoting producers' individual online purchasing options. Now, more than ever, purchases made through Taste NY help New York's small businesses and local communities thrive.

**New York State Grown & Certified**

New York State Grown & Certified producers are adapting to COVID-19 by offering delivery and curbside pickup options and other creative solutions. Keep up with the latest information about #NYSCertified businesses by following the program on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/nyscertified) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/nyscertified), where these options are highlighted every day. In addition, [certified.ny.gov](http://certified.ny.gov) helps consumers locate producers and reach out to them to find out how they can offer their support. It is critically important to support these small businesses during this time.

**COVID-19 Disrupts Dairy**

*Article Courtesy of Richard Stup, Agricultural Workforce Specialist at Cornell University*

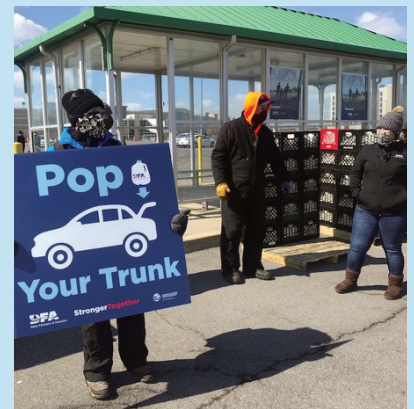
COVID-19 is causing major disruptions for dairy farms in a variety of ways. Managers and employees are taking critical steps to prevent the spread of the virus and to prepare if the farm workforce becomes sick or unable to work. Fortunately, dairy farms are already knowledgeable about infectious disease in general and good at maintaining sanitation. The COVID-19 pandemic is motivating farms to take additional steps to protect the health and safety of the farm workforce so that they can continue to produce good quality, reliable dairy foods for the rest of us.

Dairy farms are taking the following steps:

- Educating farm employees about the virus and the importance of prevention.
- Increasing cleaning and sanitation in the workplace and in farm-provided employee housing.
- Putting policies in place to financially support sick employees and those who are unable to work.
- Continuing team communications using technology tools, such as video or group chat tools.
- Redesigning workspaces and schedules to facilitate social distancing.
- Making contingency plans to continue farm operations even if employees or key managers are sick.
- Planning for appropriate reporting in the event of a COVID-19 positive case at the farm.
- Making plans to support and care for any sick employees.

Many resources exist to support farms in the fight against COVID-19. Following are a few key links:

- General Questions & Links: <https://eden.cce.cornell.edu/>
- Food Production, Processing & Safety Questions: <https://instituteforfoodsafety.cornell.edu/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Employment & Agricultural Workforce Questions: <http://agworkforce.cals.cornell.edu/>
- Cornell Small Farms Resiliency Resources: <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/farm-resilience/>
- Financial and Mental Health Resources for Farmers: <https://www.nyfarmnet.org/>
- Cornell Farmworker Program: English: [www.farmworkers.cornell.edu](http://www.farmworkers.cornell.edu), Spanish: [www.trabajadores.cornell.edu](http://www.trabajadores.cornell.edu)



*Photos courtesy of Senator May, who attended the milk drive-through distribution on April 22, 2020 at Destiny USA in Syracuse, NY. The event was organized by Dairy Farmers of America, American Dairy Association North East, and Dean Foods. Two tractor trailers full of nearly 8,000 gallons of free milk were distributed to families in need. Additional events have been hosted throughout the State, including at SUNY Morrisville.*

## Farm Safety During COVID-19

*Article Courtesy of Rebecca Meininger, Hotline Coordinator of National Rollover Protective Structures (ROPS) Rebate Program*



The National Rollover Protective Structures (ROPS) Rebate Program has been assisting farmers in New York State for 13 years with retrofitting older tractors with Rollover Protective Structures. The Program rebates 70% of the total cost: ROPS kit, shipping, and professional installation, if desired. Participants' out-of-pocket costs are never more than \$500. Most farmers know that they cannot put a price on safety, but even \$500 can be tough to scrape together.

To apply for the program, visit: [www.ROPSr4u.org](http://www.ROPSr4u.org) or call 1-877-ROPS-r4u (1-877-767-7748). The intake process takes 5-10 minutes and helps our staff provide farmers with information regarding purchasing a new, certified ROPS kit. ROPS kits are certified to tractor make and model and our Hotline staff has a list of manufacturers and pricing to provide to any farmer who applies. Farmers are under no obligation to participate; however, with a 70% rebate, it is no wonder so many have. Currently over 1,800 participate in New York alone.



Other offerings from the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) include the John May Farm Safety Fund, which is a grant program that will match up to \$5,000 for safety improvements on farms. Our trainers are also working to provide trainings to farms in need, including COVID-19 training. Trainings are currently being conducted online to comply with social distancing regulations. Contact NYCAMH at 1-800-343-7527 for more details.

We are still here for farmers throughout this COVID-19 outbreak and are ready to assist with safety improvements. These programs are vital to all farmers, their families, their employees, and to the future generations of agriculture.

## Building Farm Resilience During COVID-19 and Beyond

*Article Courtesy of Anu Rangarajan, Director of the Cornell Small Farms Program*

In times like these — when uncertainty upsets the daily rhythms of our communities — agriculturists have the opportunity to tap into timeless rhythms of a new season and deliver on a call to action. Whether you farm, homestead or garden, you can grow more food.

The Cornell Small Farms Program, in partnership with educators, researchers, and others, has been collecting news, opportunities, and resources about how you can take care of yourself, the farm, and your local community.

In New York State, farms growing food, farmers markets, and farm stands (CSAs included) are essential businesses. Now is the time to think creatively about your direct marketing approach. If you have relied on certain wholesale channels, such as restaurants, you may need different markets for those products. Consider what type of online sales tools would work for your farm and options for on-farm or drop-off deliveries.

You can also take this time to actively learn strategies that might help you through this pandemic. Focus on what you can do today. There are various opportunities to learn new skills and information to help your decision-making in the near future.

Whether you hire labor or rely on family to support a farm's operations, or you work on a farm, you need to be prepared for the possibility that you or others working beside you may fall sick due to COVID-19 this season. Now is a good time to review your farm plan and redesign activities for physical distancing. It's also important to have backup plans to make sure the essential work gets done, and consider how to care for those who may fall ill.

It is also essential that you start planning now for financial resiliency to stay in business during the COVID-19 pandemic and recover afterwards. If you are a farm business, the most important program to be aware of right now is the Paycheck Protection Loan Program, which was authorized in the CARES Act. Farms that meet the Program's small business thresholds are eligible to apply for this low-interest, forgivable loan program.

Learn more about how you can build resiliency on the Cornell Small Farms Program website at: <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/resources/farm-resilience/>.



*Nina Saeli is a farmer veteran who owns and operates Centurion Farm in Locke, NY, with her husband, Jeffrey. She has participated in various offerings from the Cornell Small Farms Program and has grown from a small garden in 2015 to a diversified vegetable farm.*

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

## Broadband: The Digital Divide

*Opinion by Senator Rachel May, Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources*

More than ever, access to high-speed internet is as essential as heat and electricity. Our businesses, schools, libraries, government agencies, courts, farms, and homes all operate on the internet. We operate increasingly among the “internet of things,” which help us all stay on schedule, pay our bills, run our businesses, and complete our school assignments. Our need for connectivity has spiked due to COVID-19. Many of us rely on the internet for work, school, and social connection, striving for a sense of normalcy.

As COVID-19 has catapulted us into a digital reality, many New Yorkers have been left out. The disparity between the broadband “haves” and “have-nots” has been exacerbated. Across New York State, a large part of this unserved or underserved population is located in rural areas, as well as in urban city centers. This digital divide means workers have not been able to file for unemployment and patients have remained isolated from critical check-ups. Students have been forced to drive to the local library merely to access assignments, but are not able to participate in any real-time learning with their classmates. There are many such inequalities.

The State has made significant investments in expanding rural broadband under Governor Cuomo’s leadership, but the scope of the problem may be broader than we previously anticipated. While the New York State Broadband Office claims that 99 percent of New Yorkers have access to broadband due to the State’s \$500 million phased-in investment, Microsoft reports that as many as 8.7 million New Yorkers still do not receive access to quality services. The network of satellites and copper wires that provide this service in many rural areas usually result in chronic spotty service and slow speeds, when they work at all. Fiber is the preferred, but elusive, method of delivery in these areas.

Companies have notoriously tried to avoid deploying fiber in unserved areas due to its high cost. Charter Communications, locally known as Spectrum, recently filed a petition asking the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to allow it to exclude some unserved areas in New York State in order to obtain \$20.4 billion from the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). The RDOF is the single largest distribution of Universal Service Fund dollars available to communications service providers in history. Unfortunately, the FCC has already placed a growing number of underserved areas at a disadvantage with its decision to block RDOF funds from census blocks that have received funding from other State or federal broadband programs. Additionally, the FCC considers an entire census tract served even if only one home in that tract is served. This is not accurate or reflective of the current situation.

Underserved areas continue to wait for sufficient broadband service and the opportunity to fully participate in society. A recent audit released by State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli found that Charter failed to expand its rural broadband service as agreed upon. In 2016, the Public Service Commission approved Charter’s merger with Time Warner Cable following a series of conditions, one of which included expanding rural broadband service. The audit revealed that Charter had not fulfilled four of the conditions set out in 2016 and had not extended its network to an additional 145,000 underserved businesses

and residents. If Charter’s waiver is granted by the FCC, a significant number of households will continue to not be served. This is unacceptable.

As Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, I have made broadband a top priority for the current Legislative Session. On September 17, 2019, the Commission hosted a public hearing in Albany on the status of broadband in rural areas. The Senate has also introduced several pieces of legislation to move the State closer to universal access to broadband: S.5523 establishes a municipal broadband fund that would give grants to local governments for broadband projects and services, S.7229 allows local governments to establish municipal broadband services for their residents, and S.5696 requires the Public Service Commission to review broadband and fiber services within the State. I urge my Senate and Assembly colleagues to support efforts to improve broadband access in all of our cities, suburbs, and rural communities alike.

As the State looks to reopen its doors and “reimagine” daily life after COVID-19, we must fight to secure universal and equal access to broadband. Currently, telemedicine and tele-education are not feasible in large swaths of the State. As the court system starts to tackle its dockets, document e-filing will not be possible in a majority of towns and villages. Every New Yorker — farmer, public city school student, business person, doctor — must have access to reliable, high-speed internet. It is vital for our economy, our education, and our daily lives.

## Understanding 5G and FCC’s Regulations Affecting Small Wireless Facility Siting

*Article Courtesy of Rebecca Ruscito, Counsel of the New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM)*

Much like the evolution of mobile phones, the internet itself is changing. The internet is no longer a solitary destination for websites and search engines. Instead, the internet is being used to transmit data between a variety of connected devices to provide users with integrated experiences. This is known as the Internet of Things (IoT). Devices utilizing the IoT have become assimilated into how we manage ourselves and our environments, and include a variety of home-based technologies like Roku, smart TVs, the Amazon Alexa, Google Home, Nest Thermostat, and a myriad of home security devices, as well as wearable technologies like smart watches and fitness trackers.

While smart devices are perhaps our most direct association with the IoT, many more smart technologies are not in our homes or available on our phones. Factories, businesses, and healthcare industries utilize this technology to track inventories, manage machines, ensure security, increase efficiency, minimize expenses, and save lives. As evidenced here, everything is becoming dependent on internet connectivity. Job applications, banking, scholarships, educational opportunities, and telehealth services all rely on robust and consistent internet access. Meeting the ever-growing need in the IoT era will rely on the dissemination of the next generation of wireless service and the small cell systems that are needed to supplement the network.

Fifth generation wireless service, or 5G, is the latest iteration of wireless technology. While no official definition of 5G exists, the different generations of wireless technology are indicative of the technological advancements that have increased transmission. Although the standards for 5G have not yet been formally established, it is expected that the new network system will provide markedly higher speeds and increased capacities than the existing cellular networks. 5G will transmit larger quantities of data much more quickly than previous generations of wireless service.

A major weakness of the 5G technology, however, is its significantly reduced transmission distance. Consequently, 5G service will require the propagation of small wireless antenna systems to provide such bolstered wireless service. In other words, the next generation of wireless technology will need many more antennas or nodes to cover the same area covered by current technology. Small wireless networks are already used by wireless companies to increase range, coverage, and capacity in densely populated areas that cannot be sustained by existing cell towers.

In October 2018, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted rulemaking that significantly impacted how local governments may examine the applications of wireless providers to install such equipment in the municipal right-of-way (ROW). Specifically, the Order (1) defined what constitutes a material prohibition of personal wireless service, (2) established presumptively reasonable fees, (3) requires safety and aesthetic considerations that may be imposed by local governments be published in advance, and (4) creates new shot clocks for applications to install small wireless facilities.

First, if a local government imposes a requirement that “materially limits or inhibits the ability of any competitor or potential competitor to compete in a fair and balanced legal and regulatory environment,” that regulation is prohibited. This includes activities such as filling coverage gaps, densifying networks, and introducing new services. Put another way, service is materially inhibited when a wireless provider cannot strengthen its service or make it more reliable in a defined area, even when the territory is already covered by the provider’s network.

Secondly, the FCC concluded that all fees associated with the siting and installation of small wireless facilities must be limited to reasonable approximations of the local government’s directly incurred costs. This means all fees must be based on the actual costs incurred by the municipality, may not include exorbitant third party consultant fees, and may not be used to generate revenue. Additionally, such costs may only be imposed in a nondiscriminatory manner. Application fees are presumptively reasonable when limited to \$500 for a single up-front application that includes up to five sites, and \$100 per application for each site thereafter. Presumptively, reasonable recurring charges for small wireless facilities in the ROW are \$270 per site per year, which includes all related access, permitting, and rental fees.

Next, the FCC’s Order requires local governments to adopt and publish aesthetic standards that the municipality will consider and impose when reviewing siting applications for small wireless facilities. Such local regulations must be “reasonable,” “no more burdensome than those applied to other types of infrastructure deployments,” and “published in advance” of any attempt to impose the standard. To ensure that local authorities preserve and retain control over considerations, such as aesthetics and safety, municipal officials must clearly establish the standards for which applications will be reviewed.

Lastly, local governments have 60 days to complete their review of applications for collocated small cells, and 90 days for applications to install small cells on new structures. “Collocation,” under the rule, is defined as placing an antenna on

any existing structure, regardless of whether that structure already has wireless equipment on it, or whether it was constructed specifically to host wireless equipment. All mechanisms for review (i.e., permitting, licensing, etc.) must be completed within the clock.

In conclusion, the FCC has dramatically restricted local governments’ review of small wireless facilities siting applications. The Governor threatened to enact further restrictions in this year’s Executive Budget, but fortunately, they were not included in the final agreement. As a result, it is imperative that villages establish written standards preserving their authority to impose local considerations. While articulating every consideration that a siting authority will impose when reviewing an application for the installation of small wireless facilities may seem like an arduous undertaking, establishing a published set of requirements is the only way to protect and enforce local standards. NYCOM recommends that local governments memorialize local aesthetic consideration and safety standards in writing as quickly as possible and modify this policy as necessary.

For more information relating to the regulation of telecommunication services and to obtain copies of sample telecommunications policies, please contact NYCOM Counsel Rebecca Ruscito at 518-463-1185 or by email at [rebecca@nycom.org](mailto:rebecca@nycom.org).

## **Rural Transportation: Critically Needed and Critically Underfunded**

*Article Courtesy of Amber Simmons, President of the New York State Association for Mobility Management (NYSAMM)*



Many people rarely think about rural transportation options until driving becomes difficult. Whether the person needs to go to a medical appointment or to the store for a few groceries, they never consider that someday it might be difficult. That’s why affordable, reliable public transportation options are vital.

Rural public transportation is the backbone of a family of mobility options, including transit, demand response systems, human service transportation (through the New York State Office for the Aging and others), volunteer transportation networks,





mobility management programs, paratransit, and other community-based organizations. These are largely coordinated through mobility management practices and link our most vulnerable populations to critical social determinants of health, such as employment, education, housing, and food.

New York rural public transportation systems have dire funding realities that threaten their existence. In 2013, the New York State Department of Health (DOH) changed the process for Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation and diverted trips from public transportation to taxi services. The unintended consequences imperiled financially-strapped systems to the brink of extinction. In response, DOH has provided supplemental funding to high-impact rural counties, which has been the difference between some small systems surviving or not.

Ultimately, sustainable solutions must be developed, but the supplemental funds are critical to fill the gap until new solutions are created. To assist with the development of sustainable solutions, Senator May has sponsored a bill to enact a State Interagency Coordinating Committee on Rural Public Transportation (S.6229) to address the issue in a coordinated manner.

It's extremely important that our local leaders support rural transportation funding and coordination within our communities, especially during these unprecedented times. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, small urban and rural transportation professionals continue to do everything they can to keep our communities safe and connected to essential services. 41% of the systems that have been reported are either providing critical trips only, or have temporarily suspended operations; they remain committed to their communities. NYSAMM has been a conduit for questions, discussion, best practices, inquiries, and a host of anything these systems need to discuss and seek peer expertise and opinion. The rural transportation matrix gathers at our weekly Zoom meeting. We have learned that even though some systems have suspended service, they continue to coordinate efforts in readiness and preparedness for when they can safely operate. In many cases, they are helping to coordinate rides with other services and are largely operating from home offices. Entire one-call or one-click centers have been mobilized to home offices.

While our community transportation reality seems to change almost daily, it's important to know that the public transportation providers, some private providers, community transportation networks, and mobility managers remain dedicated to help however they can, to keep our communities connected.

Below are general statistics of the current situation:

- 79 systems have been reported, which are primarily in Upstate NY and most are either small urban or rural systems.
- 19 report service is normal, although ridership is dramatically down by 70-90%.
- 14 report some reductions.
- 16 have reported they are providing critical trips only and service may have changed from a fixed route to an on-demand model.
- 17 report they have suspended all service. Of these, most are still coordinating some sort of transportation effort with other taxi, volunteer, or other services and may still be providing senior grocery shuttles.
- Many are no longer charging fares.

*The above situation may have evolved since this article was submitted.*



## Renewable Energy Projects Siting, 2020-2021 NYS Budget

Article Courtesy of Rebecca Ruscito, Counsel of the New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM)

The State Budget establishes a new Office of Renewable Energy Siting to review siting applications for those renewable energy facilities whose capacities exceed 25 megawatts, and those between 20-25 megawatts who opt into the new process. Much like in the proposed Executive Budget, the procedures adopted by the State Legislature will “fast track” the siting process and will shift the burden to municipalities to prove that the siting application is inconsistent with local laws and regulations. However, unlike the proposed version, the enacted language predicates approval of an application upon proof that the applicant consulted with the host municipality prior to making the application.

Additionally, the language requires host community benefit agreements, establishes a local agency account or intervenor fund that municipalities may use to determine whether a proposed facility complies with local laws and regulations, and requires adjudicatory hearings if a municipality or public comment raises a substantive or significant issue, as will be defined by the regulations implementing the law. Notably, the proposed provisions that would have altered the valuation methodology for property taxation and limited the ability of local governments to negotiate PILOTS have been removed.

While the legislation provides for more local government engagement in the process than initially proposed, it will still replace the Siting Board and the Article 10 siting review process for renewable energy facilities exceeding 25 megawatts in capacity and will deem a renewable energy project granted if not acted on within one year of a completed application. Additionally, the statute permits the Office of Renewable Energy Siting to disregard local laws and regulations when approving siting applications if such local laws diminish the environmental benefits of the proposed facility, based on the carbon reduction targets articulated in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Lastly, the legislation authorizes the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to establish a program that encourages and incentivizes the development of clean energy resources.

## Rural Health Efforts Performed by Seven Valleys

Article Courtesy of Susan Williams, Assistant Director of Seven Valleys Health Coalition



Cortland County Local Foods Map created by SVHC through USDA FMPP funding released Fall 2019.

In 1994, Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC) in Cortland began as a collaboration of the Cortland County Health Department, Guthrie Cortland Medical Center (then Cortland Memorial Hospital), and Family Health Network, incorporating as a private 501(c)(3) in 2001. Primarily funded through the NYS Department of Health’s (DOH) Charles D. Cook’s Rural Health Network Development Program and other grants, SVHC works to identify and resolve unmet community needs by creating, supporting, and promoting integrated health and human services through active participation with a variety of local, regional, State, and national systems and organizations. SVHC partners with the NYS Association for Rural Health (NYSARH), NY Public Transit Association, National Rural Health Association, Rural Health Network of South Central NY’s Food and Health Network program, and the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. While SVHC’s work addresses a variety of social determinants of health, including neighborhood environment, economic stability, and community engagement, in recent years, food systems work has become a prime focus for the agency.

SVHC convened a meeting in Spring 2016 with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Cortland, the Cortland County Planning Department, Cortland County Community Action Program (CAPCO), and Main Street Farms (a local producer) to discuss how to move forward with collaborative efforts to support locally-grown and produced foods, address food security, and bridge the communication gap between several organizations and groups separately supporting similar goals. In Fall 2016, this collaboration resulted in SVHC’s receipt of a three-year USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) grant. That meeting and seed funding was the beginning of what is now known as the Cortland Food Project (CFP) committee. With SVHC’s facilitation and significant community collaboration, the CFP has grown and evolved into Cortland County’s food policy council, with active subcommittees

and a healthy list of accomplishments in its short, four-year history. The CFP has a rich, multi-sector membership, including human service organizations, municipalities, school districts and colleges, growers and producers, food pantries, community members, and more.

Through the USDA grant and other collaborative funding aimed at improving the health of local residents, SVHC has provided technical support, supplies, communication channels, and more to local producers. This includes to farmers markets in the form of new tablets and cellular data to keep EBT operational for SNAP customers, as well as canvas shopping bags and advertising/media assistance through social media, print, and radio. Media encouraging local produce purchasing and consumption has used less

(Continued on page 11)

### COVID-19 Help is Available!

**Call 2-1-1**

If you or a loved one need assistance finding food, paying housing bills, or other essential services, **DIAL 2-1-1** to speak to someone who can help. You can also find local agency updates and help at [211cortland.org](http://211cortland.org) or by calling 877-211-8667

**Visit 211cortland.org**

2-1-1 Cortland is a program of Seven Valleys Health Coalition. This 2-1-1 information line is available across New York State and the country.



*Seven Valleys Health Coalition staff as of March 2020. Front row (L-R): Theresa Rodabaugh, AmeriCorps Member; Susan Williams, Assistant Director; Gabrielle DiDomenico, Project Coordinator. Second row (L-R): Samantha Metz, Project Coordinator; Catherine Wilde, Mobility Manager. Third row (L-R): Kristin Avery, Office Manager; Jackie Leaf, Director. Not pictured: Christopher Scagnelli, Project Coordinator; Jessica Forbes, Project Assistant.*

traditional methods, including SVHC's creation of a series of instructional cooking videos featuring locally plentiful yet sometimes less commonly consumed produce, an ongoing series of free cooking classes focused on these same recipes, and with collaboration from a CFP subcommittee, a Cortland County Local Foods map available both in print and electronically.

In early 2018, SVHC received a technical assistance award through the EPA's "Local Foods, Local Places" (LFLP), which led the CFP through a community engagement process resulting in a food systems action plan for Cortland. This plan lays out goals, action items, and local entities willing to push it forward. In Spring 2019, the LFLP plan spawned funding from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets for a new Farm-to-School project through CCE Cortland, two new, solely food-systems focused full-time AmeriCorps positions at SVHC and CCE Cortland, a revitalization of the dormant Cortland County Hunger Coalition, and a partnership with the City of Cortland and SVHC to start a new food rescue network in Cortland through three years of combined funding from NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and Health Foundation for Western and Central NY. In 2019, armed with a clear road map for Cortland County food systems work, the CFP began formalizing their structure and the transition to a food policy council through consultation and training with Ann Palmer, Food Communities and Public Health program director at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, provided by HealtheConnections through DOH Population Health Improvement Program funding.

When the COVID-19 epidemic took hold, SVHC's food systems work and their 2-1-1 Cortland information and referral service program became even more active. The groundwork laid by the organization over the past several years has helped them keep the Cortland community informed through one central collective of information and referral for a wide variety of needs, including food. The CFP and Hunger Coalition led by SVHC allowed for county-wide communication about the collaborative, rapidly changing efforts to ensure food security is maintained as needs increase. For more information about Seven Valleys Health Coalition and their food systems work, visit [www.sevenvalleyshealth.org](http://www.sevenvalleyshealth.org).

## New York Cannabis Legalization and Farming

*Article Courtesy of John Gilstrap, Co-Founder of Hudson Hemp and New York Cannabis & Hemp Trade Organization (NYCHTO), and Melissa Moore, NY Deputy Director of Drug Policy Alliance and member of the SMART NY Coalition*

New York State has considered legalizing and regulating adult-use marijuana for the last six years. Our government's first step into the cannabis industry began with the introduction of a limited medical marijuana program, one of the most highly regulated in the United States. Later, a nascent hemp industry was established, which continues to face stiff competition from large corporate hemp producers in other states. Restrictions on who could participate as license holders in the medical marijuana program and uncertainty around hemp guidelines has kept many farmers and small businesses from participating within these new markets as producers and distributors.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began ravaging our economy, many New York farms were already struggling to make ends meet. Staple goods that are a part of New York agriculture, like milk and apples, have faced declining prices and stiff international competition in recent years. As a result, farmers have had difficulty covering their basic needs, paying bills, and retaining land ownership without subsidies.

The New York Farm Bureau and Northeast Organic Farming Association have endorsed legalizing and regulating adult-use cannabis in recognition of the urgency and opportunity for a new profitable crop. A legal cannabis industry would create a significant economic boost for farmers in New York's agricultural economy. Cannabis thus becomes a sustainable crop that can complement other plantings in rotation. This crop diversity will provide a hedge against unpredictable markets and protect our ecosystems at the same time.

New York State is facing a unique budget shortfall stemming from the pandemic, with projected losses upwards of \$15 billion due to lost revenue this year. It is imperative that we develop new revenue streams for small- and mid-sized farms and businesses. Tax revenues can be invested in rebuilding and fortifying the communities that have been most harmed by the one-two punch of the war on drugs and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is only through this lens that action around legalization will have a positive statewide impact for farmers and devastated communities.

Though comprehensive cannabis legalization and regulation did not pass in this year's Budget due to the COVID-19 crisis, in the remaining months of the Legislative Session, New York retains the opportunity to pass the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA), sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger and Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes. This legislation will provide a key framework and lifeline to support people across New York and our



*(Continued on page 12)*



economic recovery as we emerge from this pandemic.

The MRTA calls for the establishment of a statewide Office of Cannabis Management to oversee the medical marijuana, industrial hemp, and adult-use cannabis programs. The Office will focus on removing structural barriers that prevent family farms from taking part in the medical marijuana industry and facilitate their participation in the craft adult-use market.

Currently, medical marijuana is grown in capital intensive indoor industrial spaces by large cap companies. We propose that New York State allow farmers to farm. To do so, farmers need access to resources, such as low interest loans, grants and private equity partnerships. Farmers will have the flexibility to grow outdoors and do what they do best.

As policymakers consider on-site consumption licenses, legislators might also include farm stand site licenses to give farmers the ability to sell directly to

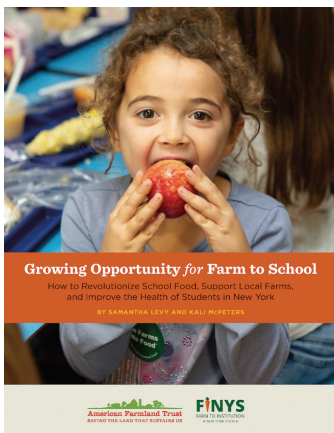
consumers. Farmers will have the ability to showcase their unique crop varieties. Farmers should have a voice on the New York State Cannabis Advisory Board to help guide these decisions.

New York will need new revenue streams and employment prospects this year and beyond. Adult use marijuana must be top of mind. Yet, we must ensure that legalization and regulation is done right to serve the communities who need to benefit from it during these precarious times, particularly local farmers, New York small businesses, and underrepresented communities. We must ensure that opportunities are there for people to take part in New York's new industry.

The success of New York's future adult use cannabis market will not only be defined by the millions of dollars of incremental revenue brought in, but by how this industry can become an economic engine for our hardest hit communities and uplift those who have been previously marginalized and overlooked.

## New Report Outlines Opportunity for New York to Revolutionize School Food

Article Courtesy of Samantha Levy, NY Policy Manager of American Farmland Trust



Helping more schools engage in Farm to School activities yields important benefits for rural communities statewide by increasing access to healthy, locally grown food for kids who need it while supporting local farms. This is critical as farmers face challenges staying in business and nearly one million children across the State are reported as food insecure.

American Farmland Trust recently released an exciting new report called "Growing Opportunity for Farm to School: How to Revolutionize School

Food, Support Local Farms, and Improve the Health of Students in New York." This report reveals the opportunity created by the New York Farm to School Purchasing Incentive in 2018, which helps schools buy more New York grown food to serve to kids by quadrupling the State's per-meal reimbursement if schools spend at least 30% of their lunch budget on food from New York farms.

While reaching 30% is a challenge, this report revealed that with the right support, 72% of New York K-12 schools feel confident that they can get there within 5 years.



Achieving this would increase school spending on food from New York farms to \$150 million while increasing access to fresh, healthy New York grown food for 700,000 students statewide. Conservatively, this would generate over \$210 million in total economic impact while costing the State just over \$94 million over the course of five years in reimbursement and support.

**The Right Support**

This is a tremendous economic and public health opportunity, but school nutrition staff still face real barriers when trying to buy local food and reach 30%. We must work to lower these barriers by increasing the number of Farm to School coordinators providing support to schools across New York, softening food procurement regulations, building local supply chains, and providing training to school food buyers on how to buy local food. This will not only improve the economy and future for our farms, but will also improve the lives of children while strengthening communities across New York. A win-win-win.

To access the complete report, please visit [www.farmland.org/growingopportunity](http://www.farmland.org/growingopportunity).

Thank you to the many school food staff across the State who have bravely worked to ensure students are fed while schools have been closed due to COVID-19.

*Photos by Nancy J. Parisi, courtesy of American Farmland Trust.*



## RECENT EVENTS

### Promoting Agriculture's Great Stories!

*Article Courtesy of Ann Noble Shephard, Secretary of NYS Agricultural Society*

At over 700 members strong, the NYS Agricultural Society is one of the oldest organizations of its kind in the United States. We are a vital body of producers, educators, promoters, regulators, consultants, lenders, and entrepreneurs ranging in age from 18 to 90 plus. Committed to agricultural education, leadership development, and recognition of our peers, the Society celebrated a historic 188th annual meeting and Forum this past January 2020.

Storytelling about our life in the industry and the work we do is a tremendous way to bridge the knowledge gap between the farm community and consumers. On an annual basis, we source these stories by promoting our annual award winners. This extensive recognition program highlights both operations and individuals in eight categories, including Farm Safety, Business of the Year, Next Generation Farmer, Ag Promotion, Journalism, FFA Chapter of the Year, and Distinguished Service.

Go to [www.nysagsociety.org](http://www.nysagsociety.org) to see our list of past winners and criteria for selection. We look forward to your nomination of a neighbor or peer that has a great story to tell about NY agriculture.



*Bricdale Farm of Perry, NY received the 2020 Century Farm Award from the NYS Agricultural Society at their 188th Annual Meeting & Forum January 9, 2020 in Syracuse, NY. The award, sponsored by Farm Credit Northeast Ag Enhancement, honors NY farms in continuous operation on the same land by the same family for 100 years or more. Established in 1889 as a small dairy, Bricdale has evolved to include a beef and specialty crop operation, including lettuce, microgreens, and sunflower sprouts. To make a nomination or to view past NYS Ag Society award winners, go to [www.nysagsociety.org](http://www.nysagsociety.org).*



*Three generations of the Brick Family are active on Bricdale Farm of Perry, NY.*

## 7th Annual Sip & Sample New York Wine Event

On February 3, 2020, the New York Wine Industry Association Inc. (NYWIA) organized its 7th Annual “Sip & Sample” event at “The Well” in the Legislative Office Building in Albany, NY. The event was sponsored by Senator Metzger, Senator O’Mara, Senator Helming, and Assemblyman Palmesano. Each year, the event provides an opportunity to showcase New York wines and foods to legislators, staff members, and other government leadership in the New York State Capitol.

Participants included:

New York Wine & Grape Foundation, Three Brothers Wineries, Frontenac Point Vineyard, Sheldrake Point Winery, Lieb Cellars, Sannino Vineyard and B&B, Dinosaur BBQ - Troy, Fulkerson Winery, Billsboro Winery, Fox Run Vineyards, Rooftop Reds, Merritt Winery, Hudson-Chatham Winery, Meadowdale Farm Winery, Lakewood Vineyards, Adirondack Winery, Anthony Road, Atwater Vineyards, Villa Bellangelo, Millbrook Winery, Altamont Winery, Bashakill Vineyards, Whitecliff Vineyard, and Wine About The Weather.



## Soil Health Roundtable

*Article Courtesy of Senator Jen Metzger*

On February 5, 2020, Chairs of the Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees, Senator Metzger and Assemblywoman Lupardo, hosted a roundtable discussion on the importance of soil health. In attendance were additional members of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, including Senator May and Assemblywoman Lifton, as well as Assemblywoman Barrett. Attendees also included farm organizations, farmers, environmental groups, experts from Cornell University, Commissioner Ball and staff from the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, plus representatives from New York Soil Health, New York Farm Bureau, Northeast Organic Farming Association, the New York State Vegetable Growers Association, the National Young Farmers Coalition, and American Farmland Trust. Participants discussed current efforts and barriers to improving soil health.

Soil health has been defined as the continued capacity of the soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Soil health strongly factors into farm sustainability, consumer demand for fresh and local food, carbon sequestration, and environmental conservation. Outcomes for soil health programs include improved water quality, reduced erosion, increased resilience

of farms and forests, lower costs of stormwater control, and other savings that can then be reinvested.

The roundtable produced a number of ideas about how the state can assist stakeholder efforts, including providing funding and incentives for farmers to make needed investments in new practices and management systems, initiating farmer-to-farmer information sharing about best practices, and continuing to support New York’s network of on-the-ground experts through Cornell Cooperative Extension and Soil and Water Conservation Districts. There was also wide agreement on the need to be flexible, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach for farmers improving soil health.

## Flooding Hearing

On February 25, 2020, the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources hosted a public hearing in Albany, NY to examine the effectiveness of current flooding emergency and mitigation efforts, and to discuss the need for future assistance due to the increase in extreme weather events. In attendance were representatives from the NYS Office of Emergency Management (OEM), the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), agriculture community, academia, and soil and water conservation districts. Individuals testified on programs and systems currently in place to handle emergency flooding, the proposed and recently passed Restore Mother Nature Bond Act in relation to future flooding mitigation efforts, and potential solutions to better prepare counties in NYS as ice jams, hurricanes, broken dams, ice storms, heavy rains, and storm surges become an even more common occurrence due to climate change. Flooding is a threat to nearly every New Yorker, as 90% of NYS residents live in a waterfront community. A majority of roads in NYS are vulnerable to floods because they were built along towns, rivers, and streams. Recent events, such as the late October 2019 storm that hit Upstate NY, Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, and rising water levels of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River have caused millions of dollars worth of damage to homes, businesses, and key infrastructure. These events will increasingly threaten the economy, environment, and lives of NYS residents if mitigation and emergency efforts are not prioritized. Commission staff continue to work on potential solutions that will combat flooding, including the installation of green infrastructure, improvement of stormwater infrastructure, update of floodplain maps, and increased assistance to farmers.

## Farm Labor Wage Board Hearings

The Farm Labor Wage Board hosted its first public hearing on February 28, 2020 in Albany, NY. The Wage Board was created by the recently enacted Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act to consider lowering the current 60-hour work week threshold for overtime. The three-member board consists of New York Farm Bureau (NYFB) President David Fisher, Department of Labor (DOL) appointee Brenda McDuffie, and AFL-CIO representative Denis Hughes. McDuffie is the Chair of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency and President and CEO of the Buffalo Urban League. Hughes has served as Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and as Past President of NY AFL-CIO.

The Wage Board was statutorily required to hold its first hearing by March 1, 2020. Originally, the Board had scheduled five hearings across the State to be completed by the end of April. Hearings were to be held in Albany, Syracuse, Binghamton, Long Island, and Batavia. Due to COVID-19, hearings have been postponed until further notice. Public comments may still be submitted to [wageboard@labor.ny.gov](mailto:wageboard@labor.ny.gov).

## New York Farm Bureau Hosts Popular Reception in Albany

*Article Courtesy of Steve Ammerman, Public Affairs Manager of New York Farm Bureau*

More than 200 New York Farm Bureau (NYFB) members visited Albany on March 2-3, 2020 to discuss NYFB's state priorities and to engage with lawmakers and staff as part of the organization's annual Lobby Days.

Things kicked off with the hugely popular Taste of NY Reception in the Empire State Plaza Convention Center. Hundreds of Senators and Assembly Members, Agency officials, and staff attended Monday evening's event. More than 80 booths representing county Farm Bureaus and agricultural organizations from across the State featured New York grown and produced food and beverages. This was a wonderful opportunity for members to engage with decision makers in a fun, social event before Tuesday's big lobby day. NYFB members participated in about 300 meetings with their representatives and adopted lawmakers from New York City.

"This is a pivotal time for agriculture. Our farms continue to face regulatory and labor pressures that are making it increasingly difficult to farm in this State. Our members turned out in a big way to make the case that New York needs a vital farm economy. Our reception and member visits showcased the rich diversity of New York agriculture and the exciting possibilities that are unique to our State, but if we don't take care of our farms, those opportunities will be lost. The real losers will be more than our farm families and employees, but also our communities and our customers who value locally produced food," said David Fisher, NYFB President.



*NYFB Vice President Eric Ooms, NYFB President David Fisher, Senate Agriculture Chair and Commission member Jen Metzger, NYFB Young Farmer Chair Christina Kohler, and NYFB State Director Bob Nolan meet in the Senator's office during NYFB's lobby day.*



*Senator May with FFA members as they visit the State Capitol and legislative offices.*



*Assemblywoman and Commission member Carrie Woerner, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard Ball, Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul, NYFB's Young Farmers and Ranchers Chair Christina Kohler, and NYFB President David Fisher with the NYS FFA State Officers Team.*



*Assembly Agriculture Committee Chair Donna Lupardo visits with the Cornell Collegiate Farm Bureau members at the NYFB Taste of NY Reception.*

 **NYS LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON  
RURAL RESOURCES**

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*The New York State Senate Chamber pictured during socially distanced floor proceedings prior to the Legislature passing the Budget on April 3, 2020.*