



2022 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing: Environmental Conservation

February 1, 2022

Dear Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, Members of the Senate Finance Committee and Members of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York's (NOFA-NY) priorities for the proposed budget. I am Katie Baildon, Policy Coordinator with NOFA-NY.

NOFA-NY is a nonprofit organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working together to create a sustainable regional food system that is ecologically sound and economically viable. We are also the leading USDA-accredited organic certification agency in the state, certifying about 1,100 organic farms and businesses, which provide quality organic products to many thousands more New York consumers.

Organic agriculture systems, like those utilized by NY's over 1,900 organic farms and businesses, contribute to healthy ecosystems and resilient local food systems - both fundamental to our fight against the climate crisis. New York State is consistently a national leader in certified organic production, ranking 3rd in the nation for the number of organic farms and 4th in the nation in terms of acres of certified farmland according to the most recent Ag Census. NY also leads in organic dairy as the state with the greatest number of organic dairy farms (*2017 Census of Agriculture*, 2019).

As highlighted in recommendations of the Climate Action Council, NY has an important opportunity and responsibility to lead the nation in incentivizing and supporting the adoption of organic farming systems that eliminate synthetic fertilizers and build healthy soils. By not using synthetic nitrogen fertilizer, organic agriculture reduces nitrous oxide emissions, a greenhouse gas that comprises half of agriculture's emissions in the U.S. according to the EPA (US EPA, 2015). The organic agriculture community is also at the forefront of developing and adopting techniques and practices that build soil health. NOFA-NY has prioritized soil health in our education offerings since the 1980s and USDA organic regulations require the use of practices such as crop rotation and cover cropping, and organic practices increasingly encourage no-till (Soil fertility, 2021). Healthy soils sequester soil carbon, prevent soil erosion, and increase the ability of crops to withstand extreme weather - both drought and floods.

We applaud Governor Hochul's proposal to increase the Environmental Protection Fund to \$400 million. This funding marks a huge step forward on the path toward achieving the environmental community's long-term goal of a \$500 million EPF. The governor's EPF proposal includes \$17.5 million for the Climate Resilient Farming Program which has reduced emissions by an estimated 300 thousand metric tons of carbon annually through waste and water management and soil health development projects implemented by County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (*Climate*

Resilient Farming Rounds 1-5, 2022). Increasing financial support for this program and for the SWCDs (to \$15 million) are measures that we enthusiastically support and urge members of the Legislature to maintain. The CRF program and SWCDs provide the necessary support for farms in adopting climate-friendly practices like cover cropping and no-till and help transition our agriculture and food systems to meet the necessary goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

USDA Organic certification enables farms using organic, climate-friendly agriculture systems to benefit from access to the thriving organic market - in the last nationwide market report from the Organic Trade Association, sales of organic products exceed \$56 billion, a 12% growth rate from the previous year (McNeil, 2021). This growth is due in part to consumers' increasing appetite for food that is good for their families and the planet. Organic market growth is also a reflection of organic agriculture's resilience and ability to serve local communities at the height of the pandemic. As the lead organic certification in the state, we are grateful for the \$80,000 line item for NOFA-NY's project to streamline organic certification through the Agricultural Business Services Program. This project will enable farmers and organic businesses to easily apply and annually renew their USDA organic certification through a streamlined, mobile responsive, online platform. We urge the Legislature to maintain this funding and look forward to the Legislatures' ongoing support of organic agriculture.

Additional Measures NOFA-NY Supports

- As members of the Clean Water and Jobs Coalition, we applaud Governor Hochul for her proposal to rename and increase the Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Bond Act by \$1 billion to \$4 billion, and we urge the Legislature to support these changes.
- As members of the Alliance for New York's Farmland, we also applaud the Governor's increase to \$20 million for farmland protection in the EPF and encourage the Legislature to maintain this increase.
- We also were encouraged by the \$100,000 in funding for Black Farmers United, a good first step in addressing racial equity in agriculture, and the new \$700,000 for Farmers Market resilience grants.

Thank you,



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2017 census of agriculture—Volume 1, chapter 1: State level data. (2019). USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service.

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_1_State_Level/New_York/

Climate Resilient Farming Rounds 1-5. (2022). [Awarded Projects Descriptions]. NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets and NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee. <https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/01/crfawardedprojectdescriptions.pdf>

McNeil, M. (2021, May 25). *U.S. organic sales soar to new high of nearly \$62 billion in 2020*. Organic Trade Association. <https://ota.com/news/press-releases/21755>

US EPA, O. (2015, December 29). *Sources of greenhouse gas emissions* [Overviews and Factsheets]. <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

Soil fertility and crop nutrient management practice standard, 7 C.F.R. § 205.203 (2021).