

New York Farm and Food Alliance

Growing New York's Future

Governor Elect Andrew Cuomo
Church Street Station
P.O. Box 683
New York, NY 10008

November 8, 2010

Dear Governor Elect Cuomo,

We are writing to congratulate you on your decisive win of the gubernatorial race and to offer our newly formed Coalition as a resource to you and your team as you plan to take office January first.

The **New York Farm and Food Alliance** is a dynamic group of farm and food community leaders, farmers, land trusts, local governments and concerned citizens with decades of experience in our arenas who have come together to strongly encourage our state to protect New York's farms and farmland as a way to strengthen our state's economy and food security at time that is fraught with both opportunity and uncertainty.

The importance of farms to New York State has never been clearer. Farms are a key element of New York's economy, selling over \$4.7 billion in products in 2009. They also utilize services provided by other small businesses such as banks, contractors, equipment dealers, veterinarians and others. Food grown by New York farmers is a key ingredient in the food processing businesses across the state and combined with wholesale and retail food trades and the food service industries – which, as you note in your Farm NY policy platform, combined represent over 10 percent of the State's overall gross output of \$1.3 trillion.

Our New York farms have an opportunity to be the key source of nutritious food needed to address major public health problems in New York. According to the Center for Disease Control, 17% of children and adolescents in America are obese (triple the rate of a generation ago) and need to eat more fruits and vegetables and exercise more often. New York can produce many of these foods, and as you know, is ranked as one of the top five states in the country in growing numerous fruits, vegetables, dairy and other products.

New York farmers are also vital cost effective allies who protect our drinking water and environment. More than nine million residents of New York City, and hundreds of thousands of residents elsewhere in New York, benefit from clean, unfiltered drinking water that is kept clean by farmers who keep their land undeveloped and adopt conservation practices so it can act as a natural water filter, which can cost as much as one tenth as much as water from unprotected sources.

*c/o: American Farmland Trust
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The citizens of New York deserve to have access to a secure, local food source, as well as the aesthetic values of scenic vistas and open spaces that New York farms provide. An enhanced state farmland protection program can provide all of this, and more. Protecting prime farmland is absolutely essential to the food security of future generations of New Yorkers and represents a clear opportunity for the Cuomo Administration to protect that legacy. Here's why:

Our neighboring states, such as Pennsylvania, have far surpassed New York in protecting farms, better positioning themselves to meet anticipated increased demand for fruits and vegetables and local products. As of June 2010, the State of Pennsylvania has invested more than \$710 million in protecting 4,000 farms. At eight times New York's investment, Pennsylvania recognized the need to safeguard its agricultural industry by protecting land. To remain competitive now and in the future, New York must reinvigorate the Farmland Protection Program now. The good news is that limited attention to this critical issue in the past creates a ripe opportunity for the Cuomo Administration to make a permanent mark on New York's future as an agricultural state.

New York's Farmland Protection Program is a vital tool for the economy of New York tool. The Farmland Protection Program, funded through the Environmental Protection Fund, has awarded \$173 million to 300 farms enabling farmers to make critical investments in their businesses – in exchange for protecting their land. These projects help New York farm families modernize equipment, construct new buildings, purchase land and reduce debt – actions that drive further spending in New York communities, support local jobs and generate sales tax revenue.

The demand for local farm products and local food continues to grow. In October, USDA reported that New York farmers sold \$362 million in farm products directly to consumers – a 57% increase in annual direct market sales since 2000. As a state with both significant population and farm production, New York is nationally positioned to be a leader in this movement to reconnect farmers and consumers. These opportunities are drawing new farmers that want to get into agriculture, but lack affordable access to farmland. Existing farms frequently want to expand, but also need resources and access to land. New York must act now to capitalize on this demand.

Obesity, diabetes and other chronic and costly diseases can be addressed in part through a diet that includes increased consumption of fruits, vegetables and other nutritious foods – healthier New Yorkers need less health care. By developing policies that increase the availability of nutritious foods and incentivize buying local and eating New York grown fruits, vegetables, dairy and lean meat, New York can leverage a win/win/win for improved family health, greater farm economic viability, and lower health care costs for the State of New York. But, we need the land to be able to grow the nutritious foods to meet this demand.

Waiting for the future to protect New York's farms is not an option. Already, areas of New York like the Hudson Valley, Long Island's East End and areas surrounding Upstate cities like Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo are nationally recognized as being some of the most threatened farming regions in America. According to the United States Department of

Agriculture, a farm is lost to development in New York every 3 ½ days. As more and more farms are lost to development, the farms and farmland that filter pollution from our drinking water, provide us with local healthy food and are a major player in New York State's economy, are lost forever. What they leave behind are expensive filtration plants, costly development and infrastructure, and incalculable food security and health issues.

From your Farm NY platform we can see that you have already recognized the value of agriculture to New York and that you have the opportunity to put your imprint on protection of New York's farms, thus cementing our ongoing success as an agricultural state. We particularly appreciate your articulation of innovative approaches to supporting agriculture and your commitment to addressing the backlog of Farmland Protection Program projects. Representatives of our coalition would very much like to meet with you to discuss working with your Administration to support these goals and to further develop your proposals so that they have the maximum impact for supporting and protecting New York's farms and farmland. Please let us know how best to schedule such a meeting by having a member of your staff contact Kristin Brown Lilley, Senior New York Policy Manager, American Farmland Trust at (518) 581-0078 or klilley@farmland.org.

Sincerely,

Teri Ptacek, Executive Director, Agricultural Stewardship Association

David Haight, New York State Director, American Farmland Trust

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Alan Grattidge, Town of Charlton Supervisor, Saratoga County Board of Supervisors

Maria Trabka, Executive Director, Saratoga P.L.A.N.

Seneca County Agriculture Enhancement Board

Leslie Wright, New York State Director, The Trust for Public Land

Linda Garrett, Executive Director, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust

Eileen Hochberg, Executive Director, Westchester Land Trust

Paul Lehman, Chairman, Conservation Committee, Western New York Land Conservancy