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New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
17 Columbia Circle
Albany, New York 12203-6399

Submitted via email to nygats@nyserda.ny.gov

RE: New York Generation Attribute Tracking System (NYGATS) Draft Operating Rules

To Whom It May Concern:

As New York State's largest general farm organization, New York Farm Bureau (NYFB) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's "New York Generation Attribute Tracking System (NYSGATS) Draft Operating Rules." Our members represent all types of commodities, all size farms, and are located across the entire state from very rural areas to locations that could be considered urban. Some of these farms are already generating renewable energy—ranging from anaerobic digesters and biomass, to small wind and solar—and other farms are considering how energy generation would work into their long-term business and land use plans and monitoring the changes anticipated for energy development in the state.

New York is the home to 35,500 farms in all corners of the state and our farmers are responsible for the stewardship of one-quarter of the state's landmass. These farms can be ideal sites for renewable energy generation and are often located in ideal locations to help strengthen the resiliency of our energy grid. As a result, farms have a huge potential to contribute to New York's energy goals as laid out in the 2015 New York State Energy Plan and the Revising the Energy Vision (REV) process that is ongoing. If farms are able to provide a greater percentage of renewable energy generation in the state, it will not only help achieve the Governor's goal of generating 50% of the state's energy from renewable sources by 2030, but will also spur economic development activity Upstate and help increase farm profitability to encourage the sustainability and successful inter-generational transfer of farms.

Key to achieving the goals set forth in REV of a market-based system for new energy generation that no longer relies on installation incentives, is the development of additional markets from which generator owners can derive income. The ability of farms that produce energy to market the attributes, both Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) and emissions reductions, on voluntary markets is a key component for the realization of this envisioned market-based system. This will help farms that already have generation units and incentivize new farms to install units. NYGATS is essential to provide the tracking and certificate generation that will be needed for voluntary markets and we appreciate that NYSERDA and the Department of Public Service (DPS) are moving forward with this system. NYGATS will provide essential assistance to the farm community to monetize the attributes of renewable energy generation.

Making NYGATS User-Friendly for the Farm Community

The draft operating rules and materials provided on the proposed system appear to be clear and demonstrate that the user system will not be too complicated to navigate. However, it is worth noting that farms with energy generators are first and foremost farmers and in the business of ensuring the production of food, raising animals and caring for the land. They do not spend the majority of their time studying energy regulations and tracking systems, nor do they have additional staff to dedicate solely to the energy aspects of their business. Approximately 99% of the farms in New York are family-owned and they do their best to understand and thoughtfully employ their energy systems, but are and should be dedicated to the agricultural aspects of their farm.

Because of this, we urge NYSERDA, DPS and your vendor to ensure that NYGATS remains user-friendly for those businesses that are not primarily driven by energy generation. It is important that everyone can take advantage of the benefits and potential market value of tracking these attributes.

In this vein, we encourage NYSERDA, DPS and/or your vendor to develop webinars and training that put instructions for NYGATS use into plain language that can be easily followed and understood by the agricultural community. It is realistic that businesses mainly focused on energy generation and those that are not, like farms, would have different needs as far as training to use NYGATS. We would encourage tailoring learning opportunities to the way in which users intend to use the system and their certificates to ensure the greatest possible understanding.

In addition, we are pleased that a helpdesk will be provided for NYGATS account holders. We anticipate that this will be of great assistance to farm users accessing the system. We encourage the vendor to train and employ helpdesk employees who are agricultural-friendly and knowledgeable about the types of energy generation typically found on farms. New York Farm Bureau is happy to work with the state on identifying common questions or challenges that farm users may face.

Stakeholder Advisory Group

New York Farm Bureau recommends that NYSERDA include a farmer with a distributed generation system on the Stakeholder Advisory Group identified in Figure 2.1 outlining NYGATS Roles. Because of the needs of farms and uniqueness of some of the generation systems installed on farms, we believe that it is important to include the voice of farms in this group to best address the challenges agricultural generation may face and any future attributes that may be added to the tracking system. We believe inclusion of a farm stakeholder will only help to increase the effectiveness of the advisory group.

Internet Access in Rural Areas

While an internet tracking system provides the most potential for ease of use, generation reporting and issuing of certificates, it is important to note that many areas of the state still suffer from a lack of sufficient high-speed internet connections. Some of our farms are still located in areas where dial-up internet is predominant. Ironically, these are areas where distributed generation may provide great benefit to grid reliability. Due to the lack of high-speed infrastructure, we urge the state to ensure that NYGATS considers dial-up operators in developing the interface and also provides backstops for generators who are challenged by providing and accessing the system online.

For these same reasons, we suggest written notice, not just email notification, before user accounts are terminated due to inactivity (3.2.5, page 12 and 5.8, page 14). Connectivity challenges may lead to rural

residents not receiving the email notifications or being unable to access their account and being prematurely terminated.

Confidential Information 14.2

We appreciate that the NYGATS system will require the consent of the account holder before releasing confidential information to third parties. However, should confidential information be released as part of a freedom of information request or in the instance of a summons or subpoena, the account holder should be notified in writing of this event. As some types of farm information can be used in nefarious ways to undermine the safety of the food system or the health of livestock, it can be important for farm owners to know what type of information has been made available so they can institute any additional safety procedures if necessary.

Conclusion

New York Farm Bureau is encouraged by the development of NYGATS and is excited about the forthcoming ability to use this system to begin to monetize RECs and other attributes on the voluntary market. This is an essential component of moving distributed energy generation on farms into the vision of REV and creating a more sustainable energy future in New York.

Sincerely,



M. Kelly Young
Deputy Director of Public Policy