May 26, 2015

Division of Dockets Management
(HFA–305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, rm.1061
Rockville, MD 20852

RE: FDA-2015-N-0797- The Food and Drug Administration Food Safety Modernization Act: Focus on Implementation Strategy for Prevention-Oriented Food Safety Standards; Public Meeting and Establishment of Docket.

To Whom It May Concern:

New York Farm Bureau (NYFB), the State's largest general farm organization, appreciates this opportunity to provide comments and attend the public meeting regarding the *Focus on Implementation Strategy for Prevention-Oriented Food Safety Standards*. Our members grow a large variety of commodities, represent all size farms and represent the large variety of production methods from organic to conventional and everything in between. Food safety is of utmost importance to our food system in the U.S. so implementing the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in a way that is meaningful and effective for both farmers and consumers is essential to our members and to our country at large.

It is very important to growers that FDA ensure there are adequate resources for training of inspectors and for foreign inspections. As mentioned during the April meeting, this will be the first opportunity for FDA to be on the farm and *it is important that inspectors are properly trained and familiar with routine and acceptable agricultural practices* (which can differ regionally) and the true risks associated with various activities on a farm. Inspectors that are not adequately trained will not be able to implement the rule consistently and fairly across the U.S and would needlessly put some growers at a competitive disadvantage.

This training must take into consideration the differences in crops, growing regions and growing practices. If FDA is not able to invest in this type of training, we encourage the agency to utilize the networks of well-trained inspectors who are already familiar with these practices through our state departments of agriculture. These inspectors are already familiar with acceptable farming practices, are familiar with types of activities performed on our farms and have a strong history of successful inspection processes. However, this would require adequate federal funds be made available to the states to perform this function.
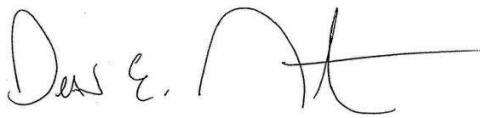
Education tools and resources were a common topic throughout the April implementation meeting. As NYFB mentioned during the meeting it is important that different modes of

communication be used as many of our rural areas in New York do not have adequate access to broadband internet. Although web-based tools and educational webinars are very helpful to reach a broad spectrum of people, in-person meetings and print newsletters are still a very valuable tools to ensure the entire regulated community is reached and knows what is expected.

Lastly, during the meeting FDA solicited comments on the idea of a voluntary on-farm pre-assessment program to assist in implementation before the rule is in effect. NYFB believes the Good Agricultural Practices Certification Program (GAP) that many of our producers already utilize would be a good option to look into. By utilizing a program that many of our producers already use, FDA could alleviate some of the fear producers have of becoming FSMA compliant and there is existing infrastructure already in place. The GAP program would only need minor changes to ensure that the standards are consistent. However, if issues are found during this voluntary period, FDA should not be able to use this information against a producer in the future. Rather, this should be a learning period for both the agency and farmers.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the meeting in April and to submit these comments. We look forward to working with FDA and our State Department of Agriculture as the implementation of FSMA continues.

Sincerely,

Dean E. Norton
President