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Thank you, my name is Jeff Williams and I am Director of Public Policy at NYFB—the state’s largest general agricultural advocacy organization.

I know my time is short here today, so I will just hit on a few important items and take any questions you may have.

With depressed world commodity prices, a global pandemic, nation-leading labor costs and tremendous pressure from solar development companies to lease farmland for large installations, agriculture is at a true crossroads. Farming in New York will not look the same, as top producers look to other states or business opportunities and smaller farms are not able to compete and are squeezed out. Farmers are not making long term investments in their operations and this must change if the state is going to have a meaningful agricultural industry.

First, the farm economy continues to struggle in the pandemic. As we have discussed before, restaurants and school sales make up about 50 percent of farm offerings. Last spring and early summer were extremely tough financially for our industry. The situation has gotten a bit better as businesses and schools opened, but as things begin to potentially close again, we could be back in the same position as we were before.

I do have to say that the Nourish-NY program has been very helpful to farmers that are able to provide their excess product to food insecure families through the food bank system and receive some money for their effort. We hope that funding is continued for this program in the coming year.

As farmers tell you every year, agriculture relies heavily on statewide programs related to animal and public health, workforce development, farm safety, food access, agricultural education, migrant childcare, farm family assistance. Quite literally, agriculture would not survive in the state without these critical programs.

The promotional and research programs for vegetables, apples, berries, grape, maple, honey, Christmas trees, wine, and craft beverages, among others, also serve as the economic development engine for our industry.

This includes the North Country Agricultural Development program which does great work on a very small budget and the Farm Viability Institute.

We also rely heavily on the EPF as the funding stream that bridges the gap between agriculture and environment. Funding for programs Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement Programs, Farmland Protection, Integrated Pest Management, Pollinator Protection Plan, Climate adaption and soil health, just to name a few.

Farmers are also requesting changes to the farm labor law enacted in 2019 to keep dairy, vegetable, and fruit farms from literally withering on the vine. They include removing the overtime requirement for workers who choose to work on their voluntary day of rest. This requirement sets up a unique situation where workers who do not work the hours needed to reach the overtime threshold are still paid overtime if they choose to work on their day off.

The law should be changed to reflect that overtime is only paid if the worker reaches the overtime threshold by working on his or her day off.

Farms in New York are well-positioned to provide high quality dairy, fruits, and vegetables and other products to consumers across the state and country. We have access to a sizeable land base, water reserves, and markets down the Eastern seaboard. Despite this, the industry needs investment to help compete with other states and countries with more advantageous business environments. We look to the state to help us all work together in this effort.

I would like to thank you all for your support of agriculture in the state and I am happy to take any questions.