

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input on stake holder needs in agriculture. My name is Ralph Freeman and I'm a Financial Consultant for NY FarmNet. I help agricultural businesses develop a plan for the future to continue in business by working directly with farm families, who would like their successors to take over the family farm. For over thirty-seven years, I worked with Cornell Cooperative Extension to help growers implement the latest technology to expand their businesses. My career choice was rewarding, and I could have retired completely. However, working for NY FarmNet provides an opportunity to help growers by providing technical and other forms of assistance on business related topics. This opportunity is unique, because NY FarmNet has resources to assist growers in overcoming personal, as well as financial barriers to business growth and viability. Personal Consultants often team up with Financial Consultants to provide comprehensive services that result in business growth. Over half of all cases we work on involve a farm business expansion. Growers often encounter interpersonal challenges with expansion such as communication and employee relations.

Agriculture is an increasingly competitive business, especially on Long Island. However, there are opportunities for agriculture as a sector to fuel economic growth throughout New York State. Consumers are demanding different agricultural products, and food processors are expanding capacity in New York State. Food manufacturing provides an opportunity to increase the number of manufacturing jobs in rural communities. However, current levels of agricultural productivity may not meet processing capacity. Farm families need to change the way they do business to take advantage of new opportunities. Adopting the latest technology may not be the sole answer to improving farm profitability. Meshing personal and business management skills to coach farm families through major business change is a unique opportunity to revitalize the rural economy in New York State. For example, the sale of agricultural products in Suffolk County totaled over \$245 million last year and increased over eight percent from the previous year. Agriculture is an economic sector that has been overlooked for too long.

The Farm Change initiative is a proposed augmentation to enhance the capacity of NY Farm Net to coach farm families in meeting new challenges and opportunities. I am supporting an additional \$300,000 to take agriculture to the next level in New York State.

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