

My name is Richard Peterson, and I am pleased to have an opportunity to discuss specific needs that impact the agricultural industry in New York. I am Chair of the advisory board for the NY FarmNet/NY FarmLink program. This program began more than 21 years ago with state funding. Our original purpose was to provide crisis intervention for farm families in New York during a time of serious financial problems that were endangering many farm operations all across New York. In the years since, the program has developed proactive programs to help farm operators plan for and manage their way through the many challenges that face modern agriculture. A highly qualified team of consultants help farm families with business planning, transition of ownership to the next generation, employee relations issues, stress management and more. The proactive program approach has helped many farm families plan for and survive serious business and personal challenges while saving and ,often, expanding their businesses.

Over the past twenty plus years, thousands of farm families have received valuable assistance from our trained consultants. However, the challenges to agriculture continue and new opportunities to change and improve farm enterprises create a need for specialized assistance to help farm families make sound business decisions. As agriculture thrives, so does our state and local economy. Many of New York's rural counties depend on agriculture as their primary source of economic stability and growth. The NY FarmNet/FarmLink programs provide assistance to farmers as they deal with the often daunting and confusing issues that new opportunities often bring. Agricultural development and growth brings many new jobs and new economic growth within our state. Production agriculture brings new wealth to the state rather than recycling existing wealth, as most other industries do. Our state needs to continue strong programs that support our agricultural industry.

As the FarmNet/FarmLink programs look ahead, there is a need to develop new initiatives to help farm families address new challenges and opportunities. The Farm Change initiative is proposed to enhance our ability to meet the challenges brought on by 21<sup>st</sup> Century agricultural advancements. Helping our farmers become more competitive and successful in an evolving global economy is good for all of us. I support an additional \$300,000 allocation to help our agricultural industry thrive.