



## **NOFA-NY Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2024 Executive Budget Proposal: Environmental Conservation**

February 7, 2024

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about the [Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York's \(NOFA-NY\)](#) priorities for the fiscal year 2025 proposed budget. I am Katie Baildon, Policy Manager with NOFA-NY.

Founded in 1983, NOFA-NY is the premier organization growing a strong organic regenerative agriculture movement in New York State. We provide farmer-to-farmer educational programming and technical assistance to NYS farmers, connect consumers with local and organic products, and advocate for a sustainable and fair food and farm system. NOFA-NY provides USDA-accredited organic certification services to over 1,100 of NY's organic farms and businesses.

The most recent USDA Organic Census shows that NY continues to be a leader in organic agriculture, ranking 3rd in the nation for the number of organic farms and leading the nation in acres of organic field crops (hay, corn, and soy). NY is also home to more organic livestock and poultry farms and organic dairies than any other state in the nation.

As the organic industry continues to grow nationwide in both [certified acres](#)– especially in the northeast– and [demand for organic products](#), NY is also positioned to grow its industry leadership. The state's financial support for NOFA-NY's work helps improve access to and the quality of the certification resources that we offer. With past contracts, we've developed digital applications and paperwork processing, offering a streamlined and thus cost-effective approach for NOFA-certified organic farms and businesses that must complete annual paperwork to maintain their organic certification.

This year, we are requesting:

- \$90,000 to further improve access to certification resources by expanding technical assistance to certified and transitioning producers, and

- \$51,000 to improve our ability to serve a greater diversity of operations and farming communities including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as well as NY’s Plain Communities by providing targeted customer service training to NOFA-NY staff, including culturally-appropriate and language-based training. Additionally, we’re requesting
- \$89,000 for workforce development training in collaboration with Broome-Tioga Workforce and the Independent Organic Inspectors Association to address the shortage of qualified organic inspectors in NY. This collaboration will create new job opportunities by supporting prospective inspectors through the course and apprenticeship prerequisites for becoming certified inspectors. They will then be eligible to contract with one of the 22 USDA-accredited organic certification agencies that operate in NY. Through this training, we hope to provide job opportunities in the BIPOC and Plain communities, making the farmers they inspect a supported part of the organic community.

Our total request for funding for these efforts is \$225,000.

<b>Project/Effort</b>	<b>Funding Requested</b>
Expanded Technical Assistance	90,000
Sensitivity Training	45,000
Customer Service Training	6,000
Workforce Development Training	89,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>225,000</b>

In addition to funding for organizational efforts, NOFA-NY strongly supports funding and expanding programming that enables NY’s thousands of farms to adapt to our changing climate, build resilience, and be part of the solution.

Organic farming is at the forefront of agriculture’s fight against the climate crisis. The foundational principles of the organic movement and the standards of the USDA National Organic Program center deep care for the ecosystems in which we operate including by developing climate-friendly farm inputs and soil-building techniques. The National Organic Program standards largely restrict the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides that are primarily derived from fossil fuels and are responsible for greenhouse gas emissions throughout their lifecycle from manufacturing, to disposal. Transitioning to organic can reduce an individual operation’s carbon emissions by 30%. Additionally,

soil health is the cornerstone of organic agriculture; organic systems nurture nutrient-rich, biodiverse soils that foster crops' ability to withstand and adapt to extreme weather. Within this framework, organic farmers have pioneered and continue to improve upon regenerative, climate-smart methods including crop diversification, cover cropping, organic amendments, sound nutrient management and recycling, and reduced tillage. These practices are being more widely adopted in the face of climate change to reduce emissions, improve resilience to extreme weather, and store carbon. As an organic farming organization that supports the widespread adoption of these practices, we urge the legislature to fund the strategies in the Climate Scoping Plan that will improve access to resources to help farmers cover the real cost of making changes to their operations.

One way to incentivize, support, and reward farmers for practicing climate-smart and ecologically-beneficial farming is a new strategy named in the Climate Scoping Plan's Agriculture and Forestry chapter called Payment for Ecosystem Services. This year, NOFA-NY joins the NY Renews coalition in calling on the legislature to invest \$1 Billion of the FY24-25 State Budget in critical, shovel-ready climate and environmental justice projects as detailed in the [People's Climate Justice Budget](#). This funding could be used to develop and enact Payment for Ecosystem Services pilots in different parts of the state where geographic and ecological differences warrant different project approaches. These pilots could lead the design of an impactful state-wide program that improves ecological systems, benefits farmers, farmworkers, and farming communities, and supports a more resilient food and farming system for the benefit of all New Yorkers

Thank you for your time and consideration.

## **Additional budget measures that NOFA-NY Supports**

Maintain an **at least \$400 million Environmental Protection Fund** that includes:

- At least **\$18 million Soil and Water Conservation District** funding as included in the Executive Budget
- At least FY24 level funding, **\$15.25 million, for the Climate Resilient Farming Program**
- **\$25 million for Farmland Protection** as detailed by the Alliance for New York's Farmland

As a member of several coalitions and partnerships, NOFA-NY also urges the legislature to advance the following measures in the FY25 budget.

- **Increase funding for Black Farmers United - New York to \$500,000**
- **Increase the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant Program to \$4 million annually**
- **Pass the Stop Climate Polluter Handouts Act** which will eliminate \$330 million in handouts that New York State provides to oil and gas companies

- Expand access to nutritious, locally sourced meals for students including:
  - At least **\$10 million for the Farm to School Reimbursement Incentive** program and expand the program to include reimbursements for all school meals including the School Breakfast Program and increase the School Lunch Program reimbursement to an additional 25 cents per lunch;
  - At least **\$1.5 million for the Farm to School Grants program** to continue to meet demand, ensuring at least \$500,000 remains set aside as non-competitive funding to support a statewide network of regional farm to school coordinators
  - Fully fund Universal Free Meals for school children