

# Senator Pam Helming

Representing the 54th New York Senate District



IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 25, 2018

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Jonathan Monfiletto – 315-568-9816

## **Senator Helming: Center of Excellence Coming to Finger Lakes**

GENEVA – Senator Pam Helming today announced that she successfully secured \$1 million in funding to establish the Center of Excellence in Food and Agriculture Innovation at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva. This will help drive research and support the success of our region’s job-producing farms and agriculture industry.

“The establishment of the Center of Excellence in Food and Agriculture Innovation is great news for our community, local famers, and New York’s agricultural industry. Agriculture is our area’s largest job creator, and Cornell has long been recognized as an extremely valuable industry partner. It made sense to recognize the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences with the Center of Excellence designation. I look forward to the new Center of Excellence promoting and growing additional food and agricultural economic development activities right here at home and across New York State,” Senator Helming said.

Eleven Centers of Excellence currently exist throughout New York State, including the new addition of the Cornell Center of Excellence. During the budget negotiations, there was a move to transfer the Center of Excellence designation and the funding associated with it from a former Ontario County enterprise to Albany- and New York City-based organizations. Senator Helming felt it was extremely important to keep both the designation and the funding right here in our community. She successfully led the effort to shift both the designation and \$1 million in funding to the Geneva-based Agricultural Experiment Station for the creation of the Cornell Center of Excellence.

The Cornell Center of Excellence is the first of its kind to promote agriculture and food. New York State traditionally establishes Centers of Excellence to foster connections and collaboration between the academic research community and the business sector. The program’s mission is to develop and commercialize new products and technologies, promote critical private sector investment in emerging high-tech fields, strengthen and grow workforce training, and expand technology-related businesses and employment.

Dr. Kathryn Boor, Dean of the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said, “New York’s food manufacturing sector is the nation’s second largest, behind only California in terms of the number of food-based businesses, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The strength of our farming community and the entrepreneurial energy of our people has led to this remarkable success. I'm very pleased that New York is investing to create the state's first-ever incubator for food-related enterprises, and I congratulate Senator Helming for her vision and leadership in recognizing the importance of this sector to the Finger Lakes and beyond. Thanks to Senator Helming, the Center of Excellence will leverage the strengths of our local food and farm communities and help create new businesses that will push growth even farther. We can't wait to get to work with our partners."

John Johnson, Executive Director of the Geneva Agriculture & Food Technology Park, said, "The Center of Excellence at Cornell will pull together the significant agriculture and food resources and talent of the region, making this one of the leading entrepreneurial development locations in the United States in the coming years. We thank Senator Helming for her leadership and aggressive efforts to support agricultural research that strengthens our regions farms."

Bill Strassburg, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at Wegmans, a partner in the Cornell Center of Excellence, said, "The new Center of Excellence in Geneva is going to be a big win for the Finger Lakes region and New York State. The agriculture and food sector is critical to the economy in upstate New York, and we know that with this new Center we will enhance this key industry. We will now be better able to foster cooperation with the key food stakeholders in the region and help to grow their business. The Center will encourage food innovators and entrepreneurs to start their businesses in a locale that is fertile for their successful development, right here in New York."

There has been a 20 percent increase in food production jobs in the Finger Lakes region since 2010. The Center's goal is to promote economic growth throughout the region and the state by making important connections between researchers, farmers, processors, businesses, and consumers. The funding will allow the Center to provide entrepreneurship training, business mentorship, and access to business space at the Geneva Agriculture & Food Technology Park. Through a mentor network, participants will be able to connect with commercial kitchens, food hubs, co-packing facilities, and other existing resources. The Center will also foster collaboration and technical product commercialization assistance between Cornell research scientists and businesses, to promote the use of cutting-edge technologies that will define the farm and food systems of the future.

*Senator Helming represents the 54<sup>th</sup> Senate District, which consists of Seneca and Wayne Counties, parts of Cayuga and Ontario Counties, and the towns of Lansing and Webster. For more information, please visit Senator Helming's [website](#), or follow @SenatorHelming on Facebook or Twitter.*

###