



Agriculture and Markets

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

March 8, 2017

Dear Stakeholder:

It is exciting to be part of an administration with a tremendous commitment to agriculture and a strong focus on safeguarding at-risk farmland for current and future farmers. Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, the state has revitalized the farmland protection program and committed historic funding to the preservation of farmland, one of the state's most valuable resources.

Since 2011, the state has invested more than \$62 million in 82 farmland conservation projects statewide. The Governor is committed to building on that great progress. In his 2017-18 Executive Budget, he has proposed another \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund, which includes nearly \$20 million for farmland protection. In his 2017 State of the State address, the Governor pledged to make securing easements in perpetuity on agricultural lands easier. He directed actions be taken to:

- assist local stakeholders to identify available agricultural lands, including those most important to protect, and to connect farmers with owners of available land;
- provide assistance to land trusts to set up revolving loan funds to cover preliminary costs involved in projects; and
- provide funding to assist local governments and land trusts cover transaction costs involved in donated easements and to buy option periods for at-risk farmland.

These new measures will help eliminate barriers and encourage conservation efforts across the state. I am excited to embrace these directives and already have Department staff working on guidelines and funding to make these new programs a reality.

For those of you who participated in my Farmland Protection Stakeholder meeting in November, I want to thank you for the insight and dialogue regarding the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program (FPIG). The meeting was very helpful to me in understanding the challenges that exist for applicants in current program administration.

I took note of your suggestions and am pleased to share the Department's intentions for the program. In addition to moving forward with the Governor's State of the State initiatives, in 2017 we will conduct the following activities in support of local farmland protection efforts:

- Hold a webinar this spring for local governments regarding FPIG, the lease of development rights, transfer of development rights (TDR) and grant opportunities to revisit local laws and remove unreasonable restrictions.

- During the summer, announce the first of the 2017 State of the State opportunities, a statewide FPIG grant to acquire options to purchase perpetual conservation easements on viable agricultural land.
- In the fall of 2017, establish and hold an application workshop to review site plans for the farms you propose to submit in the next FPIG round.

Lastly, some of you voiced concern about the timing of the FPIG application rounds. I am committed to a predictable, biennial availability of a statewide Request for Proposals for FPIG grants. The next round is scheduled to be initiated in May 2018.

Once again, thank you for joining me in our stakeholder discussion. I appreciate your comments and I look forward to continuing this forum. I value our shared commitment to protecting New York's agricultural lands and assuring the viability of farming for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard A. Ball". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Richard A. Ball
Commissioner