

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**Patrick Hooker**

Commissioner, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

**NYFARMS 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

March 30, 2007

Grange Headquarters, Cortland New York



I would like to **thank everyone** who helped put together today's program: the NYFARMS Board of Directors, its member organizations, Executive Director Martha Goodsell sponsors and presenters and of course, our friends here at the New York State Grange.

I'd also like to thank each of you for everything you do to preserve, protect and enhance farming and agriculture here in New York State.

For ten years, NYFARMS NY has brought together, a broad based statewide coalition of organizations, individuals, businesses, agencies and institutions, committed to the future of New York's farms and families

**For ten years, NYFARMS has held true to its mission:**

- To strengthen New York agriculture and food systems;
- Create public awareness of the importance of farming;
- Promote agriculture and food system literacy and
- Foster consumer loyalty to New York farm products.

**NYFARMS is a success for two reasons:**

1. NYFARMS has brought together farmers, consumers, educators and concerned citizens from across the state who all share a common desire to see New York agriculture grow and prosper and
  2. NYFARMS has helped producers provide consumers with more locally-grown, wholesome and safe food.
- Much credit goes to the members and directors of NYFARMS and especially to Martha Goodsell who has worked tirelessly to make this NYFARMS succeed.

**Both Governor Spitzer and I share the NYFARMS vision:**

- To create a vibrant, profitable and diverse agriculture and food system that meets the needs of farm families, consumers and the environment;
- To have a New York public that actively supports New York farmers, farming and the protection of productive farmland and
- An agriculture industry that further enhances the environment, meets food needs, increases economic opportunity, and fosters community development

- As you all know, **farming is an important and growing business in New York** In 2005, farmers in New York sold approximately \$3.6 billion in farm products – that’s a 33% increase since 1987.
- It is estimated that the wine and grape industry *alone* contributes \$3.4 billion dollars to the state economy through a combination of direct sales, agri-tourism and employment.
- Cornell University reports that the agricultural services sector earns approximately \$1.5 billion annually and the food manufacturing sector earns about \$20 billion annually in New York State. **These statistics suggest that the New York farm and food industry has a combined \$25 billion annual economic impact – and most of that is upstate.**
- **Farms are also vital to protecting New York’s natural resources.** Farmland represents a quarter of the total land base of New York. Well-managed farms provide aquifer recharge areas and act as natural filters to surface and subsurface water. The City of New York has recognized the important connection between farms and water quality and has established programs to retain well-managed farms in the watersheds that provide unfiltered drinking water to the City.

- **Farmers depend on both soil and water resources for their livelihood and are committed to protecting them.** Almost 10,000 farmers have voluntarily enrolled in the Agriculture Environmental Management (AEM) program administered by the Department. AEM helps farmers implement management practices on the farm that protect water quality to reduce their environmental impact and preserve the productivity of their soils.
- **New York continues to be a strong agricultural state.** The success of NYFARMS backs that up. **However**, rising fuel and feed costs, increased property taxes and the fragmentation of the farmland base have all hurt our farmers and rural communities. Increased pressure by overdevelopment and poor planning have only made things more difficult.
- **Farmers, especially here in New York have dealt with these challenges in a variety of ways.** Many farmers are exploring new opportunities through value-added processing and direct marketing to garner a greater share of the consumer dollar. NYFARMS has helped many farmers learn about these new opportunities.
- **But our farmers cannot do it alone.**

- **For the past 50 years, agriculture has focused primarily on increasing efficiency and output by utilizing advances in technology.** However, the pressures being placed on agriculture go far beyond issues of production. They also include the interactions of agriculture with water and soil quality, the health of farmers and other rural residents, and the economic and social viability of rural communities.
- **In today's environment, no one farmer, no one organization** can marshal all the expertise, nor does anyone have all the resources necessary to solve all the problems faced by the agricultural community. Collaboration and working together partnership like **NYFARMS** are essential for farmers to prosper and for agricultural lands stay in production in new and exciting ways. The potential of these tools is what NYFARMS is all about and why your continued support of this organization is so important.
- NYFARMS and its members have shown that *it is* possible to create environmentally sound, socially desirable, and economically viable production systems. Through the cooperative efforts of NYFARMS, farmers and other community members are also working together to influence attitudes and policies to make it easier for other farmers to change.

- **NYFARMS has demonstrated that both a viable agriculture *and* a healthy environment can be achieved** not in a confrontational way, but in a way that honors and respects those who have lived, worked, and contributed to a community over the years. This is the process of true change that occurs from the inside out, from within individuals and within communities – not from outside forces or government edict.
- In my discussions with Governor Spitzer, I have articulated the changing face of agriculture and the tough situation many of our farmers now face each and every day. The Governor understands the importance of a financially stable agriculture industry in New York all along the value chain, from producers to processors to consumers. In his inaugural address, he spoke of Chris Kelder and his family, who have farmed their land in Ulster County for more than two centuries, passing their dreams on from one generation to the next.
- The Governor’s 2007-2008 Executive Budget reflected his commitment to protecting agricultural and environmental resources for future generations. His budget proposal included:
  - \$28 million for farmland protection – **a 22% increase from the current year and a 75% increase from two years ago;**
  - \$13 million for Agricultural non-point source pollution control – **a 17% increase from the current year;**
  - \$5 million for invasive species efforts; and \$3 million for local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

- **I am also pleased to tell you the Department of Agriculture and Markets has submitted legislation to create a New York State Food Policy Council.**
- This proposal will bring together citizens and government officials in a collaborative effort to examine the State's food system and recommend changes in public policy. The goal of the Council is to better deliver an adequate supply of safe, wholesome and nutritious food and provide the associated health, economic and quality of life benefits so important to the people of the State.
- The bill requires the Council to advise the Governor, Legislature and the public on programs to increase food self-sufficiency for the State and enhance the vitality of agriculture in the State. The Council will solicit public input and review State programs, practices and regulatory systems affecting the food supply system.
- The Council will also make recommendations to resolve conflicts, remove burdensome requirements, improve the efficiency, safety and productivity of the State's food system and increase consumer access to food. The council is also charged with coordinating the efforts of State agencies to promote locally grown foods.

- **I am also pleased to report work is progressing on the development of a new wholesale farmers market in New York City.** The new market will provide a tremendous opportunity for our growers to access one of the largest and most affluent food markets in the world.
- **The Department has also hired a new marketing specialist,** Sarah Johnston, who will be assisting farmers throughout the state take advantage of the exploding consumer demand for organic foods.
- These are just some of the ways the Department is working to foster a competitive food and agriculture industry that benefits producers and consumers alike.
- Agriculture is as important today as it has ever been to the Upstate economy. As Commissioner, I appreciate all that NYFARMS has done collectively and each of you have done individually, to make New York agriculture all that it is today.

## **NYFARMS KEYNOTE**

**Thank everyone**

**NYFARMS has held true to its mission**

**Governor Spitzer and I share the NYFARMS vision**

**Farming is important to the upstate economy**

**Farmers are important to environmental preservation**

**Rising costs and over-development threaten agriculture**

**Farmers cannot do it alone**

**Agriculture has been too production focused**

**Need collaboration / partnerships – NYFARMS!**

**Governor understands challenges facing agriculture**

- **Increased funding in Executive Budget**
- **Creation of Food Policy Council;**
- **NYC Wholesale Farmers Market**
- **Sarah Johnston as organic marketing specialist**
- **Agriculture is important, NYFARMS is essential to its future**
- **Thanks again**

