



American Farmland Trust

Memorandum in Support of A. 6687 to Make Land Trusts Eligible Applicants for Farmland Protection Funding

American Farmland Trust seeks your support for A. 6687 that would make non-profit conservation groups, or land trusts, eligible to apply directly for “implementation” grants from New York’s Farmland Protection Program (FPP) and reduce the time required to complete farmland protection projects.

BACKGROUND

Since 1996, New York’s FPP has awarded more than \$144.5 million in grants for projects in 28 counties to help protect 63,700 acres on 276 farms. These grants provide critical funding to complete sophisticated real estate transactions that permanently protect working farms.

New York land trusts play a pivotal role in New York’s FPP by helping local governments develop and complete funded projects. In 2007, 72% of the state funded projects had land trusts involved in completing projects and holding permanent conservation easements on protected farms. 20 land trusts have participated in state-funded farmland protection projects – from the Peconic Land Trust on the eastern end of Long Island to the Western New York Land Conservancy operating near Buffalo. In 2008, the State Legislature enacted legislation to make land trusts eligible for capacity building grants from the FPP to support their work with farmers, towns and county agricultural and farmland protection boards in developing local farmland protection projects and programs.

Despite this close partnership between local governments and land trusts, only town and county governments are currently eligible to apply for Farmland Protection “implementation grants” to purchase development rights on interested farms. While it makes sense to have coordination between municipalities, county agricultural and farmland protection boards and land trusts, this current structure creates unnecessary complexity and delays to projects. This structure requires local governments with limited capacity and familiarity with conservation easement transactions to play a pivotal role in state contracting and project implementation.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO 25-AAA OF AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS LAW

The proposed amendment would reduce the timeline to complete many farmland protection projects and workload for local governments. It would enable land trusts to apply directly for Farmland Protection Implementation Grants if the proposed project is in a town or county with an approved agricultural and farmland protection plan and they have demonstrated support from this unit of local government as well as the appropriate county agricultural and farmland protection board. This amendment would not preclude towns or counties from applying directly for the funds if so desired and would not have any financial impact on the State of New York.