



**Agriculture
and Markets**

AGRICULTURE NEWS

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CONTACT:

Jola Szubielski | (518) 457-0752 | Jola.Szubielski@agriculture.ny.gov

Julia Mason | (518) 457-0752 | Julia.Mason@agriculture.ny.gov

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STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ANNOUNCES 2024 NEW YORK STATE COMMUNITY GARDENS SOIL TESTING PROGRAM

*Included As a Part of Governor Hochul's 2023 State of the State, Initiative Will
Make \$40,000 Available to Process Up to 800 Soil Tests*

*Advances New York State's Goals to Strengthen Food Supply Chain and Support
Community Gardens*

New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard A. Ball today, in partnership with Cornell Soil Health Lab, announced soil testing is available for community gardens through the 2024 New York State Community Gardens Soil Testing Program. The initiative was announced in Governor Kathy Hochul's 2023 State of the State plan as recommended by the [Community Gardens Task Force](#) in its [2023 Annual Report](#), and will allow eligible food-producing community garden members in New York State to send soil samples for testing up to one time per year without charge.

Commissioner Ball said, "Community gardens are unique, valuable spaces that not only help provide accessible sources of fresh, local food to historically underserved areas, but also provide a space for residents to develop a personal relationship with agriculture while also connecting with their community. Ensuring the quality of good, rich soil through soil testing is an essential tool for anyone growing food, and making soil testing more accessible to those operating community gardens will only make these critical spaces even more valuable. I'm grateful to our partners at Cornell for their work on this initiative and encourage any eligible applicants to take advantage of this opportunity."

Soil testing is a quick and accurate method to determine the relative acidity of the soil, the level of several essential nutrients, as well as the presence of heavy metals. Soil test results can be a helpful tool for farmers and gardeners in determining plant selection, soil

preparation, and fertilization to optimize the growth of their crops. Technical support and education for participating growers will be provided by garden specialists from Cornell Cooperative Extension Harvest New York to help gardeners interpret the results and provide recommendations to amend and support their soils for the best food production outcomes.

Benjamin Z. Houlton, the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of the Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said, “Good soil health is absolutely fundamental to growing healthy and abundant food. The first step in community gardening and farming is knowing your soil type, and the nutrients that plants will need throughout the growing season to ensure a successful harvest. Cornell CALS is so proud to partner in this critical new resource for community gardeners, which will improve gardening success and food security. Community gardens are incredibly important to the fabric of urban communities, creating spaces where many generations can gather, spend time outdoors, as well as contributing to biodiverse ecosystems and providing respite from urban heat in a changing climate. I applaud the Governor and the Commissioner’s leadership in this innovative new program to assist New York’s community gardeners, and hope everyone has a successful gardening season.”

Funding through the 2024 New York State Soil Testing Program will allow up to 800 soil tests for eligible community gardens across the states to be processed, free of charge to the organizations. Eligible applicants include organizations managing food-producing community gardens in New York State, including individual community growers.

Applications will be accepted from March 13, 2024 until funding is exhausted. All interested applicants must email the PDF application and proof of eligibility documents to: urbanagriculture@agriculture.ny.gov with the subject: “2024 Community Gardens Soil Test Application.” More information about the application is available [here](#).

An informational webinar with information about the program, how to apply, and eligibility requirements will be held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024 at 12 p.m. Access the webinar [here](#). Please direct any questions to: UrbanAgriculture@agriculture.ny.gov.

Community-led growing spaces are collaborative projects on shared open space that produce healthy and affordable fresh fruits and vegetables for local community consumption. Gardens offer physical and mental health benefits by providing opportunities to eat healthy fresh fruits and vegetables; engage in physical activity, build skills; create green space; beautify vacant lots and revitalize neighborhoods; and create safe spaces and improve social well-being by strengthening local connections.

New York is home to more than 3,000 registered or permitted urban and community gardens. Through its [community gardens efforts](#), the Department of Agriculture and Markets helps foster greener, healthier cities by connecting community groups with state or local agencies to facilitate the use of vacant properties for community gardens.

Funding for the New York State Soil Testing Program is included under the Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program, which complements the State’s ongoing efforts

to provide technical assistance to community growing organizations statewide and promote urban agriculture. The inaugural round of the competitive grant program was announced in Governor Kathy Hochul's 2022 State of the State Address and [dedicated \\$800,000](#) to 35 projects across the state. Following this successful launch, the program was renewed and enhanced in the Governor's 2023 State of the State plan, with \$1 million dedicated in her Executive Budget this year. The program continues to play a critical role in the Governor's commitment to making local food more accessible to all New Yorkers and to encourage more urban farming.

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