## Save the Date!

We're inviting all our NYS Grown & Certified producers to join us for a special event to celebrate our 10th anniversary! The event will be held at NYS Grown & Certified Indian Ladder Farms in Altamont, Albany County on **September 25, from 3-6 p.m.** The lineup will include special remarks by State Agriculture Commissioner Richard Ball, a chance to network with other program participants and sample NYS Grown & Certified products. More details to follow!

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## NYS Grown & Certified Partners with Tully's to Deliver Homegrown Experience and Celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Program at the Great New York State Fair's Potato Booth!

The iconic $1 Potato Booth at the Great New York State Fair will now serve up The Fair's famous baked potatoes, and salt potatoes, now grown in New York by NYS Grown & Certified **NY Fresh, LLC** from Central New York. The butter, cheese, and sour cream will also be NYS Grown & Certified products—making this year's Potato Booth a true celebration of New York agriculture, all while maintaining its beloved $1 price. The Potato

Booth is being operated by Tully's Good Times. The collaboration comes in time for the 2026 New York State Fair, as the NYS Grown & Certified Program also celebrates its 10th anniversary.

"The Great New York State Fair is one of the best places to showcase the phenomenal quality of New York agriculture, and this year's Potato Booth is a perfect example," said **New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball. "**We're proud to highlight our local farmers and food producers across The New York State Fair and having locally grown potatoes and locally made toppings is extra special because we're also celebrating the 10th anniversary of NYS Grown & Certified this year. From the potatoes to the butter and sour cream, every bite supports New York agriculture while giving fairgoers the delicious tradition they've loved for years."

**Owner and Operator of NY Fresh, LLC Garrett Williams shared,** "We are honored to be chosen to supply the annual State Fair baked potato and look forward to having fairgoers experience the quality and freshness of local potatoes. They were grown with lots of challenges, luck, and hard work. I hope they are enjoyable as they finish their long journey from the farm to right here at the NYS Fair."

The Potato Booth is located in the Horticulture Building on the New York State Fairgrounds. The Great New York State Fair opens on August 26 and runs through Labor Day, September 7, 2026.

## Welcome All Around!

We welcome our newest participants to the program. From craft beverages and fiber to vegetables and fruits, poultry, maple, cut flowers, and aquaculture, we thank the farms below for joining New York State Grown & Certified in the month of August. Welcome!

- Black Squirrel Farms - Penn Yan, NY
- Dear Native Grapes - Walton, NY
- LB Vineyards - Forestville, NY
- Hidden Brook Hollow - Blossvale, NY
- Randy's Honey Hive LLC - Piseco, NY

- Maitri Farm - Amenia, NY
- Barger Vineyards - Westfield, NY
- Chaotic Neutral - Vestal, NY
- Waterman's Flowers - East Concord, NY
- New York Beef Co. - Poughkeepsie, NY
- Glen Copack - Watkins Glen, NY
- NY Fresh, LLC - Cato, NY
- Covenant Food Group - Rodman, NY
- Josey's WineFarm - Old Chatham, NY
- Freight Yard Brewing - Clay, NY
- Grower's Co-operative Grape Juice Co. Inc. - Westfield, NY

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## Reminder: $1.3 Million Available to New York State Grown & Certified Farmers for Research and Development

More than $1.3 million in funding is available through the New York State Grown & Certified Research and Development Grant. This funding, which is being administered by the New York Farm Viability Institute, is specifically dedicated to research and development to help our NYS Grown & Certified agricultural producers, processors, and distributors launch new products or even increase distribution of existing products.

The grant is available to businesses currently enrolled in the program and making edible products. Applications that meet all technical requirements will be awarded funding on a rolling basis until funds are exhausted. Grants will range from $10,000 to $50,000.

The Request for Applications (RFA), details on Technical Requirements, and webinar recordings can be found here on the NYFVI website. Questions can be emailed to nysgcgrants@nyfvi.org.

This funding opportunity builds on the $8.5 million in funding awarded to NYS Grown & Certified participants this past fall for infrastructure and technology projects.  Learn more about this opportunity here!

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## Spotlight!

This month's NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure and Technology (IT) Grant Program recipient shout-out is Black Squirrel Farms.

The grant program provided $8.5 million to more than 70 NYS Grown & Certified businesses in 2025, including Black Squirrel Farms, and now some of those projects are nearing completion.

Black Squirrel Farms has twice as much to celebrate: not only were they awarded a NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure and Technology (IT) grant but they are also the recipients of the New York Small Business Development Center, hosted by Binghamton University, 2026 Manufacturer of the Year. The farm was honored **TODAY** at a very special event, which we were proud to join!

Check out the highlight story below on Black Squirrel Farms, provided to us by the New York Farm Viability Institute, who is administering the NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure and Technology (IT) Grant Program, as well as the newly launched Research and Development Grant program, on behalf of us here at the Department of Agriculture and Markets. Read on to find out how the NYS Grown & Certified grant has helped grow this NYS Grown & Certified farm and small business!

For many New Yorkers, the green hull of a raw eastern black walnut is a familiar sight each autumn, often scattered across yards, roadsides, and fields.

For years, black walnuts have been overlooked, largely because cracking the hard shells and removing the walnut meat requires considerable time and effort.

However, these black walnuts, which are native to New York, are both edible and nutritious, representing an untapped opportunity for food

production, value-added manufacturing, and sustainable economic development in New York agriculture.

This week's feature highlights a success story out of Yates County, where Black Squirrel Farms is unlocking the potential of local black walnuts through key technological investments and the development of regional supply chain infrastructure.

Since 2022, owner and operator Sara Tyler has made Black Squirrel Farms a cornerstone of New York's native black walnut supply chain, connecting growers, processors, and consumers through value-added products.

That commitment to innovation recently received a boost through funding from the NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure and Technology Grant Program.

In 2025, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Richard A. Ball announced $8.5 million in funding to support food and beverage producers, processors, distributors, and other eligible entities across New York State (NYS) in bringing NYS Grown & Certified products to market through investments in innovative infrastructure and technology.

Located in the Finger Lakes region, Black Squirrel Farms was one of 73 recipients of the 2025 NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure and Technology Grant administered by the New York Farm Viability Institute. This funding supported the purchase and installation of a unique optical sorter that uses infrared machine vision technology to separate black walnut shell fragments from kernel pieces.
By automating a process that is currently done by hand, the new system will improve food safety, reduce material handling, and increase operational efficiency.

"An optical sorter doesn't sound dramatic, but for a small processor it changes what's possible. It means better food safety, less hand sorting, and more product moving out the door. Those are the investments that make a farm business durable," said New York Farm Viability Institute Executive Director Aaron Ristow.

NYS Grown & Certified recognizes farms that meet higher standards for food safety, environmental sustainability, and labor practices, helping consumers easily identify food that is responsibly grown in New York State.

This investment aligns with the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets' celebration of NYS Grown & Certified' s 10th anniversary.

In a significant milestone for the industry, Black Squirrel Farms recently became the first black walnut operation in New York State to be accepted into NYS Grown & Certified.

**Statewide Recognition as Manufacturing Business of the Year**

Black Squirrel Farms' innovative approach has improved processing efficiency while earning statewide recognition from the New York Small Business Development Centers (NYSBDC).

NYSBDC are a statewide network that provides free, confidential business advising, training, and research assistance to entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout New York State. Each year, NYSBDC selects a small group of outstanding entrepreneurs and businesses from among more than 27,000 clients served statewide.

As part of the 2026 Annual Client Awards Roadshow, NYSBDC will honor Black Squirrel Farms with the Manufacturing Business of the Year Award in recognition of the company's innovation in manufacturing, commitment to sustainability, and positive impact on the rural economy.

"Black Squirrel Farms exemplifies innovation by transforming an underutilized natural resource into high-value products while creating a sustainable, locally driven supply chain. Their commitment to environmental stewardship, value-added manufacturing, and strengthening the regional economy demonstrates how New York manufacturers can turn creativity and resourcefulness into lasting business success," said Sonya Smith, State Director of the New York SBDC.

As part of the celebration, Black Squirrel Farms will launch a maple black walnut and honey granola, co-developed with The Dansville Granola Company, located in Dansville, New York. The granola features local maple syrup, honey, pumpkin seeds, and, of course, black walnuts. Notably, the product label shares the story of how cold cereal was first developed in Dansville, New York.

**Building a Market for New York Black Walnuts**

Building a successful market requires more than just a quality product. Every stage of the supply chain, from tree to table, must be economically viable. For New York black walnuts, the lack of economically sustainable processing infrastructure has long been a key barrier to market expansion.

Recognizing this gap in the supply chain, Tyler and the team at Black Squirrel Farms set out to create a viable processing operation that could unlock the economic potential of New York's black walnut resource.

"We create value through coordination and collaboration," said owner and operator, Sara Tyler.

Black Squirrel Farms grows raw black walnuts and purchases additional harvests from more than 100 local growers. After collecting from local growers, the operation hulls and dries the nuts to produce dry, hulled, whole in-shell black walnuts, which are further processed onsite into food products and value-added nutshell products, including granola, walnut oils, soaps and BBQ smoking chips.

Through the creation of a regional black walnut collection program, Black Squirrel Farms has established a unique supply chain that benefits local property owners and growers while supporting its own processing facility.

"Processing sits in the middle of the supply chain, with supply downstream and the market upstream. Downstream, Black Squirrel Farms grows their own black walnuts, and purchases black walnuts from more than 100 local growers. Upstream, in addition to direct-to-consumer sales, Black Squirrel Farms works with restaurants, farm markets and small-scale value-added food producers who can use black walnuts as an ingredient," said Tyler.

With funding from the NYS Grown & Certified Infrastructure and Technology Grant, Tyler's operation was able to purchase a machine vision optical sorter, that uses infrared technology to separate shell fragments from walnut kernels, while also distinguishing high-quality walnuts from damaged or defective product. While infrared-based optical sorting technology has long been used at industrial scales across a variety of nut crops and food-processing applications, more compact systems have only recently become available to smaller processors.

Supported by New York Farm Viability Institute and recognized for manufacturing excellence, Black Squirrel Farms exemplifies how strategic investments in innovation can strengthen the long-term viability and competitiveness of New York agriculture.

As owner and operator Tyler notes: "There are a lot of people doing amazing things to make their land more productive or resilient, or to make their own lifestyle healthier or more self-sufficient. However, long-term, we need to develop ways to make these actions reinforce and magnify each

other to have regional scale impact. Finding non-timber value in native nut trees is just somewhere to start.”

The New York Farm Viability Institute works to strengthen the long–term sustainability of New York farms through targeted grant programs and partnerships, while also advancing the competitiveness of New York agriculture on a national scale. Interested farmers and producers can learn more about available opportunities at nyfvi.org.

## Help Us Celebrate!

If you can't tell, we are excited about NYS Grown & Certified' s 10th anniversary and want to share the good news far and wide! We are inviting all program participants to join us in the celebration by sending us a short video message, wishing the program a "Happy 10th!" or "Happy Anniversary!" and welcome video clips with any additional thoughts about the program. The video messages will be compiled into one, longer video that we will debut at a special, upcoming event and on our social media channels. To submit a video, or if you have any questions, please email Julia.Mason@agriculture.ny.gov.

We're getting some really excellent video congrats, so thank you to all of those who have submitted a video so far. Here's a great example from Headwater Foods:

Our goal is to highlight as many producers from across the state, in all commodities, and shine a spotlight on New York's diverse and thriving agricultural community.  We hope you'll join in the celebration!

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