

First Pioneer Farm Credit
Statement on the
Proposed Bill 5002, Connecticut General Assembly
February 23, 2009

On behalf of First Pioneer Farm Credit, I am pleased to submit comments in support of legislation (Proposed Bill 5002) that would allow greenhouses and nurseries to be eligible under the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. The greenhouse and nursery sectors are very important to Connecticut agriculture and to the economy of the state and should be included in this program.

First Pioneer Farm Credit is a federally chartered lending cooperative that serves agriculture and rural communities in Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey and New Hampshire. First Pioneer Farm Credit lends to farms of all sizes and types in our region. In Connecticut we have over 900 customer-members and extend \$224 million in credit. We are a farmer-owned lender, governed by a farmer board of directors and headquartered in Enfield, Connecticut.

Greenhouse and nursery operations comprise in excess of 34% of our loan portfolio in Connecticut – significantly more than any other individual sector. These businesses create jobs and economic activity throughout the state. Connecticut is fortunate to have excellent greenhouse and nursery operations that are progressive and utilize cutting edge technologies in a very difficult and competitive marketplace. The fact is that greenhouse and nursery operations are a vital part of Connecticut agriculture and contribute to the ensuring the state has the necessary critical mass of agriculturally-related service businesses necessary for the state's overall agriculture industry. Connecticut greenhouse and nursery businesses should be encouraged through appropriate public policy initiatives including eligibility under the Agricultural Development Rights Program.

First Pioneer Farm Credit finances many farm operations in which the development rights have been sold in Connecticut and in other Northeast states. Development rights programs can be effective in allowing open space and assisting in the agricultural production in areas under pressure by non-farm uses. The exclusion of Connecticut's largest agricultural sector is counterproductive to efforts to strengthen the long-term viability of Connecticut agriculture and should be addressed with passage of this legislation.

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