

Environment Committee Public Hearing
Monday, February 9, 2009 – 10:00 AM
Room 1E of the LOB

Joyce R. Okonuk, First Selectman, Town of Lebanon

Re: **Proposed Raised Bill 5811**
AAC Battery Cages and Egg Laying Hens

Good morning Senator Meyer, Representative Roy and members of the Environment Committee.

I am Joyce Okonuk, the First Selectman of the Town of Lebanon. I am here today to speak against **HB 5811** AAC Battery Cages and Egg Laying Hens.

The Town of Lebanon is one of the most rural and agricultural towns in the State of Connecticut. We have more land preserved for agriculture and open space than any other town in the state. We take great pride in our historical and agricultural heritage. Throughout the past two challenging decades we have watched dozens of our small family farms disappear. What reappeared were subdivisions, new houses, roads, and more people where our farms and farmland once stood. This was true of both dairy and poultry farms. To remain viable our farms must be larger and more productive businesses than every before. That's right – agriculture is business—a business that contributes to the local and state economy.

In Lebanon, Kofkoff Farms LLC is the third highest taxpayer in our community – paying taxes of nearly \$130,000 per year. In addition to their taxes, Koffkoff is also one of our larger employers. They purchase their feed, equipment and supplies locally – helping our local and regional economy. The chicken manure is spread on our land to produce hay and corn. But most importantly, Kofkoff produces Connecticut grown fresh eggs – a commodity that is slowly but surely leaving our state. I can remember only a few years ago as the cost of doing business in Connecticut continued to increase, a very large poultry operation, Arbor Acres, eliminated their farms, and left their corporate offices in Glastonbury, moved out of Connecticut to a more affordable southern location. We do not want to see that happen again.

RB 5811, if enacted, will be the final nail in the coffin of the Connecticut egg industry. I can't believe the Environment Committee really wishes to support legislation that would have such a devastating impact on the Connecticut egg industry putting Kofkoff Farms, Southern New England Eggs and New England Egg Farms all out of business in Connecticut. What about their employees, the local businesses they support, and the taxes they pay? The language in this bill, as written, will make an inevitable and detrimental impact.

Our State is struggling. In these difficult economic times, Connecticut farms and agri-business are struggling too. I am asking that you think about the greater picture here when considering this bill. Let's keep Connecticut farms in business, keep our eggs local and fresh, and let's work with our communities to hold onto the jobs and taxes that these agricultural industries provide.

I am asking that members of this Committee **defeat HB 5811**. Thank you for your time.


Joyce R. Okonuk, First Selectman