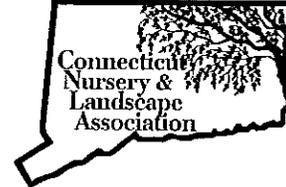




**Connecticut
Florists
Association**



**CONNECTICUT
GREENHOUSE
GROWERS
ASSOCIATION**



Statement of
Bob Heffernan
Executive Director
Connecticut Green Industries Coalition
before the
Environment Committee / Connecticut General Assembly
Supporting HB 5002 • Green Industry Use of Preserved Farmland

February 23, 2009

We ask the Committee's support for House Bill 5002, which directs the Commissioner of Agriculture **NOT** to exclude greenhouses and nurseries from participating in the state's farmland preservation program.

Since the state farmland preservation program was started 30 years ago, not a single green industry farm has been preserved. Further, no green industry farm has been allowed to lease or use farmland that's already been preserved by the state.

Connecticut's green industry is more than half of all of agriculture in the state. If we're not preserving this land for this important segment of our state's agriculture, then exactly who are we preserving it for?

We believe the Commissioner of Agriculture needs this two-sentence statutory nudge from the legislature and the Governor to begin including the green industry. The Commissioner has previously stated he feels constrained by previous farmland preservation statutes limiting his consideration to farms that produce "food and fiber".

The "purists" behind the farmland preservation movement might argue that our green industry could harm soils. These "purists" even "commissioned" a flawed study by a retired UConn professor that looked at only one Connecticut nursery. They've got this warped view that we're out to "steal" soil.

But HB 5002 lets the Commissioner of Agriculture require a soil remediation or replacement program for green industry farms when he feels it is necessary.

Fact is, no greenhouse or nursery can operate without preserving and enhancing the soils they grow on/in. Land is simply far too expensive in Connecticut. Many nurseries have large composting programs to replenish their soils, even taking autumn leaves from entire towns. The vast amount of ornamental plants today aren't even grown in the ground anymore, but on top of it in containers — which would do absolutely no damage to preserved farmland.

The state legislature has to ask itself: is the purpose of the farmland preservation program to preserve open space, or to preserve land for working farms into the future?