



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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February 23, 2009

TO: Members of the Environment Committee
RE: IMPACTS of proposed House Bill No. 5002,
An Act Concerning the State Acquisition of Agricultural Development Rights Program

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the Federal agency charged with the classification, mapping, and interpretation of soils on America's private lands. In Connecticut we have worked in partnership with the CT Department of Agriculture, University of Connecticut, and CT Agricultural Experiment Station to identify the spatial extent of different soils as well as the physical and chemical properties of the soils and to help determine the suitability and impact of different land uses. NRCS soil scientists working with the CT Dept. of Agriculture have determined that there are a number of traditional nursery, greenhouse, and turf grass cultural and management practices that degrade soil resources and make them less viable and more costly for future agricultural use. Activities that permanently degrade the soil resources would violate the primary mission of both the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program and the NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), and are a violation of the deed language. It is not in keeping of the stewardship intent of permanent farmland protection for future generations

The proposed Bill No. 5002, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE ACQUISITION OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS appears to offer "soil restoration and replacement" as a mechanism to compensate for soil degrading practices of topsoil and subsoil removal, grading, and creation of large areas of impervious surface. Soil restoration and replacement is costly, difficult to monitor and enforce, and does not result in a soil landscape with the same agricultural productivity as undisturbed prime and important farmland soils. In addition, it may result in contaminated materials being brought to a site, changes to surface and groundwater quality and quantity, and reduced crop yields that require additional fertilizers and water.

The NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program has been an active partner in farmland preservation in Connecticut, contributing our \$15 million to protect 85 farms. Over \$12 million have been used in partnership with the CT Farmland Preservation Program. Our jointly agreed upon deed language prohibits the degradation of the soil resources. Both nursery and greenhouse agriculture are allowed as farms where NRCS has contributed to the easement, with the condition that a conservation plan be developed, impervious surfaces limited (up to 5%), and that the soils are not degraded, extracted, or removed. We would not consider "soil restoration and replacement" as a suitable substitute for limiting impervious surfaces or allowing excessive soil degradation and loss. Approval of these amendments (proposed House Bill No. 5002) may result in the state of Connecticut being ineligible for \$4-8 million of matching Federal funds per year for the next five years (\$20-40 million).

Connecticut's nursery and greenhouse industry is an important part of the economy and quality of life in the state. We have worked with many producers to address their environmental risk and increase their profits through our technical and financial assistance programs. We welcome the opportunity to work with producers who want to permanently protect their land, and to develop conservation plans that protect soil landscapes for long-term sustainable production. This is paramount to the integrity of the public's investment in farmland preservation and to maintaining our obligation to future generations. Allowing soil degradation and then attempting restoration on preserved farmland does not support this vision.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed Bill.

Sincerely,

Kipen J. Kolesinskas
State Soil Scientist
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program Manager
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service