

## Testimony before the Environment Committee -Feb.18, 2009

My name is Joe Greenbacker and my family and I operate a dairy farm in Durham, CT. I wish to speak in support of HB5272 and HB5483. We own 415 acres, rent 250 additional acres, are milking 160 cows with a total of 360 total head of cattle. My family had been farming in Connecticut since 1732 on the same farm in Meriden until the mid 1980's. At that time it became clear we needed to move to a different location. Our choices included moving out of Connecticut to continue farming or to find a new location within the state. In 1983 we purchased our current farm with the development rights already sold to the state. Since that time, we built a new dairy facility for our herd and have made other improvements to the farm to improve and enhance our operation. Our farm is a family operation with several family members involved in the day to day operation and management of our business. My daughter Melissa received her degree in animal science from Cornell and has assumed responsibility for herd management. I also have a niece that is a graduate student at University of New Hampshire and a nephew who is a senior in high school planning to attend SUNY-Cobleskill in the fall, both of whom are pursuing education in dairy science, and it is possible that they will also want to continue the operation of our dairy farm.

Our farm makes a considerable contribution to the local community. Much of the land we rent is town owned open space land that is in permanent hay production. The rest is privately owned land that would otherwise be developed or left idle if we did not use it for agriculture. Because we grow more feed than we need for feeding our own cattle, we sell a large amount of hay and corn silage to horse and cattle owners whose farms are too small to economically grow their own crops. We have 40 horses on our farm that are owned by others who board their animals here. Another important part of our business is our Agway store that sells lawn and garden and animal supplies.

In recent years the price we receive for our milk has been very volatile making it difficult to remain profitable or to make investments for the future of our farm. Six months ago, milk price

forecasts were predicting a drop in milk prices in 2009 that would have made it very difficult financially for Connecticut dairy farmers. In recent weeks, prices have fallen further and faster than predicted resulting in an unprecedented crisis for our farm. If the most recent price forecasts are correct, we will see a reduction of 150,000 dollars in our milk income in 2009 compared to 2008. I feel this is a symptom of the failure of the federal milk pricing system. This system does not recognize regional differences in markets or cost of production. It seems to be geared to encouraging milk production in some areas of the country and discouraging production in other areas, including Connecticut. Many western states have increased in milk production very rapidly recently, putting much more milk on the market, and depressing milk prices nationwide. Many of these western farms milk thousands of cows, have access to abundant supplies of feed and cheap labor, and have lower investment per cow than farms in Connecticut. We are at an economic disadvantage to these farms no matter what the price of milk is.

In July 2006 Governor Rell visited our farm to announce the Dairy Farm Reinforcement Program. This initiative had several components including developing a program to provide for the long term viability of Connecticut's dairy farmers. We are still waiting for that program. We are not looking for a guaranteed profit, but a chance to survive and prosper. Our family and other dairy farm families have younger members who are interested in continuing in the dairy business in Connecticut. Their future and the future face of Connecticut agriculture depends on legislative action to make their dreams possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my views on this matter.

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