



To: Environment Committee
From: Erin Wirpsa Eisenberg, Executive Director, CitySeed
Re: RB 5419 – An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs
Date: March 12, 2010

CitySeed is a community-based, nonprofit organization that operates a network of farmers' markets in the City of New Haven and seeks to promote increased access to local, healthy food and farm viability. During the 2009 market season, our markets redeemed over \$89,000 in WIC and Food Stamps from New Haven residents who are most nutritionally at-risk. In addition, these four, outdoor markets contributed over \$1.75 million to the local economy. We know firsthand the positive impact local agriculture and farms can have on a community in terms of creating jobs, building community and ensuring that inner-city residents have access to fresh, healthy food. *An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs* can help us make an even greater impact on the City of New Haven and the entire State of Connecticut.

In these challenging economic times, leaders and communities at every level are required to seek new solutions to keeping our communities healthy and prospering. *An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs* does just that:

- By investing \$1.5 million into the preservation of community farms, *An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs* will **support the small farm businesses that provide jobs in our state**. According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, 64% of Connecticut's farms are fewer than 50 acres in size. Since the CT Farmland Preservation Program continues to maintain a waiting list of farm applications that meet that program's size criteria of 30 acres or more of cropland, legislative leaders and farmland advocates worked to create the Community Farms Program, enacted in PA 08-174. The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board has completed the scoring criteria which would be used by the Community Farms Program. The same entity has recommended a pilot year for the program. Working Lands Alliance anticipates that between 5 and 8 farms could be protected if the pilot program is funded, thus maintaining jobs and open space in our state.
- By investing \$1.5 million of state money, Connecticut can easily **leverage these**

moneys to attract matching federal dollars. The Federal Farm and Ranchland Preservation Program would be a major potential funder for the preservation of Community Farms, matching the state's investment dollar for dollar.

- By allowing small farmers to increase their production of value-added products, *An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs* will **help our state's farms, farmers' markets and other local food venues grow in success and size, thus creating new jobs in our state.** These value-added products are a vital component to any vibrant marketplace. Customers and farmers alike benefit from the jams, jellies, yarns, meats and dairy products that small farmers sell. These products need to be able to find new marketplaces and sales outlets.
- By allowing farmers' markets and school gardens to best serve their communities, *An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs* will provide for more and better opportunities to inform the public about the food they eat and how they can contribute to the economy of Connecticut by buying local products!

As a nonprofit organization that works very closely with small farmers, we know the benefits that these business people bring to the communities of Connecticut. In addition to jobs, they provide healthy, fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, greens and value-added products to our marketplaces, thus helping the residents of Connecticut stay healthy. These healthy foods can be found in farmers' markets, restaurants, hospitals and schools, where healthy food is most needed. Through their diverse array of products, our farmers attract not only New Haven residents but also tourists from outside the state. These visitors bring both their interest in seeing the great work we are doing here in Connecticut around agriculture and food, and their dollars. For CitySeed, this translates into \$1.75 million that is infused on an annual basis into our local economy.

For the health of our urban and rural communities alike, I strongly urge you to support Raised Bill No. 5419 – *An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs* – so that our state can build on a strong movement to improve the health of our environment, people and economy.