



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: Mar 10, 2010

Testimony in regards to: Governor Rell proposal to take \$5m of Community Investment Act Funds

Submitted by: Jiff Martin, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition of 200 businesses and non-profits as well as over 600 individuals committed to increasing the state's commitment to farmland preservation.

Enacted in 2005, Public Act 05-228 (also known as the Community Investment Act) was heralded as a dramatic success, creating a dedicated revenue stream to protect and preserve the unique character of Connecticut for future generations. Public willingness to accept this fee (\$30 deed recording fee) was based on the promise that this revenue would be permanently directed to farmland, open space, historic preservation, and affordable housing. 25% of these funds are dedicated to agriculture viability programs. Governor Rell's proposal is to redirect \$5m of this dedicated revenue stream into the General Fund.

WLA strongly objects to the loss of Community Investment Act funds (CIA) which will deeply harm the state's ability to protect farms and support farm businesses.

- 1) The CT Farmland Preservation Program relies on CIA funds to pay for three of five full time program positions, plus support staff in the Attorney General's office to review legal contracts. Loss of CIA funds will mean a dramatic step backwards, reintroducing unnecessary delays and inefficiencies when the program is enjoying an all-time high demand from farmers wishing to sell their development rights to the state, with over 50 applications currently in the pipeline.
- 2) CIA funds have tremendous leveraging power. Since 2005 the Dept. of Agriculture has received approximately \$14.5m through the CIA, and has leveraged an additional \$10-\$12 million in federal, municipal, and in-kind match.
- 3) CIA funds are used for a variety of farm business programs that would not be funded otherwise, including the Dairy Support Program, CT-Grown Marketing, CT Farm Link, and the highly successful Agriculture Viability Grants.
- 4) Since 2005, under the Agriculture Viability Grants program:
 - Farm Transition Grants:
\$2,555,912 grant dollars have been allocated to 76 producers, 19 agricultural non-profits and 2 Ag Cooperatives with total projects values of \$7,773,835 meaning that they are leveraging \$5,217,923 of their own money to complete these projects.
 - Farm Viability Grants (for municipalities and non-profits):
\$2,036,984 grant dollars have been allocated to 63 municipalities and 10 agricultural non-profits with total project values of \$4,326,883 meaning that they are leveraging \$2,289,899 of their own money and services to complete these projects.
- 5) Between 2009-2011, CIA funds will be a vital source of dairy support funding that will help keep over 70,000 acres of farmland in active agricultural use.

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