



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

To: Environment Committee

Date: Mar 12, 2010

Testimony in support of: The Preservation of Community Farms; Promoting Farm Viability; Creating an Easement Registry, and Enabling a Municipal Conveyance Tax

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.

Thirty years ago our state leaders enacted landmark legislation with passage of Public Act 78-232 which laid the groundwork for what is today known as the CT Farmland Preservation Program (or Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR)). The main objective of the program is to secure a food and fiber producing land resource base for the future of agriculture in Connecticut. Connecticut has 4,916 farms and 406,000 acres of 'land in farms'.¹ The state goal is to protect 130,000 acres of farmland, including cropland and supportive lands such as forest and wetlands. So far the state has protected less than 37,000 acres on 265 farms.

Support to RB 5419

As outlined in Sec 1 and 2 of **RB 5419, An Act Concerning Farms, Food, and Jobs**, the Working Lands Alliance coalition strongly supports a \$1.5 million investment in the Community Farms Preservation Program. WLA is also supportive of a \$1.5 million capital bonding authorization to leverage federal funds through a new Farm Training and Infrastructure Jobs and Grant Match Program. Both of these programs are important investments in growing jobs and income on small farms.

According to 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, 64% of Connecticut's farms are under 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 saw the need for a separate and new farmland preservation program that would be able to work with smaller working farms.

The creation of the Community Farms Program was 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 at a level of \$1.5 million in funding. The scoring criteria give preference to farms that have significant community support, including financial match for the state's investment. \$1.5 million invested by the state could easily leverage another \$1.5 million in matching funds. The Federal Farm and Ranchland Preservation Program would be a major potential funder for the preservation of Community Farms, matching the state's investment

¹ USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture

dollar for dollar. WLA anticipates that the Community Farms Program could protect between 5 - 8 farms if funded at the \$1.5 million level by the state.

In addition to our farmland preservation advocacy, WLA supports efforts that promote the long-term viability of farming in Connecticut recognizing that the sustainability of farms is as critical to Connecticut agriculture as is the long-term availability of farmland. To this end, we feel the creation of a state funding source to match growing federal funding available to grow the local food and farm economy is critical. The Farm Training and Infrastructure Jobs and Grant Match Program would incentivize entrepreneurs and service providers to address infrastructure gaps, pursue value added agriculture enterprises, and train beginner adult farmers.

Support to RB 5417, Sec 1 and 2 only

WLA strongly supports the creation of an online registry of open space and protected farmland. We currently have no way of estimating the amount of farmland that has been protected by towns unless they have leveraged state or federal funding. We estimate there could be up to 10,000 acres of unaccounted protected farmland. Although the registry would not resolve the lack of information from past acquisitions, it would at least build a new database of farmland easements going forward.

WLA is also supportive of the concept of enabling municipalities to use a buyer's tax on the conveyance of real property in order to raise local funds for investments in the preservation and restoration of a community's natural assets, including the purchase of development rights on farmland. We have seen this model work successfully in certain regions where land values are high, such as the Hudson River Valley and the North and South Forks of Long Island. This tool has made farmland preservation possible in communities where it would have otherwise been unaffordable. As you can imagine, there are regions in Connecticut which are already prohibitive in terms of land values for the use of public dollars to protect farmland without significant local match funding.