



## CT NOFA

### *Cultivating an Organic Connecticut*

To: The Environment Committee  
Re: HB 5419, AAC Farms, Food and Jobs  
From: Bill Duesing, Executive Director, CT NOFA  
Date: March 12, 2010

This testimony is presented on behalf of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut's nearly 800 members who see Connecticut agriculture and a vibrant local food system as essential for a healthy future. Since 1982, CT NOFA has been educating and advocating for local and organic agriculture.

**We strongly support passage of Raised Bill 5419, AAC Farms, Food and Jobs.**

In these challenging times, Connecticut agriculture is one of the bright spots. Over the past ten years there has been a remarkable growth in interest and participation in local agriculture and food and farm projects in our state. The growth of farmland preservation, small farms, community farms, farmers' markets, community food projects, farm-to-school, to-chef and to-plate programs and many more aspects of the growing, vibrant Connecticut food system has been remarkable and very heartening.

We all have to eat every day. As more of the places where our food now comes from develop their farmland, face diminishing water supplies and a growing number of mouths to feed, the food we can grow in Connecticut will become even more important.

Raised Bill No. 5419 will provide some significant incentives to encourage the local food movement in our state. The Farm Training and Infrastructure Jobs and Grant Match Program (and the funding for it) should help provide more trained workers and better infrastructure to help meet our food and fiber needs.

The funding for the existing Community Farms program will help meet the growing need to preserve the significant smaller farms that communities believe are increasingly important.

The acidified food products section provides a common sense and safe way for farmers to add value to the products they grow and will allow them to have products for sale over a longer season. This will also benefit the consumers at Farmers Markets and Farm Stands.

CT NOFA is especially interested in the change in the definition of Farmers Market to include events that are not season long. We had trouble for the first time last year at the Farmers Market we held at Manchester Community College for one day in September because of the existing language relating to season long. There are more and more special events that include a one or several days-long Farmers Market that meets all the other criteria for such a market, Connecticut producers selling produce from their farms. Under current law, just because the event is not season long, each farmer's stall becomes instead a food service establishment with serious limits on what can be sold and an increase in the fees that must be paid.

We are excited by the provision that adopts the Federal exemption that allows a farm to grow and process up to 20,000 chickens. There is an increasing demand for local and organically raised poultry and Connecticut has a long history of raising poultry and lots of new interest among farmers.

The provision which explicitly lets schools use the produce they grow to feed students, subject to a test for lead, should eliminate a lot of confusion and frustration among teachers and schools which are using school gardens and farms as important educational tools. Learning to eat the food students grow may be as important as learning to grow it.

CT NOFA strongly supports passage of this bill.  
Thank you.

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The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut  
*A growing community of organic farmers, gardeners, land care professionals and consumers*  
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