



Eastern Connecticut RC&D

Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc.

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*John Guskowski, President
Paula Stahl, Vice President
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To: Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee
From: John Guskowski, Board President, Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council 
Re: RB 5419 - An Act Concerning Farms Food and Jobs, Section 2 providing funding for Community Farms Program
Date March 12, 2010

I appreciate the opportunity to be able to be here today to discuss with you the Community Farms Program. My name is John Guskowski, and I am the Board President of the Eastern Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc. We are a volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving agricultural viability and building livable communities across the region. On behalf of this organization I also sit on the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Advisory Board that was created by PA 07-162, and serve as the chairman of the Board's Criteria Subcommittee.

As you know, PA 08-174 created the Community Farms Program as a new program, independent of the ongoing Farmland Preservation Program, and charged the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board with developing program criteria. Over the past year, my subcommittee has done just that, relying heavily on guidance provided by the statute creating the program. We believe that the criteria we have developed will help the State protect the best of the best small and community-supported farms in Connecticut. Along with the development of these criteria, the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board has recommended a pilot year for the program at a level of \$1.5 million in funding.

Section 2 of RB 5419 authorizes the State Bond Commission to invest \$1.5 million in the preservation of Community Farms. The Farmland Preservation Program in Connecticut currently only works with properties that have 30 or more acres of prime farmland. As Connecticut is home to hundreds of vibrant, vital farms smaller than that threshold, there is a key gap to be addressed. According to 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, 64% of Connecticut's farms are under 50 acres in size. Community Farms are small farm businesses that provide jobs in the state.

The scoring criteria my subcommittee developed gives 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 dollar for dollar. We anticipate that the Community Farms Program could protect between 5 - 8 farms if funded at the \$1.5 million level by the State.

In these difficult fiscal times, it is critical to invest State funds where they can do the greatest good. By investing in permanently protecting the finest farmland in the state, by creating and retaining local jobs, by ensuring continuing support for local farms, by protecting sources of fresh, local foods, the choice to invest \$1.5 million in the Community Farms pilot program this year will be one of the best choices you make.

Thank you for your consideration.