

Testimony presented to the Environment Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly by
Connecticut Commissioner of Agriculture
F. Philip Prelli
March 12, 2010

Good Morning Chairman Meyer, Chairman Roy, Ranking Members McKinney, Chapin and Members of the Committee.

My name is Phil Prelli and I serve as Connecticut's Commissioner of Agriculture. I am here today to testify on a number of bills principally Raised House Bill 5419 AAC FARMS, FOOD AND JOBS.

Areas of this bill generate much debate with respect to public health and safety, as well as issues regarding its cost. I would like to focus on a few sections of the bill that deserve your attention today.

Section 4 of the bill concerns the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board. The Department supports developing, coordinating, and implementing promotional, research and other programs designed to promote Connecticut dairy farms and the consumption of pasteurized milk. Our concern revolves around the best language to accomplish that and we will stand ready to work with the Committee to affect that desire.

Section 5 of the bill allows for a one day type of Farmers Market. Presently, Farmers Markets abide by long term schedules of fixed times and places. This section allows for flexibility when scheduling markets to take advantage of large crowds gathered for other reasons. The Department believes this will be used in a limited fashion. The language in this section needs changes regarding vendors operating as food service establishments. We would be happy to work with the proponents of this bill and the CT Department of Public Health to develop appropriate language to achieve this end.

With regard to sections 6 and 7 the intent of the language in this section is unclear. It appears to attempt to create an avenue for the commercial sale of poultry raised by Connecticut farmers outside the traditional USDA inspection process. The Department of Agriculture supports the sale and use of Connecticut raised poultry, but expects that any commercial activity in this regard will take place in a manner that would ensure public health and keep Connecticut consumers safe. The agency is willing to work with the relevant stakeholders to find an appropriate solution for this issue in the future. However, given the current fiscal challenges facing the state, no resources are available to implement such a program at this time.

Lastly, we applaud section 8 and are very much in favor of teaching Connecticut's school children about agriculture from an early age. The presence of pesticides, lead and other heavy metals in the soil around and near schools and the safety of the food grown in this circumstance are better commented on by other agencies.

With respect to Raised Senate Bill 383 AAC A STATE-WIDE WATER USE PLAN the Department urges that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture be consulted as well as the Water Planning Council when agencies develop a state-wide water use plan as water use is part of the fundamental foundation of agriculture.

Finally, Senate Raised Bill 397 AAC PUPPY MILLS AND THE ORIGIN OF OTHER POTENTIALLY SICK DOGS IMPORTED INTO THIS STATE recognizes the need to pinpoint where the vast majority of diseased animals entering the state come from and offers the opportunity to correct this threat to Connecticut companion animals. The Department supports the goals of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these bills.