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Statement of
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before the Environment Committee

Supporting Senate Bill 207 • Including Nurseries & Greenhouses in Farmland Preservation

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Since the state farmland preservation program was started 32 years ago, not a single green industry farm has been preserved. Further, no green industry farm has been allowed to lease or use farmland that's already been preserved by the state.

Why has half of all of agriculture in the state been excluded from the program? Horticulture and floriculture has over \$1 billion in annual sales, 48,000 employees, and 46,000 acres of land, operating in every town.

We know our nurseries and greenhouses can abide by reasonable standards or protocols to protect precious farm lands. Senate Bill 207 simply directs the Commissioner of Agriculture to work with us in developing a soil remediation or replacement program for green industry farms when he feels it is necessary. Discussions have begun in earnest through the Working Lands Alliance and others towards including the growers of ornamental plants along these lines. We're pleased to participate in those talks.

Fact is, no greenhouse or nursery can operate without preserving and enhancing the soils they grow on/in. Land is simply far too expensive in Connecticut. Many nurseries have large composting programs to replenish their soils, even taking autumn leaves from entire towns. The

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vast amount of ornamental plants today aren't even grown in the ground anymore, but on top of it in containers – which would do absolutely no damage to preserved farmland. There are other new technologies, such as pot-in-pot, where a tree is planted in the ground in a pot, allowing the existing farm soil to stay on-site.

The other five New England states have had no apparent difficulty bringing their green industry farms into preservation programs:

	Total Green	
	<u>Industry Land</u>	<u>%Preserved Land*</u>
Vermont.....	11,500 acres.....	19%
Rhode Island.....	31,000 acres.....	21%
New Hampshire.....	25,000 acres.....	36%
Massachusetts.....	90,000 acres.....	40%
Maine.....	17,200 acres.....	36%
Connecticut.....	46,000 acres.....	3%

There are two types of land preservation in Connecticut: first, farmland preservation, and second, open space. We strongly believe that farmland preservation is necessary to keep these lands in the *business of farming*. Farming returns value in the form of crops, tax and economic benefits. Open space doesn't offer these added benefits.

Over the 32-year history of the program, has the \$100 million-plus state investment in farmland preservation enhanced the *business of farming*, or has it been diverted to open space preservation? Both are laudable goals, but we insist that farmland preservation is for *farming*.

Our green industry is a proven economic engine for Connecticut. Allowing the green industry access is in line with the original purpose of farmland preservation.

Lastly, not enough attention is paid to the long-term environmental contribution of our plants. The trees we grow last decades, absorbing carbon and combatting global warming. Fruit trees get their start in nurseries. Our plants capture stormwater runoff. By far, horticulture's extensive environmental benefits make it a wise use of our preserved farmlands.

*from *A Summary of the Impact of the Environmental Horticulture Industry on the New England Economy* (2009) (University of Vermont, University of Maine)