

**Testimony presented to the Environment Committee of  
The Connecticut General Assembly  
By the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture  
Steven K. Reviczky  
2/23/11**

**H.B. 5508 AAC THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL FOR AGRICULTURAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

**H.B. 6402 AAC THE REQUISITE NUMBER OF POULTRY FOR CERTAIN  
APPROVED FOOD SOURCES UNDER THE PUBLIC HEALTH CODE**

**S.B. 992 AAC CONNECTICUT WINE FESTIVALS**

**S.B. 993 AAC FAIR ADVERTISING FOR CONNECTICUT AGRICULTURAL  
TOURISM**

**S.B. 994 AA AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF CONNECTICUT WINE AT  
FARMERS' MARKETS AND ESTABLISHING A FARMERS' MARKET WINE  
PERMIT**

**S.B. 207 AA AUTHORIZING THE INCLUSION OF NURSERIES AND  
GREENHOUSES IN FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAMS**

**H. B. 5368 AA EXTENDING CERTAIN PET SHOP LICENSEE  
REQUIREMENTS TO PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT IMPORT  
ANIMALS FOR ADOPTION**

Good morning Chairman Meyer, Chairman Roy, Vice Chairs Maynard and Davis, Ranking Members Roraback and Chapin and distinguished members of the Environment Committee. My name is Steve Reviczky and I serve as Connecticut's Commissioner of Agriculture. It is a pleasure to be here this morning to share my thoughts on a wide range of Agriculture related proposals. In the interest of brevity it is my intention to offer a brief synopsis of thought on each bill and then make myself available for questions by the Committee and of course stay as long as the Committee requires.

The Department is in favor of H.B. 5508, An Act Concerning the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development. Presently the Council is comprised of thirty members and meets once a year. The legislation reduces the number of members to fifteen and increases the number of meetings to four and requires the Council to focus on recommendations increasing the percentage of consumer dollars spent on Connecticut grown products. The intention is to make the Council a more effective group that can then concentrate on matters that grow Connecticut agriculture and improve the viability of our farms.

The Department supports the concept of H.B. 6402, An Act Concerning the Requisite Number of Poultry for Certain Approved Food Sources Under the Public Health Code with a few minor caveats. The intention of the bill is to enable farmers with fewer than five hundred birds to be approved food sources for food service establishments in the state. How wonderful would it be to enjoy fresh eggs at your local diner from a farm right around the corner or right down the road? As I'm sure you are aware, it is a very exciting time for Connecticut agriculture.

Consumers are demanding more locally grown food as never before. For obvious reasons keeping the source of the food and the consumer of the food as close as possible produces a number of societal benefits; freshness of product and diminished energy consumption among them. The bill states that a "... food service establishment... may purchase shell eggs from unregulated sources... provided such shell eggs... otherwise meet the same standards as those shell eggs from commercial, regulated sources inspected according to federal and state law, and... are received

clean and sound.... It is critical that there be no diminution of public health and safety requirements with this agricultural product. It is not enough for eggs to be local, it is not enough that they be fresh, it is imperative that they be safe to consume. The Department stands ready to work with our sister regulatory agencies to achieve the results desired by proponents of the bill while not overwhelming the existing resources of the Department.

S. B. 992, An Act Concerning Connecticut Wine Festivals is a Department of Agriculture bill submitted at the request of The Connecticut Farm Wine Development Council. A similar bill is before the General Law Committee. Connecticut law presently makes allowance for one wine festival per year. This bill will assist in the promotion of Connecticut produced wines by allowing for wine festivals in both eastern and western Connecticut, thereby building awareness and enhancing the image of Connecticut wines. Connecticut wineries comprise over 2,000 acres of working land that are visited by over 500,000 travelers a year searching for locally produced wines. Our wineries are a critical component of our magnificent vistas and local economy. This bill will allow CT wine producers to expand the sales of wine to a greater audience, assist in the broadening awareness of the quality of Connecticut wines and help make the wineries more economically viable. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture urges your support for SB 992.

The Department of Agriculture supports the concept of S.B. 993, An Act Concerning Fair Advertising for Connecticut Agricultural Tourism. Growing

agricultural tourism is another way that Connecticut's family farms have diversified, adding a profit center that makes many farms more viable. As always the Department will make itself available to our sister agencies to work out whatever impediments may exist to make this helpful idea a reality.

**S.B. 994, An Act Authorizing the Sale of Connecticut Wine at Farmers' Markets and Establishing A Farmers Market Wine Permit** is the second Department bill before you today. This bill will create a \$250 annual permit to allow farm winery permittees to sell Connecticut made wine, by the bottle, at Farmers' Markets at the invitation of individual markets. The permit holder or an authorized representative must be present at the time of all sales. A farm winery permittee would be limited to no more than three farmers' market premises during the course of the year. The permit would be granted by the Department of Consumer Protection. There are over 120 Farmers' Markets in operation in Connecticut and a number are held on or near church or school grounds. Wine sales would be conducted in compliance with all local ordinances. The Connecticut Farm Wine Development Council has requested consideration of this proposal in the Council's efforts to increase sales of Connecticut wines by building awareness and enhancing the image of Connecticut's farm wine industry. A primary business growth objective of each winery is to promote tourism to their properties and the communities in which they are located. The availability of Connecticut wines at Connecticut Farmers' Markets will assist in broadening awareness of the quality of Connecticut wines, showcase award winning wines thereby assisting in the continued development and economic viability of the

industry while adding to the success of Farmers' Markets. Connecticut citizens are demanding locally grown and produced farm products. Farmers' Markets have evolved into critical venues where farmers connect directly with consumers and are a vital component of our agricultural economy. Farmers' Markets are most successful when they offer a wide range of Connecticut Grown foods and products. Allowing farm wineries access to Farmers' Markets will help sustain both the farmers and the markets.

With respect to S.B. 207, An Act Authorizing the Inclusion of Nurseries and Greenhouses in Farmland Preservation Programs the Department has some concerns. The foundation of Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program is protecting prime and important farmlands soils. Presently, the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program allows for the construction of greenhouses and nursery production on up to five percent of the preserved farmland. The Department has acquired the development rights to a number of farms that contain a component of greenhouses, nurseries and Christmas trees that are farmed in a manner consistent with the parameters of the conveyance of development rights deeds and the Connecticut General Statutes. The Department has acquired the development rights to seven farms comprised of 669 acres that have constructed greenhouses for plants and vegetables and container nurseries and six farms comprised of 614 acres that grow cut-your-own Christmas trees. In addition, under the Farm Viability and Farm Enhancement Grant programs, seventy one farm projects or 34% of the total projects, and 40% or \$2.6 million, have been awarded

to the greenhouse and nursery industry. There are concerns with the potential for troubling soil losses on farms protected under the Farmland Preservation Program with nursery crops harvested using the ball and burlap method. Recognizing the critical importance of Connecticut's green industry the Department looks forward to working with the industry to further development of best management practices supported by science, utilizing alternative techniques, switching to bare root operations and switching to pot-in-pot culture, so as not to diminish the arability of the agricultural soils.

And finally the Department is in favor of the concept of H.B.5368 An Act Extending Certain Pet Shop Licensee Requirements to Persons and Organizations that Import Animals for Adoption. The Department of Agriculture receives numerous complaints from the public regarding animals that enter Connecticut from other states and countries that have significant health issues. Respiratory problems and parasite infections are common. The Department has followed up on some of these complaints and has found animals are sometimes adopted out of shipping containers in parking lots, often without the required current health certificates and exhibiting signs of disease. Currently the Department has no authority to regulate the importation of these animals other than to require current rabies vaccination and health certificates. This weakens the state's ability to control the introduction of non-endemic disease and parasites. The current situation poses significant risk to the state's human population through the potential introduction of zoonotic diseases and also threatens the state's companion animal population. The Department of

**Agriculture seeks to strengthen existing companion animal importation law in order to minimize these risks. The Department seeks a dialogue with animal rescue organizations in an effort to control the importation of disease with dogs entering the state and to prevent the practice of trafficking in dogs for profit. This bill serves as an important beginning point in resolving the issues that separate rescue organizations and the Department of Agriculture on this critical issue.**