

From the desk of

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February 23, 2011

To: Environment Committee, CT State Legislature

Re: Testimony in favor of HB 993

***AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR ADVERTISING FOR CONNECTICUT
AGRICULTURAL TOURISM***

Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives:

I am a 6th generation farm owner with 30 years of hands on farm management. Our family operates a 300 acre fruit and vegetable farm and year round farm market and pick-your-own operation in Guilford that employs over 150 people in a year, had an annual payroll last year of almost \$2 million, and currently has over 65 full and part time employees (during our slow period). We were the 2001 National Winners of the Mass Mutual Family Business of the Year and recognized by the Ct.General Assembly for this accomplishment.

I am here to ask your support of HB 993, specifically, I want your votes to allow signs letting those traveling our Limited Access Highways know where they can find agricultural tourist attractions, including, but not limited to, farm markets, "pick-your-own" and agri-tourism sites like wineries. This would include them on the DOT permit application titled "**Approval of Specific Information Signs and Business Signs on Limited Access Highways.**" This is **NOT** seeking an increase in the number or location of DOT "**Qualified Interchanges and Approaches**" last revised 3/04 as posted at <http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?A=1394&Q=259522>. Approval of this bill will only allow agriculturally related tourist businesses to join with Gas, Food, Lodging and Camping as approved uses and **not increase qualified locations.**

Allowing this change will help the farm businesses attract tourists, and also help other area businesses have exposure once cars get off the highway.

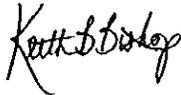
Federal DOT regulations <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/htm/2003r1/part2/part2f.htm> allow these signs, but the states must specifically enable them. Massachusetts and NY are 2 neighboring states where they are in use. Photos of Exit 26 in MA on I-495 in Bolton, MA are with this letter.

The number of farm businesses that would be eligible for this program is limited by the business location (must be near a limited access highway and also off of a qualifying interchange on DOT's "List of Qualified Interchange and Approaches). By allowing the few who wish to pay the fees, signage, bonding and construction costs for this program, they also will help the state to promote tourism and add to the economic vitality of agriculture and its preservation by the private sector with no cost to the state.

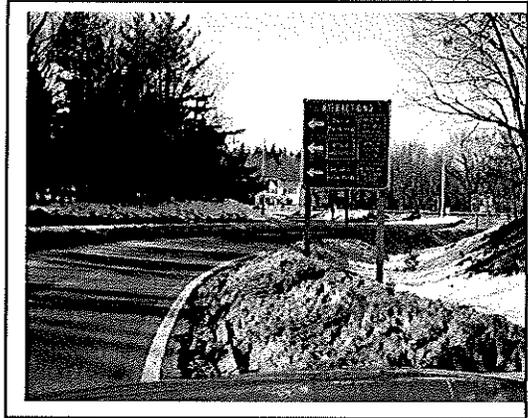
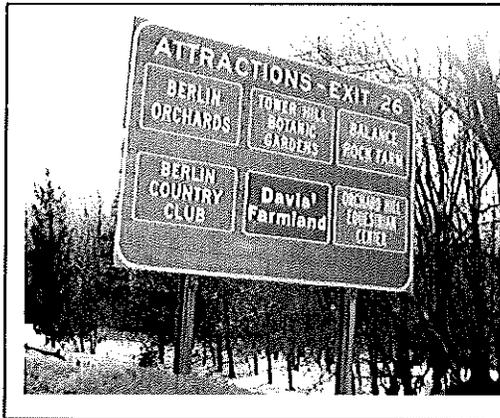
Farmers are trying to maintain an industry and a source of fresh, safe, locally grown food and farm products, that in turn provides jobs, open space and significantly adds to the quality of life in Connecticut. Yet as we work harder to do that, we are losing dairy farms (and others) that cannot survive due to economics of producing in a high cost of living state. We lose others due to development pressures, animal damage (specifically deer), increased regulation compliance, encroachment by houses, combined with dealing with trespass and crop theft by people who think farmland is 'public land'.

Thank you for your understanding of my points, and knowing that I and the voting delegates of the CT Farm Bureau support HB 993.

Sincerely,



Keith B. Bishop
Co-Owner & Co-CEO



Massachusetts allows Ag Logo signage on Interstates. Here is I-495, sign on left approx 1/2 mile before Exit 26, and one on right is on exit ramp.