



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

Date: February 23, 2011

To: Environment Committee

S.B. 207: AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE INCLUSION OF NURSERIES AND GREENHOUSES IN FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

Submitted by: Ben Bowell, Acting Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition of caring individuals and more than 200 organizations and businesses working together to raise awareness of the need and importance of saving Connecticut's valuable and vanishing farmland.

Nursery and greenhouse farms comprise a very important sector of Connecticut agriculture and account for the largest percentage of cash receipts—49% in 2007. We appreciate that issues exist for many nurseries and greenhouses interested in the Farmland Preservation Program and recognize their frustrations.

There is not a prohibition against nurseries and greenhouses entering the CT Farmland Preservation Program. Although there have been some concerns around the integrity of the land and soil resource, nurseries and greenhouses are eligible provided they fall within the parameters applied to all farms. At least 6 nursery and greenhouse farms have participated in the program. While this is a small portion of the 283 farms protected, according to the USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture, nurseries and greenhouses account for only 8% of Connecticut's land in farms.

Members of the Working Lands Alliance believe it is important to look at the issues and convene a discussion with all stakeholders. This conversation would help to clarify practices currently allowed and clearly define barriers to increased participation in the program. The state's Farmland Preservation Advisory Board was created to address such issues of policy and is the ideal venue for this discussion.

Steps have already been taken to start this dialogue and the Working Lands Alliance believes it is important to have these conversations first, prior to statutory changes. These discussions may result in agreement around legislation, recommendations to create a new program or other options. The Working Lands Alliance will be happy to move forward with partners at that time.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this issue.