

**Testimony of Steven K. Reviczky**  
**Before the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee**  
**February 17, 2011**

Good afternoon Chairpersons Looney and Janowski, Ranking Members Fasano and Piscopo and other distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Steven Reviczky and it is an honor and privilege to have been nominated by Governor Malloy to serve as Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and to appear before you today.

Before answering your questions, I would first like to share my background with you.

Prior to my nomination by Governor Malloy, I served as the Executive Director of the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, our state's largest agricultural not-for-profit organization. Connecticut Farm Bureau is a 5,000 member general farm organization dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture. In this capacity I was responsible for day-to-day operations including programs, budget and personnel. I also had the good fortune of working closely with a broad spectrum of farmers from across Connecticut, members of the Connecticut General Assembly, other agricultural stakeholder groups, state and local officials, regional councils of governments and various state agencies. My role with Farm Bureau was to advance the agricultural industry as a whole. In my four plus years as the Executive Director, the Association significantly advanced the availability of locally grown foods and the viability of Connecticut's family farms.

From 1998 to 2006 I was employed at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in the Farmland Preservation Program. During this period I performed a full range of duties regarding the purchase of development rights including the evaluation, investigation and negotiation of applications. I prepared deeds, leases and agreements, reviewed real estate appraisals, prepared bids and administered contracts and prepared proposals for funding under the United States Department Agriculture Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. My responsibilities also included conducting farm reviews and inspections to ensure compliance with development rights deed covenants, state statutes and regulations and reviewing legislation affecting Connecticut agriculture.

Before joining the Department of Agriculture, I worked for nine years at the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. From 1989 to 1998 I served in a variety of capacities at the DEP including work in the Land Acquisition and Property Management Division, the Planning Section of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner and as an Executive Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner. During my tenure at the DEP I worked to develop Connecticut's 5-year Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, the Branch of Environmental Conservation's strategic plan and served as a liaison with other state agencies and the United States Department of the Interior's National Park Service as well as with regional councils of governments, municipalities and other public, quasi-public and private recreation and land conservation organizations. I also prepared leases, easements and agreements related to the management of the real property rights of Connecticut state parks, forests and wildlife management areas.

In my hometown of Ashford I served my community as a member of numerous boards and commissions and as an active member of local organizations including the Ashford Volunteer Fire Department where I was an Emergency Medical Technician and a firefighter for 10 years. While a college student, I was elected to the Board of Selectmen and, at the age of 26, elected First Selectman.

While I have never made my living farming, agriculture has always been a major part of my life. I planted my first Christmas trees when I was a high school sophomore, made maple syrup and raised sheep and beef cattle. My first job, outside of working for my father, who was a plumber, was at local chicken farms where I cleaned coops and picked, washed, graded and packed eggs.

These are very exciting times for Connecticut's farmers and the future of Connecticut agriculture. I had the good fortune of working along side the dedicated staff at the Department of Agriculture for 8 years and it never ceases to amaze me what a small group of dedicated employees can accomplish. I look forward to working with them as Commissioner to grow agriculture in our state and to enhance the availability of Connecticut grown food and horticultural products, to rigorously enforce the laws of our state with regard to domestic animals and food safety and to effectively manage the Department's aquaculture programs.

Our mission must be to grow local farms and local jobs. A recent study by the University of Connecticut's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources indicates that agriculture

contributes \$3.5 billion to the state's economy each year and represents some 20,000 jobs. In a lot of ways, consumers are way ahead of government. Consumers are demanding locally grown food and products as never before. They want to buy local and want to know their farmers. Connecticut farmers are ready, willing and able to meet this growing consumer demand. Government needs to be a partner to help make this happen.

One of the most cost effective ways to keep farmland from being converted to non-agricultural uses is to enhance farm viability. The more profitable farms are, the less likely it is that good farmland will be lost forever. At the same time, the state must continue to work toward its goal of permanently protecting 130,000 acres of active farmland through the purchase of development rights.

The diversity of Connecticut agriculture is robust, the future is bright and there is no limit to what we can do when we work together.

As you know, I was originally scheduled to appear before you in January. Questions raised about a transition period in 2006 caused the hearing to be postponed so that the Governor had an opportunity to examine the facts. I respectfully ask the Committee grant me some latitude to discuss this matter in some detail.

As my resume indicates, there was a period of time where I worked for both the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association. This nine week transition period was done with the approval of the agency and the agreement of the Association. I contacted the Office of State Ethics and consulted

private counsel regarding this matter. Once leaving state service, I had no contact with employees of the Department of Agriculture for a period of one year as required by law. In the spring of 2007 my duties at the Connecticut Farm Bureau changed requiring that I register as a lobbyist. Prior to my filing, I asked the Office of State Ethics for an advisory opinion that clearly set out the parameters of my interaction with my former agency.

I understand that it is extremely hard for some to wrap their heads around the fact that I would not leave the Department of Agriculture and the Farmland Preservation Program to begin my new job as soon as I possibly could. Like thousands of State Employees, I was dedicated to my work, my agency and the citizens we serve. Unlike most, however, I was motivated by a unique set of circumstances.

In late January 2001, I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma that I soon learned was stage III having spread to my lymph system. I endured three surgeries followed by twelve months of chemo therapy - high dose interferon. Through it all (with the help of family and friends, and access to excellent health care) the Department stood by me. I finished my treatments in July 2002 and was able to return to work fulltime soon after. I believe I am alive today because of the support and flexibility demonstrated by Agriculture Commissioners Ferris and Gresczyk, Farmland Preservation Director Joseph Dippel and the support and encouragement I received for my coworkers.

For most, this type of cancer has proven to be a death sentence. I promised myself that, should I live, I would change my life and focus on those things that were most important

and make the most difference. Unfortunately, I realized one morning in the spring of 2006 that I had changed very little. Life is very short and I decided I was not going to end my active career in a cubicle on the ground floor of the State Office Building.

One of the things I decided to change was my job - I wanted new challenges or a new career. I spoke with my boss, J. Dippel, about this and began a job search. He was not happy with the prospects of my leaving. In fact, he suggested that we switch jobs; he would become a property agent and I the Director of Farmland Preservation. He took his proposal to Human Resources in the Smart Unit in the Department of Administration Services where it was rejected.

The Farmland Preservation Program was a two person office that purchased development rights to qualifying farms. Mr. Dippel and I were very concerned about the impact my leaving would have on the work the unit does protecting Connecticut farms. When it became clear that I would accept the position of Executive Director of Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, a private nonprofit corporation, Mr. Dippel and I explicitly discussed ways that I might continue to assist the Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program at some level. Our specific and immediate concern was to ensure that the work of the unit would continue uninterrupted. The needs we identified included Mr. Dippel's fulltime commitment to the ongoing Koniecko trial, the myriad of acquisition and stewardship projects and the preparation of Federal Farmland Protection Program grant reimbursement requests necessary to remain eligible for federal funds.

The willingness and commitment to work together in any way during the transition were never in doubt.

Knowing that new staff members were coming on board was a great relief.

Unfortunately, circumstances beyond our control caused significant delay in the actual start date of new staff. The next major obstacle we faced was the fact that the actual start date of new staff coincided with Mr. Dippel's absence from the office. Once again, it was agreed that I would work to train the unit's new employees, begin to transition projects to them, and be available as needed.

In summary, based on the Department of Agriculture's need and our discussions, I was able to negotiate a delay in both my initial starting date and the commencement of a fulltime assignment with the Connecticut Farm Bureau. It was always understood that this arrangement was to be short-term, depending on specific program and agency needs.

In conclusion, I believe my farming experience, my experience in state and local government and my recent work running a not-for-profit membership association has prepared me to lead the Department of Agriculture and to seize the opportunity to grow our agricultural sector.

Again, I am pleased to be working with Governor Malloy and the legislature, and look forward to shaping a sound future for Connecticut's farmers and consumers.

I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have and humbly ask for your positive consideration of my nomination.

Thank you.