



**Working Lands Alliance**  
*A Project of American Farmland Trust*

Date: January 31, 2011

To: Environment Committee

Testimony in Support of: **H.B. 5202: AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION**

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

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*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.*

The authorization of new bond funding for the CT Farmland Preservation Program is the top legislative priority of the Working Lands Alliance and we strongly support HB 5202.

The last \$5 million lump sum of authorized bond funding for farmland preservation is likely to be allocated early this year. *We anticipate the Farmland Preservation Program will run out of new funding in summer 2011.*

In order to continue the current pace of farmland protection, the Farmland Preservation Program needs \$20 million in new bond authorization—\$10 million in each of FY 2012 and FY 2013. At the current average easement costs, \$10 million will allow the program to protect 2,000 acres per year and continue working toward that statewide goal of 130,000 acres (as of January, 2011 a total of 37,262 acres on 283 farms have been protected by the CT Farmland Preservation Program).

**Why Save Connecticut Farmland:**

- 1) CT Agriculture is a \$3.5 billion industry and farmland is its greatest resource. However, 85% of Connecticut's farmland remains unprotected and leaves farm businesses dependent upon this land base vulnerable.
- 2) The Farmland Protection Program helps to grown CT farms. The program provides essential capital for farmers to expand and improve their businesses. Protected land is also more affordable for new farmers seeking land.
- 3) Farmers and the land they steward provide a variety of ecosystem services and environmental benefits to the state such as water filtration, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. In sum, Connecticut's 321,000 acres of cropland, pasture,

and farm woodlands provide an estimated \$394 million annually in non-market ecosystem services.

- 4) The Farmland Preservation Program has picked up the pace with 1,371 acres on 16 farms protected in 2010—double the number of acres protected annually ten years ago. Farmland owners are lining up enthusiastically for the program and the program is currently negotiating for the purchase of development rights on approximately 35 farm parcels. A new authorization of bond funding is needed to sustain this high level of interest in the program which, in the past, was plagued by erratic funding, under staffing, and insufficient funds.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee on this important issue. The Working Lands Alliance is strongly supportive of HB 5202 and urges your support.

**Testimony in Support of: Raised S.B. 829: AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN OPEN SPACE REGISTRY**

The Working Lands Alliance is supportive of Raised S.B. 829 which would establish a state registry of protected open space and farmland. Such a centralized registry would allow for better tracking of progress toward meeting the state's farmland preservation goal of 130,000 acres.

Thirty years ago our state leaders enacted landmark legislation with passage of Public Act 78-232. With its passage, this legislation laid the groundwork for what is today known as the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. The main objective of the program is to secure a food and fiber producing land resource base for the future of agriculture in Connecticut. The state goal is to protect 130,000 acres of farmland, including cropland and supportive lands such as forest and wetlands.

We currently do not know how many acres of farmland have been protected in the state and, subsequently, how close we are to reaching the state's goal.

As of January 2010, the CT Farmland Preservation Program has protected over 37,000 acres. However, there is currently no statewide data that track farmland that has been protected by towns and land trusts without the use of state or federal funding. We very roughly estimate that some notable towns and land trusts which have aggressively protected farmland have added an additional 10,000 acres to the state's total. These figures tell us that Connecticut is roughly 36% of the way toward meeting its goal of 130,000 acres.

The Working Lands Alliance is committed to the state's goal and believes it can be reached by 2043 if at least 2,000 acres of farmland are protected annually using state funding while land trusts and municipalities protect another 500 acres of farmland each year. Without a centralized registry, however, the state will continue to be unable to track its progress toward the goal.

A registry would also be useful for monitoring easements on protected farmland as well as setting and implementing municipal open space and farmland preservation goals.

The Working Lands Alliance is supportive of Raised S.B. 829 which would establish a state registry of protected open space and farmland.

