



CONNECTICUT
FARMLAND
T R U S T
PRESERVING WORKING LANDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

TO: Members of the Environment Committee
FROM: Henry N. Talmage, Executive Director
DATE: March 7, 2011
RE: **Testimony on HB #5203**

I am writing to express the Connecticut Farmland Trust's support for HB #5203 "An Act Authorizing An Agricultural Conservation Easement On The Lands Of The Southbury Training School".

The Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) is the state's only private, non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to the preservation of working farmland. We hold agricultural conservation easements on privately owned farms and assist farm families throughout the process of protecting their land. CFT is a member of the Working Lands Alliance coalition.

CFT wholeheartedly supports HB #5203 as it provides a mechanism to permanently protect this critical agricultural parcel that although currently owned by the state, needs measures to assure that the future use of this remarkable property stay in agriculture in perpetuity. Since the inception of the Farmland Preservation Program in 1978 the Department of Agriculture has protected over 37,000 acres on over 280 farms. There is still much to do to reach our goal of protecting 130,000 acres. The Department of Agriculture is making significant progress but as you know all too well, public funds for preservation are increasingly harder to come by. HB #5203 provides a mechanism to add substantial acreage to the protected farmland total at little or no cost to the CT taxpayer.

CFT and the Southbury Land Trust has worked closely with the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board after it was charged by Special Act No. 09-08 to review and evaluate certain state-owned farmland for permanent protection. The Advisory Board studied 7 parcels including the agricultural lands at the Southbury Training School. Each parcel was ranked using the Department of Agriculture's preservation criteria and the Southbury Training School property received a score of 99 out of a possible 105 points. (A typical ranking for applicants to the Farmland Preservation Program is around 80). This unique parcel represents a rare, large, contiguous and diverse

agricultural property that should not only the productive fields themselves but the abutting woodlands that typically are included in similar farmland preservation plans as well.

The residents of Connecticut recognize that protecting our precious farmland is important and we need to act quickly before more land falls out of production. CT continues to have one of the highest rates of farmland loss in the country. This is happening even while there is increased interest in healthy, local food. There is reason to be optimistic about the future of Connecticut agriculture and the great diversity of quality farm products that we produce and sell in our local markets. Without land however, the farming economy cannot survive. According to a recent study published by the University of Connecticut, agriculture contributes \$3.5 billion to CT's economy. Farmland preservation is different than other forms of land protection in that it provides opportunities for rural businesses and jobs. In short, protection of farmland is good business.

In the future the residents of Connecticut will look back at this time and recognize your vision and resolve to protect this unique parcel of farmland for our future. HB #5203 "An Act Authorizing An Agricultural Conservation Easement On The Lands Of The Southbury Training School" simply makes sense for meeting our farmland conservation goal while being fiscally responsible during these tough economic times.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Henry N. Talmage
Connecticut Farmland Trust