

03/07/2011
Benjamin Freund
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Chairmen and members of the Environment Committee:

I am testifying in favor of Proposed H. B. No. 6262 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ACCOUNT.

As chairman of the Connecticut Farm Bureau Dairy Committee, I want to thank this committee for its wisdom in recognizing the importance of agriculture in Connecticut and especially with its work creating and supporting the Community Investment Act.

My brother Matthew and I own and operate a 270 cow dairy farm in East Canaan, CT that annually provides over 660,000 gallons of fresh milk to support the good health and well being of Connecticut residents. We own 455 acres and rent 350 additional acres. The milk we produce is only part of our story. The open spaces, wetland recharge areas, recreational backdrops, employment, and significant economic multiplier inherent in the basic production of goods, all happens because we make milk.

Dairy is the foundation of agriculture in the State. We are stewards of the preponderance of open space and provide the demand for goods that attracts the specialized infrastructure to Connecticut that supports all of agriculture. Our dairy sector alone generates over 1 billion dollars of economic activity that directly supports the 3.5 billion dollar agricultural economic engine.

Since the Community Investment Act began to support the Agricultural Sustainability Account, that funds the dairy safety net, we have worked diligently on the federal pay system with insufficient success. Representative Courtney is the first Connecticut congressman in over 100 years to serve on the House Agricultural Committee. He understands how important agriculture is in our State and has positioned himself to help. This afternoon he is visiting a dairy farm in Northeastern Connecticut. Senator Gillibrand from NY State last week announced an effort to change the federal system to avert the pending dairy crisis that cannot wait until the 2012 Farm Bill is enacted. The issue is documented. Dairy is not in sync with the strong surges in our major inputs of corn, soy, fuel, and fertilizer. We need a safety net to be here to provide all of the security that a local fresh food supply guarantees.

Since 1997, the energy that heats the farm home and heats all of the hot water used in the milking center is generated by burning methane harvested from the cow manure. Our fields are minimally tilled to save energy and reduce the environmental carbon load. We test soils twice a year to prescribe the precise amount of fertility to feed the plants and avoid any excess. We always close our annual harvests with cover crops to conserve the soil and provide green manure in the Spring. We graze the animals during the growing season to take advantage of the natural harvesting and nutrient spreading characteristics

of the cow. Our farm represents many decades of hard tuition invested in learning how to marry our valuable natural resources with efficient production systems that provide wholesome food to our neighbors.

All of these practices represent years in developing an environmentally aware industry that contributes much more than the obvious products, adding great benefits through sensitive production systems. Connecticut farmers are not only in compliance but also lead the way showing the rest of the country how land conservation and preservation can be accomplished. We know because we live side by side with non farming neighbors how to be good neighbors. We not only use, we preserve open space and enhance wildlife corridors that can disappear in a heartbeat. Our neighbors appreciate this value and it is documented with hard numbers in the UCONN Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Connecticut's Dairy Industry Report presented to this legislature.

My brother and I want to continue to feed our state and our families. We need more security than the federal milk price provides. The dairy business is too volatile to attract the next generation to learn and thrive with the systems that we have developed on our farms. Our value to Connecticut is too important to let our industry decline to an unsustainable level. Please support the proposed bill to remove the sunset and continue to provide a safety net to our industry so we can provide food security, enhanced conservation, open space, and important economic activity for Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,
Benjamin Freund
For the Connecticut Dairy Industry