



Working Lands Alliance

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you in favor of HB 5202. My name is Terry Jones, I am a fifth generation farmer who, with my family, operates a 400-acre farm in Fairfield County. We produce fruit, vegetables, Christmas trees, grapes and operate an award-winning winery and farm-to-table educational cooking studio. I also serve as Chairman of the Working Lands Alliance – a coalition with the sole purpose of preserving Connecticut's most precious natural resource – its farmland.

I will share with you a bit of history, because to make the best decision for the future it is important to understand our past.

"Midas had a lot of gold, but he starved to death."

"Land is the tool that a farmer uses to make food."

These quotes are from public hearings held in 1974 by Governor Grasso's *Task Force For The Preservation Of Agriculture Land*. I was 27 years old and chaired a similar (but lower profile!) Connecticut Farm Bureau "study committee on farmland preservation". The two groups reached similar conclusions – Connecticut farmland soil should be protected to ensure a secure and healthy supply of food for our citizens. These reports led to the Connecticut General Assembly's enacting pioneering farmland preservation legislation in 1978. Thus, Connecticut became a pioneer and on the cutting edge of efforts in the US to protect our precious farmland soils.

Over the next 25 years the Connecticut program moved forward blessed with some exceptionally talented and dedicated staff at the Department of Agriculture. Legislatures and Governors were supportive. However, in the late 1990s support dwindled under Governor Rowland and for a few years farmland protection languished.

That has changed. The pace accelerated in the mid-00s. In 2007 the Legislature and Governor Rell created landmark legislation to establish lump sum bonding and a farmland preservation advisory board.

As a Connecticut citizen, taxpayer and farmer, I am proud of this cooperative achievement by the Legislature and Governor. Bonding is the fuel. The Legislature's biennium authorization of \$20 million to be allocated by the Governor in four equal parts, twice a year for two years, has created an efficient and effective program. Our goal is to continue at this pace, which should result in roughly 2,000 acres preserved each year.

This is good for our environment, our economy and our health:

- Opens the door for millions in Federal reimbursements.
- Maintains farmer/citizen confidence in the program.
- Stretches public dollars further at a time when land values have declined.
- Provides opportunities for farm infrastructure investments that help local economies and tax roles.

Twenty years ago, our farm participated. What we did was not unusual. It was a bargain sale – the state saved money. Our farm's estate tax burdens were lowered. And we were able to purchase adjacent farmland, which made our farm more sustainable with enough land for better crop rotations.

Thanks to you, the Legislature and the Governor's Office, this program is now running efficiently at a very productive output – like one of our diesel tractor engines under full load. But, if we allow our fuel to run out air gets in the system and the engine stops. It takes precious time to re-prime the fuel system and get back to work. Farming and protection of our precious soils is a race against time. *"Groceries are renewable – but farm land to grow them on is not"*.

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