



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

Date: March 7, 2011

To: Environment Committee

**HB 5203: AN ACT AUTHORIZING AN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION  
EASEMENT ON THE LANDS OF THE SOUTHBURY TRAINING SCHOOL**

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

---

*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 preservation of state-owned farmland is a top legislative priority of the Working Lands Alliance and we strongly support HB 5203.

The State of Connecticut determined long ago that preservation of farmland is "vital for the well-being of the people of Connecticut", but despite the state's long-standing Farmland Preservation Program, farmland lost to development continues to outpace farmland preserved. State-held farmlands have not been exempt from this trend. These lands have historically been subject to Special Acts that transfer them to non-state entities for non-agricultural use. In recent years there have been 9 such transfers amounting to 165 acres of farmland converted to non-agricultural uses.

HB 5203 presents an opportunity to move closer toward the state's goal of preserving 130,000 acres of prime and important farmland at no cost to the state.

On January 15, 2010, the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board submitted recommendations to the Commissioner of Agriculture and the legislative Committee on the Environment to permanently preserve more than 1,300 acres of state-owned farmland on six properties. Granting an agricultural conservation easement on the over 600 acres of farmland at the Southbury Training School is an important first step toward the implementation of these recommendations.

While we are supportive of the bill and concept, we suggest one change to the bill language. WLA believes strongly that the Commissioner of Developmental Services should work closely with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to determine the configuration of the property for protection. The Department of Agriculture, particularly the Farmland Preservation Program, has expertise in this area and should approve of the agreement.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this important issue. The Working Lands Alliance is strongly supportive of HB 5203 and urges your support.