

Good evening, my name is Thomas DiMarco; I am a 2005 graduate of the Nonnewaug High School, Agri-Science program, in Woodbury. While at Nonnewaug I studied landscaping where I learned the necessary skills to be employed as a summer intern for a local landscaper in Watertown, CT. After high school I went to college at the University of Rhode Island where I graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Environmental Horticulture and Turf Grass Management. My first job out of college was with the Walt Disney Company in Orlando Florida working as an intern at EPCOT in their hydroponic greenhouses. At Disney I did everything from start plants from seeds, transplant, plant maintenance, harvest crops, maintain a fully functioning show quality greenhouse, and give tours of our greenhouses to guests. Disney was a great learning experience that provided countless opportunities for me. When my internship ended at Disney I moved back to Connecticut and was hired by White Flower Farm in Morris, CT. I am currently the shipping coordinator and one of the greenhouse growers for our operation. White Flower Farm is a multi-million dollar company that has a retail store in Morris that counts for 10% of our business. The other 90% of our business is made up from our mail-order catalog and online business. We ship annuals, perennials, shrubs, and houseplants year round to customers all over the country. Our business had been showcased on National Public Radio, Martha Stewart Living, XM Satellite Radio, and countless other newspaper and magazine articles. One of our largest customers is the parent company for Better Homes and Gardens, the Meredith Corporation, who uses our plants in their publications. Our company gives about 200 people in northwest Connecticut jobs, and we are constantly looking to fill more positions with qualified employees. Students coming out of our states Ag high schools are the type of people that companies like White Flower Farm are look to hire. These individuals graduate high school and are ready for college and the work force. They have the leadership experience and knowledge that employers want in an employee. This is why helping the Ag centers across the state is so important. Not only do the Ag centers help the agriculture industry as a whole but also they help Connecticut by filling jobs with the qualified workers we need. Please remember this when thinking about agricultural education. Thank you very much for you time.