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GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

**By Stan Sorkin, President
Connecticut Food Association
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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO RB 5326: AN ACT ENCOURAGING THE PURCHASE OF PRODUCTS GROWN OR MADE IN CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut Food Association (CFA) is the state trade association that conducts programs in public affairs, food safety, research, education and industry relations on behalf of its 240 member companies— food retailers, wholesalers, distributors, and service providers in the state of Connecticut. CFA's members in Connecticut operate approximately 300 retail food stores and 250 pharmacies. Their combined estimated annual sales volume of \$5.7 billion represents 75% of all retail food store sales in Connecticut. CFA's retail membership is composed of independent supermarkets, regional firms, and large multi-store chains employing over 30,000 associates. The majority of our members are family owned privately owned supermarkets. Our goal is to create a growth oriented economic climate that makes Connecticut more competitive with surrounding states. The Connecticut Specialty Food Association (CSFA), an organization of Connecticut base entrepreneurs sharing a vision to provide consumers with high quality specialty foods, is part of the Connecticut Food Association.

I am Stan Sorkin, President of the Connecticut Food Association. The CFA wholeheartedly endorses the purpose of the act- encouraging the purchase of products grown or made in Connecticut, **but not the means specified in the act to get there.**

First, the Connecticut Food Association is responsible for the success of Connecticut's specialty food industry . Our business and marketing plans are geared to increasing the distribution and sales of CSFA produced specialty foods to distributors, retailers, and consumers.

Second, CFA members are active in their support of Connecticut grown fresh products with most retailers heavily advertising and displaying CT Grown products during the peak selling season. Our retailers were quick to recognize the consumer trend of buying local and thus, developing partnerships with local producers to increase distribution and sale of CT Grown products in Connecticut's supermarkets. We are highly supportive of the Department of Agriculture's CT Grown program and look forward to expanding it.

However, we cannot support the specific requirements as outline in the proposed language for the following reasons:

- **Mandatory state labeling** of CT specific produced or grown food product is expensive for the state's retailers to implement and provides little benefit to consumers.
- It fails to provide material facts concerning the safety or nutritional aspects of food and purely serves as mandated advertising of CT produced products at the retailer's expense.
- The language only pertains to grocery stores and not to other retailers selling CT produced foods. It would put the grocery retailer at a cost disadvantage in relation to other classes of trade that sell CT grown products-mass merchandisers (Walmart, Target), drug stores, farm stands, etc.
- Federal legislation already mandates Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) on produce items, meat, and seafood items and nutritional signing as of March 1, 2012 on single ingredient cuts of meat. State pricing laws require that you post the price and unit price of the item below a packaged item on the shelf. Additional mandatory signage on CT produced or grown items will make the signs surrounding the product more prominent than the product itself.
- The cost of modifying and maintaining your front end system to note CT specific products(SKUs) is expensive and difficult. With produce products having standard look up codes, it would be impossible to differentiate a CT grown corn and out of state corn. What is the value of the use of the register receipt to show CT grown or produced product after the purchase is made.

The additional costs associated with this well meant bill would only make Connecticut products more expensive to the consumer and inhibit sales.

The additional costs associated with this well meant bill would reduce the likelihood of retailers stocking CT produced or grown products.

Based on the well- meant goal of the legislation, we strongly recommend that Connecticut form a task force with our industry, the Food Policy Council, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Economic Development to develop a comprehensive business plan to move the purpose of the legislation- encouraging the purchase of products grown or made in Connecticut.

We respectfully ask that the General Law Committee vote NO on RB 5326.