



Working Lands Alliance

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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Testimony for Legislative Program Review and Investigations on behalf of Connecticut Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Program

Submitted by: Working Lands Alliance Chairman Terry Jones

Dear Co-Chairs Senator John Fonfara and Representative T.R. Rowe, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance in support of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Farmland Protection Program.

I am Terry Jones, Connecticut Farmer, Steward of our precious land, and Chairman of the Working Lands Alliance. In 1978 the state of Connecticut took a visionary stance, making it public policy to protect 130,000 acres of farmland and to make sure that we have a secure land base for food and agricultural production. Since then, the Farmland Preservation Program has become the primary tool to protect our farms, to keep Connecticut farms productive, and to make sure that farming families can continue their farming traditions of feeding their neighbors and even more people in the State of Connecticut.

The Farmland Preservation Program program has been a central success for the Department. Of the \$130 million spent so far to protect 291 farms on 38,078 acres, the program has leveraged \$5 million from 30 joint acquisitions with towns, land trusts, and 80 with USDA NRCS. Furthermore, the Connecticut Farmland Protection Program has leveraged \$20 million in Federal funds to help protect more than 80 farms. The Jones Family Farm, along with many farms across the state have been afforded to our communities through "bargain sales," by partially gifting the land's development rights to the state.

In 2010 Connecticut land prices were estimated at greater than 5 times the national average. And today, land remains the highest input for farmers, the largest barrier to access for new farmers, and a major barrier to growth for veteran farmers. With an average age of farmers standing at 57 years old, the Farmland Preservation Program is the principal method of securing affordable farmland for the next generation of farmers and providing locally grown economic development to our communities. Protecting our land by selling the easement has allowed us to invest in our farm and secure a land base and helping us to be more sustainable with our crop rotation and our

farm expansion. I know other farmers are sharing their testimony today with similar stories documenting how the farmland preservation program has been critical to keeping lands affordable, helping to ensure quality products, expanding operations that produce local and healthy foods, increasing diversity of agricultural products that we can enjoy, and ensuring that our lands stay in farming for our families and others who want to join the ranks of Connecticut Farmers.

Farms in our community, like Jones Family Farms help to balance the development of our community, ensuring a beautiful community with a high quality of life, and drawing individuals and businesses who want to live in communities like ours. Our farm provides 15 year-round jobs and 25 season jobs for students. Our Christmas tree production and wine sales generate \$86,500 annually for CT sales and excise tax coffers, paying \$60,000 annually in local property taxes. Furthermore, our efforts are helping incubate neighboring agricultural enterprises that are further adding to Shelton's economic development. Jones Family Farms has become a prime tourism destination bringing thousands of New York state tourists, which are a boost to area restaurants, gas stations and other businesses.

Not many years ago, I was afraid that our farm would be one of the last standing farms in our area. And it is no exaggeration to say that this fear has been reversed primarily *because* of programs like the Farmland Preservation Program. It is for this reason I became the Chairman of the Working Lands Alliance and why the authorization of bond funding for the Farmland Preservation Program is the top legislative priority for the Working Lands Alliance. This important fact is even more meaningful given diversity of the membership and those who serve with me in leadership and advocacy roles with Working Lands Alliance. Comprised of more than 200 individuals, organizations, and businesses and representing a broad based coalition of diverse interest in agriculture, the Working Lands Alliance has brought together, through "fierce cooperation," many members who sit in opposite aisles when it comes to our roles in agriculture and our work in Connecticut food systems. However, supporting the farmland preservation program has been the key area of common ground, bridging diverse stakeholders.

Economists are often noted for knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. In the same vain, the *value* of the Farmland Preservation Program is so much more than the 38,078 acres on 291 farms that have been preserved since 1978. The program is one of the few guarantees that Connecticut farmers, like my son Jamie will continue in a line of seven generations of farmers on our farmland.

Thank you, Terry Jones, WLA Chairman and farmer