



Working Lands Alliance

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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

Submitted by: Working Lands Alliance Project Director, Leah Mayor

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

My name is Leah Mayor and I am the Project Director of the Working Lands Alliance. Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments in support of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Program.

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based coalition that uses "fierce cooperation" to champion policy and education that supports Connecticut agriculture. Our organization represents 200 individuals, organizations, and businesses and is governed by a highly diverse 19-member steering committee that seeks to represent the interest of all in Connecticut agriculture. The health and viability of the Farmland Preservation Program has been the top priority of the Working Lands Alliance since we began our work in 1999.

The state's Farmland Preservation Program helps to preserve and to grow Connecticut farms. Protected farmland is more affordable for farmers seeking land. The program provides essential capital for farmers to expand and improve their businesses. And for many farmers in the state, this is the key way of ensuring that their lands remain productive; farmed by a new generation of farmers. WLA has heard from many farmers about how the program has helped to keep their farmland in farming, allowed them to expand production or buy additional land, and enabled them to create new jobs through reinvestment in their farm businesses.

The Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program has leveraged funding and expertise from partnerships with Towns, land trusts, and USDA-NRCS. Steady funding in recent years has encouraged participation in the programs, as farmland owners see the value and benefits of program participation. Program efficacy has been aided by an excellent and hard working staff that understands agriculture and uses this knowledge in decision making. What has resulted is a total of 38,078 protected acres on 291 farms. In addition, millions of dollars have been leveraged through the donated value of easements from farm families.

Of further benefit is the birth of a new pilot program for smaller farms. The

new Community Farms Program requires Towns to be forward thinking and “agriculturally freindly” in their planning. The program has inspired 23 Towns to sign cooperative agreements to partner with the State on protecting farms. This will help protect smaller farms, which are important to communities and provide affordable land for new and expanding farms.

Farmland preservation directly benefits Connecticut’s economy and creates jobs. Farming remains a \$3.5 billion industry in the state. The program contributes to environmental protection and general quality of life. Farms and well managed cropland offers numerous “ecosystem services” and environmental benefits to the state such as water filtration, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. It has been estimated that, Connecticut’s 321,000 acres of cropland, pasture, and farm woodlands provide an estimated \$394 million annually in non-market services. In addition, there are some, such as human health and quality of life,that we do not even try to measure.

Working Lands Alliance Chairman, Terry Jones is known for saying, “Be good to the land and the land will be good to you.” Farmland Protection contributes to job creation, environmental health, quality of life, ecosystem services, preserved traditions, fresh healthy foods and food security. It is an investment with immeasurable return.