

Claire Laroche, Mattabeset FFA President

Legislation Hearing Speech

Good evening, my name is Claire Laroche. I am a senior at Middletown High School, I am the President of the Mattabeset FFA Chapter at our school, and I study plant science in the Agriculture Science and Technology program. I have been enrolled in this program since my freshman year, and I cannot express how proud I am to be a part of it.

Students enrolled in Agricultural Science Programs have opportunities to gain unique skills that contribute to their success in school and in life. Students enrolled in our program are leaders; we work together to serve each other, our school, our community and the agriculture industry. Students also gain work experience through their required Supervised Agricultural Experience program. For example, my SAE consists of raising a small flock of egg laying hens in my back yard. Through this experience, I have learned to be an entrepreneur and run a profitable business. I sell a quality, local product to my regular customers. I keep an accurate record of receipts, expenses, and income. I make business decisions, such as deciding prices on eggs, which breeds of chickens to purchase, and what equipment was necessary for smooth coop management. I've also learned a lot about managing a healthy flock including disease control and preventative care. I plan on using these skills in my future by owning my own small business or revitalizing my family's historical farmstead.

Connecticut's Agriculture Science Programs prepare students for successful careers. In the past 10 years, enrollment in Agriculture Science programs in Connecticut has increased by more than 22 percent. While this trend is positive, the state's 19 agri-science high schools don't have enough students or graduates to fill the need for trained and skilled agriculturalists. Today, Connecticut agriculture needs to be diversified to ensure a sustainable future in CT agriculture, and the need for innovative agriculture is growing, but it cannot expand without trained labor.

Schools can't prepare students this demanding workforce without funding. Magnet, Charter, Technical, and Open Choice Schools all seem to take precedence over Agriculture Science schools when it comes to funding. Each of these school types received increases in state funding from the 2011-2012 school year to the 2012-2013 school year; but Agriscience Schools received NO increase in funding at all. Connecticut's Agricultural Science Programs deserve an equal amount of funding as the other open-choice programs in the state. Investing in agriculture is in the best interest of the state because agriculture is essential to the sustainability and quality of life in CT, and providing additional funding to educate our youth in CT is a vital component towards securing the future of agriculture in our state.

Please increase funding for agri-science programs by adopting the ECS Task Force School Choice Funding recommendation into the Governor's Proposed Budget so that more students, like me, can experience the community and support of being part of an agriculture science program. Thank you. Claire Laroche, Mattabeset FFA Chapter President.