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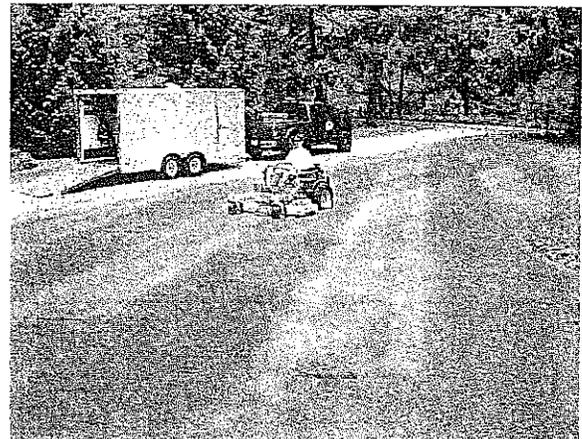
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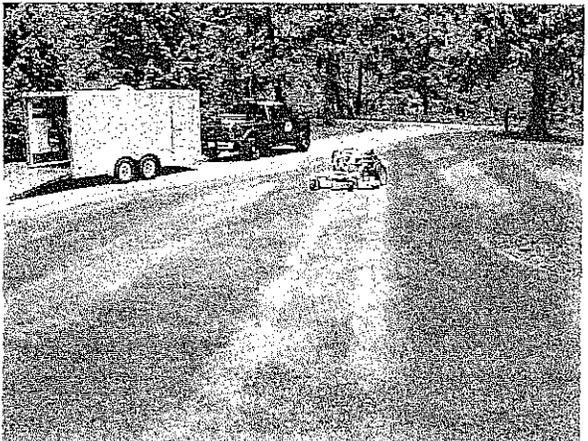
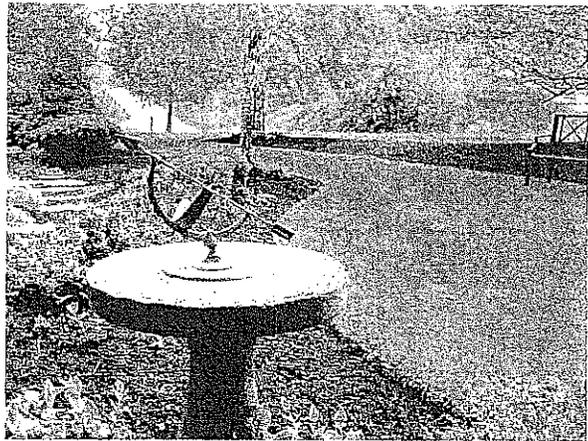
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Good evening, my name is Collin Sieracki and I'm a 2010 graduate of Nonnewaug High School's Agriscience and Technology Program in Woodbury, CT. I am here today to speak in favor of increasing Agriculture funding. Besides my passion for Connecticut agriculture and understanding the importance of an excellent education to every student's ultimate success in life, everyone is aware of the economic impact in our state and the higher costs of living. I am 20 years old, and I am the owner of Evergreen Lawn and Landscape, LLC, located in Woodbury, Connecticut, a business I started on my own at age 15.

Throughout my childhood my love for nature and being outside gave me a jumpstart to my career. I had a dream, a vision and a passion. My vision of what I wanted to accomplish in the coming years of my life started with the opportunity I was given when I was accepted in to the Ellis Clark Agriscience program at Nonnewaug High School. As I was filled with excitement at the time, it took me years to understand how lucky I was to be chosen. With limited number of spots and funding for students, many are filled with the disappointment of getting a letter in the mail saying they have been rejected. Without the supporting friends, parents, alumni and staff of this agriscience program in Region 14, the dream of operating and running my own successful landscape company would not have been achieved. At age 15 I was fully operational and slowly was able to build up clientele and invest in more equipment by also working part time at Fred's Carwash Inc. in Watertown Ct and other various odd jobs juggling school, sleep, and maintaining a social life. Evergreen Lawn and Landscape was my new passion. From sun up to sun down I was determined to make my business as successful as possible starting with the education I received from the agriscience program's highly educated staff. Through this hands-on program, I have obtained skills and knowledge to achieve results in my business. From learning plant material to rebuilding motors, from learning the importance of recordkeeping to how to calculate fertilizer rates of application for lawns, the Agriscience department is a well rounded program. After high school it gave me the confidence to apply for plant healthcare license, and now in the process of obtaining my arborist license. Not only do you learn employable skills, but you get to meet and surround yourself with positive people at state wide FFA competitions and award banquets. Because of my successful business, I was named as the FFA State winner for the Turf Grass Management Proficiency Award, and then my application was sent on to the National FFA organization last August and was judged up against

the best Turf Grass Management projects from each of the other 49 states. I was very proud to place in the top ten of the country, earning myself a National Gold Medal for my efforts. These people in the FFA, my fellow students and the teaching staff, have the same drive to succeed as I have. What I have taken away from this program can not be described with pen and paper, but can be described by my work ethic and ability to impress and achieve a happy customer. Growing my business from mowing 4 lawns a week at age 15 to currently mowing a respectable 102 lawns a week, and plowing over 100 commercial and residential driveways in this past record breaking storm, I am proud of the successful business I have built for myself and also providing jobs and stimulating the economy and giving my hard earned money back to the state. From mowing to mulching, to spring and fall cleanups, I want to be able to offer my customers the security and knowledge that they deserve so I can make a difference in the community and educate other students if they have the same passion as I did.

Because of my experience in agriculture as a successful business owner and importance of a high quality education for all Connecticut's students, especially during their high school years, is very important to their ultimate success in their chosen career path. If I did not have the opportunity that I was given I know I would not be where I'm at today. I would be in a college dorm room like many of my friends still not knowing what they want to do. Is that right? Did I make the right choice? For me, I did, and for others being stuck in a room wanting to be working or wishing they had that opportunity to discover their career at a young age. Everyone is different in what they want to do, but what should not be different is the significant in funding for Agriculture schools. Invest in our future, Invest in our land, Invest in our school.

Thank you for your time, and I have included copies of my latest business flyer and business cards with my testimony in case you might be looking for any landscaping done at your home this spring. And remember "Please increase funding for agriscience programs by adopting the ECS Task Force School Choice Funding recommendation into the Governor's Proposed Budget"