



Working Lands Alliance  
A Project of American Farmland Trust

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Testimony to Appropriations Committee with regards to Department of  
Agriculture Budget within Governor's Bill 6350  
Submitted by Kip Kolesinskas on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance  
February 20, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department of Agriculture's  
budget within Governor's Bill 6350.

The Working Lands Alliance is a broad-based coalition dedicated to  
saving Connecticut's farmland. Our 200+ members reflect the diversity of  
organizations, businesses, and individuals that care deeply about our working  
lands and the farmers who steward them—land and farms that grow our  
economy and jobs, provide our food, filter our air and water, and make our  
communities special places to live and visit. Improving the State's capacity  
to permanently protect farmland has been the top priority of the Working  
Lands Alliance since we began our work in 1999.

In Connecticut, our agricultural sector is an important and growing part of our  
state's economy, accounting for \$4.6 billion in output in 2010 and an estimated  
26,700 jobs in the state. The economic impact of agriculture underscores the  
need for continued and sustained investments in this sector.

We are grateful that the Governor's budget maintains current staffing and  
budget levels in the Department of Agriculture. These investments help to  
maintain continuity in the Department's many programs and services that  
protect our agricultural land and promote a supportive environment for farming  
in this state.

However, we are extremely concerned about a change proposed in the  
Governor's budget to the Community Investment Act (CIA) that would reduce  
funding for several vital programs within the Department of Agriculture. The  
Community Investment Act program – created in 2005 to fund community-level  
investments through a surcharge on recording fees – provides dedicated funding  
for several programs within the Department of Agriculture, including the  
Farmland Preservation Program, the Community Farms Program, the

Agriculture Viability Grants Program, and a safety net for dairy farmers in periods of low milk prices.

We oppose the proposed changes offered in Section 22 of Bill 6357, which would transfer \$1 million every quarter, or \$4 million per year, from the Community Investment Act to the Healthy Food Certification Program. While we certainly agree that the Healthy Food Certification Program (which offers a 10 cent per meal reimbursement to schools that serve healthier foods) is a worthwhile program, there is no direct nexus to the Community Investment Act, which is tailored to support programs with a direct tie to land and community investments— farmland preservation, farm viability, open space protection, historic preservation, and affordable housing. The diversion of \$4 million in funds to a program that does not directly relate to the core objective of the CIA would have a significant, negative impact on the abovementioned programs within the Department of Agriculture, as well as to the other 3 sectors which all rely on this dedicated source of funding. All told, this diversion would reduce funding to these other programs by roughly 20%—and could be greater depending on the CIA revenue stream in any given year.

The Community Investment Act has been a highly successful program, leveraging local, federal, and private dollars to complete projects that provide tangible economic benefits to the state. For instance, Maple Lane Farms in Preston received a \$32,500 grant from the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Viability Grant Program, which is funded through the Community Investment Act. Through this grant, Maple Lane Farms was able to offset the \$90,000 in costs to convert their old mushroom facilities into a hydroponic greenhouse — allowing them to grow lettuce year round that is sold directly to Stop &Shop. This small grant leveraged private funding that in turn generated new local food production and four year-round jobs. These state investments, made possible by the Community Investment Act, are critical to ensuring the economic viability of our farm sector.

In addition, the CIA is also providing funding for the Community Farms Program, a new pilot program that will protect key community farms that do not meet the criteria for the traditional Farmland Preservation Program. In addition to the direct benefits to communities of protecting these locally important places, the Community Farms Program is encouraging municipalities to demonstrate support of agriculture (ie. through the establishment of agricultural commissions, recognizing farmland preservation in Plan of Conservation and Development, and designating a funding source for farmland preservation). In total, the Community Farms Program — with critical funding provided by the Community Investment Act — will leverage state and federal dollars to fund projects that are both worthwhile investments *and* create a supportive environment for our local farmers at the town government level.

Lastly, the CIA has provided an important additional source of funding for the Farmland Preservation Program, augmenting annual bonding. This CIA investment has increased the rate of farmland protection, leveraging additional federal resources and encouraging more landowners to participate.

Thank you again for your consideration and for the opportunity to submit testimony.