

## **Written Testimony of Lanse Minkler of The Hill Improvement Association in Favor of H.B. 5480, An Act Requiring An Assessment of the Use of Certain Pesticides at the University of Connecticut Research Farm**

Dear Environmental Committee Members,

I am President of the Storrs Heights neighborhood association, The Hill Improvement Association, and an Associate Professor of Economics at UCONN. As Vice President of the association in 2009 I made the motion to form an ad hoc committee, the Farm Water Committee, to investigate potential environmental issues associated with UCONN's experimental farm, which is located just next to our neighborhood, other residents, and the Fenton River watershed (which supplies water to Willimantic and southern Mansfield residents). The neighborhood's enthusiastic endorsement of, and continued support for the committee reflects both the deep concerns about the safety of our well water and UCONN's inability to allay those concerns --despite our many meetings with UCONN administrators. We are continually surprised by the lack of oversight of the farm's activities; it leaves us feeling quite vulnerable to chemical exposure through our well water. The experimental farm is different from normal farms because it uses pesticides and fungicides not normally used on agricultural farms, and in ways that have not gone through normal approval processes. Moreover, we have had a difficult time obtaining a full list of chemicals used at the experimental farm, partly because some chemicals used are proprietary. Even though our neighborhood has faculty from pharmacy, geology, physics, and chemical engineering who have looked at the available information, *we simply do not have the skill or expertise necessary to assess the safety and safety practices of the roughly 90 chemicals used at the experimental farm.*

I urge you to support H.B. 5480 for the following reasons.

### **Our water, other residents' water, and the Fenton River Watershed are at risk.**

While UCONN administrators continually assure us that they follow regulatory guidelines, a perhaps low threshold that we cannot confirm, they also assert that they are not in the business of risk assessment. *But all of the area residents would have to bear the full health costs of a chemical poisoning.* Consultants have told us that we are at risk because UCONN only tests for a small number of the chemicals used, in inadequate ways, and because chemicals move in underground water systems in unpredictable ways. Even with the best conceivable testing we could never know the effects of interactions between 90 chemicals. Based on our consultant's recommendations in August of 2012, I sent a letter to the neighborhood urging them to consider charcoal filtering systems for their drinking water. I also contacted the Allstate Insurance Company about a policy to insure the Storrs Heights neighborhood against a chemical poisoning from the experimental farm. After a lengthy investigation, Allstate responded that they could not offer *any* such policy.

**Without legislation, UCONN's administrators may not act.** We have had many meetings with UCONN's administrators in different forums. Many of us are UCONN employees; many of us support the experimental farm so long as its activities are demonstrably safe; and all of us support UCONN's success. But UCONN administrators have established through pattern and practice that they will only employ just enough chemical safety procedures to stave off unwanted attention. Fortunately, because of this proposed legislation, they have agreed to a third party assessment of their chemical safety procedures at the experimental farm. This legislation will help to protect both our water supply and also UCONN's reputation. This legislation also assures that it doesn't matter who the future residents or UCONN administrators are because our safety will not depend upon the skill or willingness of those parties. Instead, it will depend upon the skill of the DEEP and DPH experts, which is where it belongs.

Sincerely,  
Lanse Minkler