



Working Lands Alliance

A Project of American Farmland Trust

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 6350 (WITH 2 MODIFICATIONS)

Appropriations Committee

Submitted by: Terry Jones, Steering Committee, Working Lands Alliance

February 21, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and Committee members:

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, asking you to consider two modifications of HB 6350, An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2015, and Other Provisions Relating to Revenue.

The Working Lands Alliance (WLA) is a broad-based coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. Our 200+ members reflect the diversity of organizations, businesses, and individuals that care deeply about our working lands and the farmers that steward them – land and farms that grow our economy and jobs, provide our food, make our communities special places to live and protect the quality of our environment and natural resources.

FIRST, we support the healthy foods certification in Connecticut schools. *However, we do not support using the Community Investment Act (CIA) as a source of funding.* We believe it is a mistake to dilute the present statute of the CIA.

The CIA was enacted to fund four specific land use programs, which enhance our economy and create jobs. Created with tremendous bipartisan support in 2005 to address the social and environmental impacts of suburban sprawl, the CIA provides increased funding for state programs for open space, farmland/dairy production, historic properties and affordable housing. Funded by a surcharge on recording fees, the impact of the CIA on the economic well-being and overall quality of life in our communities has exceeded all expectations.

The CIA has become Connecticut's "little engine that could." Many hundreds of projects in virtually every town in Connecticut have benefited from the CIA. A majority of these state grants have leveraged matching funds from the private sector, municipalities, non-profits, and federal sources.

SECOND, WLA strongly urges additional funding for the 19 agriscience centers in Connecticut.

We applaud the public policy support for farmland preservation this legislature and this administration have provided. But, we must also invest in career training to fill the need for new and young farmers, and the workers in the businesses that support agriculture. We are talking about jobs available right now for our \$3.25 billion industry.

Fortunately, we already have the infrastructure and the organizational matrix to expand enrollment in our agriscience schools.

These schools are the original magnet schools of Connecticut. They are the gold standard for what we now realize is the most effective mode of education – "mass individualization". Three things happen:

1. Agriscience students find a personal passion in their field and get fired up for learning. That is the experiential and inquiry based component.
2. Agriscience students connect with and find relevance in their academics and develop enthusiasm for the STEM part of their education.
3. Students participate in a robust FFA experience, which develops the social and civics skills needed to be productive members of our 21st century society.

Connecticut has invested in some great agriscience school infrastructure. It is time to move towards funding parity with other magnet schools and thus make more efficient use of these agriscience facilities by increasing enrollment.

This is exactly the kind of career training we need to fill the jobs waiting to grow Connecticut agriculture.

WLA appreciates the opportunity to speak in support of modifying HB 6350.

Terry Jones on behalf of
Working Lands Alliance
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