

**Written Testimony of Robert W. Coughlin
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee
March 15, 2013**

Testimony in support of HB No. 5480, An Act Requiring an Assessment of the Use of Certain Pesticides at the University of Connecticut Research Farm

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor **HB No. 5840**

My name is Robert Coughlin and I have lived at 49 Storrs Heights Road in Storrs CT since 1977. Until I retired several years ago, I was a professor of chemical and biomolecular engineering at UConn, serving also as Department Head for several years. After retirement I continued to do some unpaid committee work for my Department and I look back at a generally happy and productive career at UConn where I now enjoy emeritus professor status.

I enthusiastically support Committee Bill HB No. 5480 co-sponsored by Rep Haddad, 54th District. This bill is directed at oversight through assessment, review and evaluation by the CT Departments of EEP and PH with respect to the UConn Research Farm. This farm is located within a residential neighborhood in close proximity to many homes, one of which is mine. I understand that at least 90 toxic chemicals are warehoused at the farm and regularly released to the environment by application to land and crops in experimental research programs. Such research is supported by grants and contracts from extramural entities. Clearly work at the farm attracts revenue to UConn and advances the careers and interests of the students, faculty, staff and administrators associated with the farm. However there appears to be no oversight and review of farm operation by an outside, independent, disinterested organization qualified to monitor and assess risk and safety aspects regarding the release of the toxic chemicals into the environment so close to residential houses. Subject Bill is directed at such oversight.

I would like to emphasize that this research farm is not simply a farm in the usual sense of the word. It can be better described as a 153-acre outdoor laboratory where a large number of experimental toxic chemicals are released to the environment by application as pesticides to crops. Many of these experimental chemicals are not registered for agricultural use, with no accepted or approved protocols for their application and release to the environment.

My neighbors and I have looked but not found any similar research farm operation so close to where people live and obtain their drinking water. We are concerned about the possibility that the toxic and potentially carcinogenic chemicals regularly released to the environment by the UConn farm could be entering drinking water obtained from our residential wells. Many of us have started to use filtered and bottled water in response to such fears. A related fear is that an explosion or fire at the chemical storage building on the farm could broadcast such chemicals over a wide area far beyond the surrounding homes.

I might add that many of my neighbors living near the farm are employed by UConn and their careers and livelihoods depend on such employment. Thus many are reluctant to express their concerns overtly and vigorously in a way that they fear might jeopardize their employment and advancement at UConn. Nevertheless a neighborhood Water Committee was formed in 2009

and ever since then the committee has been expressing concern publically and in frequent meetings with UConn personnel about the potential harmful impact of the research farm on the drinking water we obtain from our wells.

As a result of concerns expressed by residents UConn has tried to allay neighborhood fears by conducting a sampling and testing program for a small fraction of the chemicals employed at the farm. However, in the view of many residents such programs are inadequate in that they rely on a limited number of samples taken long after the chemicals are released to the environment and the samples are analyzed for only a few of the chemicals that could be applied. UConn will not give us more detailed information about where, when and what chemicals are applied, arguing that divulging such information would violate confidentiality agreements entered with the organizations that support the research. Most importantly there is no oversight by an independent, disinterested, outside agency of the monitoring, safety procedures, record keeping and risk reduction that UConn employs or ought to employ. Subject Bill would bring about such oversight and transparency that I and my neighbors feel is sorely needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this hearing.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert W. Coughlin