



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER



Steven K. Reviczky  
Commissioner

Tel: (860) 713-2500  
Fax: (860) 713-2514

**Testimony presented to the Environment Committee of**

**The Connecticut General Assembly**

**By the Connecticut Department of Agriculture**

**February 11, 2013**

## **H.B. 6318 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE CULTIVATION OF SEAWEED**

**Chairmen Meyer and Gentile, Vice Chairs Maynard and Albis, Ranking Members Chapin and Shaban and members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.**

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture is charged as the lead agency for the development of aquaculture in the state (CGS Section 22-11d). Aquaculture includes seaweed cultivation, an industry recently identified as one with economic potential in Connecticut, but the administrative framework necessary to issue licenses for seaweed cultivation in specific areas of the coastal waters of Long Island Sound currently is nonexistent.

The proposed legislation addresses the absence of that administrative framework required to advance seaweed cultivation as an industry in Connecticut. It supports the development of seaweed cultivation in Connecticut as a sea vegetable to be used as a food source and agricultural product, with the potential for these new Connecticut Grown seaweed products to replace those currently imported into the United States from foreign countries.

There also is an opportunity to develop new markets and uses for these products. The Department of Agriculture's successful Farm-to-Chef and other marketing programs can serve as vehicles to introduce these new Connecticut Grown seaweed products to wholesale and retail customers.

In addition to the development of seaweed cultivation as a food source, unlimited potential exists for the development of seaweed aquaculture for additives to manufactured foods, as a component for fish meal, in cosmetics, as a biofuel source, and as a nutrient and contaminant extractor for remediation purposes.

The Department of Agriculture currently has equivalent legislation in place for shellfish aquaculture, which has been used as the basis for the creation of new legislation to address seaweed cultivation. Under CGS Sections 22-11f-h, the Department of Agriculture licenses aquaculture operations for the importation and cultivation of aquatic plants and animals within the state.

In administering these licenses, the department imposes requirements to ensure that importation or cultivation of non-native species does not adversely contaminate or impact native plants or animals or wild stocks or their natural habitats.

The existing statute grants the Department of Agriculture the authority to license aquaculture operations, but under the current legislative framework, seaweed cultivation is not specifically addressed. The proposed bill expands upon and defines the term "aquatic plant" so that it is clear that the licensing of seaweed aquaculture falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture.

The proposed bill specifies that "each aquaculture producer of aquatic plants shall be required to meet processing standards prior to receiving an 'aquaculture certificate' for aquatic plant production from the commissioner." This proposed language is intentionally general because the Department of Agriculture works cooperatively with the Departments of Public Health and Consumer Protection to develop policy and procedures for the production of all aquacultured species intended to be marketed as "approved" human food sources.

The Department of Agriculture has the authority to lease areas within Long Island Sound for shellfish cultivation under CGS Section 26-19. This statute does not grant the Department of Agriculture the authority to license areas for the cultivation of species other than shellfish, such as seaweed.

This proposed bill would grant the Department of Agriculture the authority to issue non-transferable licenses for seaweed cultivation within designated areas of Long Island Sound at an associated per-acre fee of \$25.00.

It is critical that these licenses be non-transferable. This will prevent mass acquisition of licenses by a few large companies and will enable smaller, individually owned and operated companies to develop local and sustainable aquaculture production, promoting responsible stewardship of Connecticut resources.

Language within the proposed bill recognizes the existence of other commercial fishing rights and prevents any licensed seaweed area from conflicting with any previously established right of fishing.

The current policy of the Department of Agriculture in the administration of new shellfish leases is to review each plot with representatives of the Connecticut Lobsterman's Association and with known licensed finfish trawlers to ensure any new shellfish lease will not conflict with existing fisheries. This policy has significantly reduced conflicts and a similar review will be performed for proposed seaweed licenses.

Each seaweed license application will need to be reviewed for compliance under CGS Sections 22a-359 through 22a-363f, the existing regulation for in-water gear permitted through the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

The Department of Agriculture and DEEP presently collaborate through a joint permit and review process that enables each agency to independently issue the necessary licenses, permits, and authorizations. "Aquaculture structures" (cages, anchors, longlines, floats, etc.) are permitted by DEEP.

Seaweed cultivation complements existing cage cultivation of oysters. In fact, the only presently authorized seaweed permittee is operating under an existing DEEP aquaculture gear permit within an established shellfish lease bed, on which he also operates a cage oyster cultivation.

The proposed legislation provides for an exemption to the per-acre fee when a shellfish lease holder desires to cultivate seaweed in addition to shellfish. The seaweed license as proposed will require an individual to make a good-faith effort to cultivate and harvest seaweed from a licensed area.

Seaweed aquaculture is a sustainable, green industry with tangible and measurable environmental benefits, including nutrient remediation of excess nitrogen and phosphorus and water clarity improvements. Since species cultivated in Connecticut will be cultured rather than harvested from the wild, there will be no negative impact to existing native stocks.

The adoption of the legislation will assist in "green" job creation in the agriculture sector and will create new revenue for the state by enabling the agency to charge a per-acre fee in areas of Long Island Sound that are not currently in production for other species.

Sea Grant offices in Connecticut and New York are organizing a work group to determine the potential for utilizing seaweed as nutrient bioextractors, which may require separate legislative action in the near future.

Continued discussions between the Departments of Agriculture, Consumer Protection, and Public Health about the specific language of the bill lead to the request that the following technical changes to the bill be made:

Line 5: Add "or plants" after aquatic animals

Line 35: Strike "this" and add (b)(2) after subsection

Line 36: Add "or aquatic plant" before producer and strike "or any person who produces aquatic plants"

Lines 38 to 41: Strike "The Commissioner of Agriculture shall license and inspect producers of aquatic plants, including, but not limited to, seaweed producers. The commissioner may prescribe the length of term, fee and application for such license."

Line 42: Add "or aquatic plant" before producer and strike "or to produce aquatic plants"

Line 43 to 44: Strike "meet processing standards, as prescribed by the commissioner, and"

**Thank you for your time today and for your thoughtful consideration of this testimony. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information that would be helpful.**