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March 5, 2014

Honorable Members of the Environment
Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
Room 3200, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Honorable Members:

I am submitting this written testimony to the Environment Committee in support of the passage of Senate Bill 313. Brass City Harvest, Inc., of Waterbury, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit agricultural [urban farming] and human services organization. Our target client populations in Waterbury are low-income SNAP/WIC households, elderly, and medically special clients (patients of Waterbury Hospital's diabetic and HIV clinics). We serve thousands of our clients through our urban agricultural and farmers' market programs.

We have tried to forge a pilot program with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture for the better part of the last two years that would allow this organization to accept seasonal WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons at our year-round, indoor, CT Grown farmers' market, and our mobile farmers' market program that visits sites that include Waterbury's senior centers, both hospitals, community centers, and public housing projects. Brass City Harvest is a unique entity in that we are both an urban farmer (3 acres) and the market master of CT Grown seasonal, year-round indoor fixed location, and mobile refrigerated farmers' markets in Waterbury. We have been unable to create a situation that would allow a pilot program in Waterbury that would satisfy the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and statutory law.

Senate Bill 313 is our attempt to create a pilot program that will answer the need that exists in Waterbury to put more Connecticut Grown produce on the tables of our most vulnerable citizens. Simply "*handing out*" WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons each summer is not enough in Waterbury. Under the current situation, there is one seasonal "certified" farmers' market that exists on our municipal Green [that is managed by Brass City Harvest] whose hours of operation and location makes it difficult for working mothers receiving WIC to attend or for seniors who have transportation issues to come to that market. The future of this "certified market" is equally in doubt beyond the 2014 season which could leave vulnerable Waterburians with no access to a "certified market" within the geographic borders of the City of Waterbury under current statutory law.

Passage of this bill would give us the opportunity to increase access to fresh, Connecticut Grown food by allowing Brass City Harvest to accept seasonal WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs as payment for produce purchased by clientele as if we were the farmer. In this case, we are essentially the agent for the farmer. This program would bring produce from our network of partner Connecticut farmers to the very doorsteps of those most in need in every urban nook and

cranny of Waterbury through our year-round, indoor market and most especially, our mobile farmers' market van. Many of the locations we serve through our mobile farmers' market program are meccas for the elderly and WIC mothers and their children. *“What better way to increase access to fresh Connecticut Grown food than by meeting the very clients these programs are meant to serve right at their most convenient gathering places?”*

The Statutes of the State of Connecticut that govern the definition of a “farmer”, “farmers’ markets”, “certified farmers’ markets” and the entitlement programs that are operated through those certified markets were designed to maintain the integrity of the Connecticut farmer, agricultural industry, and the CT Grown brand. No one has more respect for our farmers or the CT Grown program than we, at Brass City Harvest. However, statutory law has failed to keep pace with the cold facts about food security in the State of Connecticut and the need to enhance the Connecticut Grown branding within burgeoning urban cultures in the State of Connecticut by increasing accessibility and to locally sourced agricultural produce and goods. Statutory law has also failed to keep pace with the changing face of agriculture in our state as more and more urban municipalities are embracing agriculture because they see it as a sustainable way to provide healthy food for its citizenry.

The intention of SB 313 is not to circumvent statutory law, but facilitate a non-binding pilot program that we, as urban farmers, will be able to implement and monitor in conjunction with personnel from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. Together, we will “report back to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to agriculture” once this pilot is completed. We stand prepared to work with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in every way possible and we will agree to constant monitoring as to market rules and Brass City Harvest will always avail proof of our produce sourcing from Connecticut farms and dairies to DOAG personnel [we currently maintain open files of our sourcing available to DOAG personnel for spot inspection at our fixed location]. Our network of partner farmers starts in North Granby and stretches to the shoreline. We make regular pick-ups of produce from all of our farmers; therefore it is very easy for us to maintain appropriate records.

A pilot program would both serve our citizenry and promulgate Connecticut Grown produce for some of our most difficult client populations. Passage of this bill would enable Brass City Harvest – once certified by the Commissioner of Agriculture – to accept WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coupons at its fixed, year-round location, and all of its mobile farmers’ market sites. Our mobile farmers’ market program visits all of the senior centers in Waterbury, as well as Waterbury Hospital and St. Mary’s Hospital. We have an ongoing partnership with the Waterbury Health Department as a steering committee member of the Greater Waterbury Health Partnership and the Waterbury Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

As stated earlier, Brass City Harvest purchases all of its produce from a network of partner farmers; when we buy more – particularly at off-season times like the winter months – the farmers see increased revenue. Right now our only “certified market” gives two farmers four hours’ of business exposure once a week for 18 weeks of the year. Brass City Harvest patronizes these same farmers and many others; thus we give them a greater economic footprint and in some cases, an entirely new market in Waterbury. Our farmers have a strong bond to Brass City Harvest and they appreciate our hard work and a customer who pays them promptly for their goods.

Previous discussions with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture have revealed that one of their concerns is that a pilot program would enable Brass City Harvest to “make a profit” but that is simply not true. Brass City Harvest – like many small customers, purchases goods at a tiered rate that is slightly under a farmers’ (or farm stand) retail price. Add in costs for fuel, personnel, utilities, etc. –

figures which are easily documented – our costs are quite significant and certainly make up for the few cents’ difference per item based upon our purchase price of Connecticut farm produce. *Our goal is not to make a profit – our mission is to feed people – and we do so, much of the time, at our cost.* There are price points, inspections, and state oversight that force strict adherence to Connecticut Department of Agriculture regulations. *There are no profits in this business – there are only untold thousands of people who need food.* By way of illustration; a newspaper article from the March 5, 2013 edition of the Waterbury Republican-American illustrates a sample of our current mobile farmers’ market and nutrition program carried out with medically special populations is attached to this testimony.

As an agricultural non-profit that operates at least two farmers’ markets on any given day (fixed location and a mobile market), we are often thrust into the midst of the people we’re supposed to serve. Think of your own families; if an elderly relative of yours had to travel downtown, pay for public transportation and perhaps change buses, just to get to the farmers’ market only to find out that it’s not “certified” and therefore the market can’t accept their Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coupon, two things will happen: 1) the elderly patron will become extremely upset (justifiably so), and 2) the farmers’ market and the CT Grown program (and the farmers) will have lost a customer forever because the elderly patron will *never* forget the inconvenience they suffered because of a law that doesn’t mean anything to them. The only fact that an elderly patron will expound upon is that he or she has a booklet of coupons that are now worthless to them because they’re not going to spend any more time and money to come back downtown on a Thursday or whatever day when the seasonal “certified” market operates for a couple of hours. We’ve lost a customer, the state has lost a customer, and a farmer has lost a customer. This scenario was repeated more times than I could count during the summer of 2013.

We, at Brass City Harvest, think the personnel of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and most especially, Commissioner Steven Reviczky, are second to none in the United States in regards to their dedication to local agriculture and support of all agricultural industries in our great state. However on the issues concerning implementation of a pilot program for WIC/Senior Nutrition Farmers’ Market Programs, we disagree. That disagreement is based upon our somewhat divergent missions but we do hold a common, enduring belief – our love and respect for Connecticut’s farmers and dairymen. Brass City Harvest lives and dies based upon the availability of agricultural products produced in the State of Connecticut. We ask our legislators equally, to stand behind us as we endeavor to serve the needs of a disadvantaged community.

Sincerely,



Susan G. Pronovost
Executive Director

Hospital, Brass City Harvest offer vouchers for organic foods

Healthy partnership for patients

“THIS IS A REALLY BRILLIANT IDEA TO TEAM UP WITH A FARMERS MARKET AND GIVE THEM SOME INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO PREPARE HEALTHY FOODS. IT’S NOT JUST, ‘HERE’S A HEAD OF KALE, GOOD LUCK.’”

DR. STEVEN ARONIN

CHIEF OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES AT WATERBURY HOSPITAL

BY CARRIE MACMILLAN

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

A self-described junkfood eater most of his life, Joe Mancinone started to eat healthier after he was diagnosed with diabetes two years ago at age 61.

But the Waterbury man, who went on disability in 2006 after a work injury, soon discovered fresh fruits and vegetables cost more than the types of items he was accustomed to buying on his limited income. So when he found out about a new partnership between Brass City Harvest and Waterbury Hospital that awards vouchers to select patients in the hospital's diabetes and infectious disease clinics, Mancinone was elated.

“Having diabetes, I am learning that if I don't do what I need to do, I pay the price. My doctor had warned me that I needed to change my habits, but it's not easy to change. I've been looking really hard at the ingredients of everything I eat. I meet with a nutritionist at the hospital, but if you don't have the money to buy good food, especially the organic stuff I like, why bother talking about it?”

Mancinone said.

Brass City Harvest, a Waterbury-based nonprofit that runs farmers markets in the city and has a mobile market that visits neighborhoods and senior centers, received a grant to kickstart the program with the hospital, which is called Food for Life.

To qualify, participants must belong to one of the hospital's two disease management clinics and be at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty level.

Qualified patients receive vouchers in \$3 increments. A single person can receive up to \$24 a month and a family of five can receive up to \$120 a month.

Vouchers can be redeemed at any Brass City Harvest market, including the seasonal one on the Green and the year-round operation on Field Street.

Brass City Harvest also sets up shop at Waterbury Hospital every Friday morning, and soon will be visiting Saint Mary's Hospital in Waterbury starting Wednesdays, said Susan Pronovost, executive director of Brass City Harvest. Participants receive vouchers on a monthly basis as long as they are in compliance with their medical visits, nutritionist visit and exercise regimen as prescribed by their doctor.

The program, which organizers say is the first of its kind in the region, launched last Friday *See FOOD , Page 2D*



Waterbury resident Joe Mancinone, left, checks out the Brass City Harvest market at Waterbury Hospital last week. Mancinone is one of 60 patients from the hospital's diabetes and infectious disease clinics participating in a new program that awards vouchers to be used at the market.

ANDREW HOGAN

Article Continued Below

[See FOOD on Page D02](#)

FOOD: Cooking and eating tutorials begin

Continued from 1D

and continues through December. Pronovost said she is confident the program will come up with more money to cover operating costs and hopeful that it will continue beyond December. The program kicked off with a cooking demonstration by a chef from Morrison Food Service at Waterbury Hospital.

"Seeing that guy cook was wonderful and reminded me of how much I used to cook and got me excited. I went ahead and bought spinach and lettuce and a bag of purple onions and eggs," Mancinone said. "I hadn't seen lettuce that looked that green since I was on a farm."

The Food for Life program began with a \$2,500 grant from Ion Bank Foundation. Since then, other partners have come on board and Waterbury Hospital has come up with its own grants to match those from Brass City Harvest. Altogether, the program has secured about \$7,500, Pronovost said.

The hospital has enrolled 60 patients in the initiative so far. The program also includes a free membership at the Greater Waterbury YMCA. Participants see a nutritionist monthly and a physician will track certain health indicators, such as blood-glucose levels, blood pressure and cholesterol.

"We will be able to see if their outcomes are improving," said Juana Clarke, director of grants at Waterbury Hospital. "Patients will meet with a case manager to get their vouchers every month, and they have to be using them to get the next month's voucher. The Y also sends us a monthly report on gym use. They can meet with a dietitian for any questions on recipes."

DR. STEVEN ARONIN,

chief of infectious diseases at Waterbury Hospital, said the program makes a lot of sense because medical providers often “stop taking care of people once they leave the doctor’s office or the hospital.”

“We had a home-visit program here a few years ago with residents that was so revealing,” Aronin said. “Patients don’t throw away their pills. They have bottles and bottles of them. But you open up their fridge and, ‘Ohmigod you are diabetic and look at the food in here.’ So this is a really brilliant idea to team up with a farmers market and give them some instructions on how to prepare healthy foods. It’s not just, ‘Here’s a head of kale, good luck.’” While the benefits for diabetics is obvious, HIV patients also are helped because the HIV medications commonly lead to high cholesterol and high blood pressure, Aronin said.

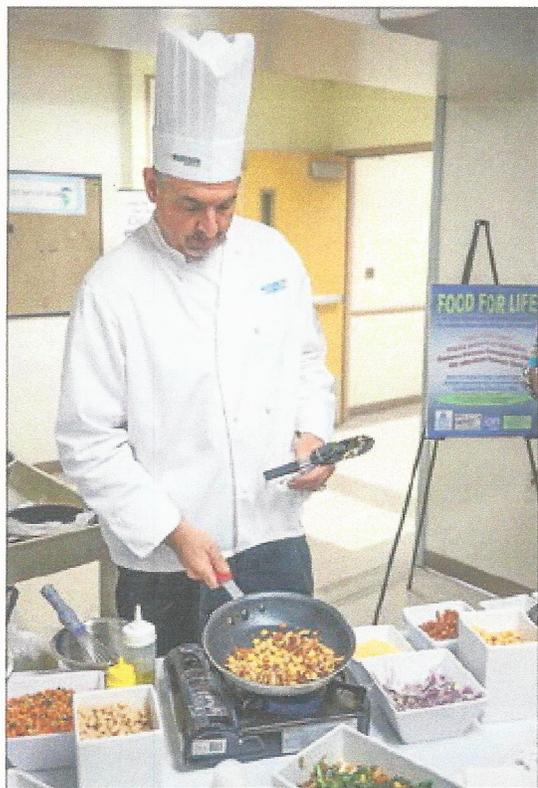
“It’s basically a fresh fruit and vegetables prescription diet,” Pronovost said. “We’re trying to reduce their medication load and to get them to eat healthier for life. It’s a bit of a behavior modification process.”

Cooking demonstrations at the hospital will be given at least quarterly, and perhaps more frequently, Pronovost said.

Dr. Stephen Huot, co-director of the Diabetes Disease Management Clinic at Waterbury Hospital’s Chase Outpatient Clinic, applauded the program.

“Access to fresh and affordable food is a particular challenge in urban settings, and the opportunity to include education to empower patients to make healthier food choices is powerful,” he said. “These types of community-based programs can have a direct and positive effect for patients where activity and diet are particularly important, such as for people with diabetes.”

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Pasquale Giannelli, executive chef with Morrison Food Service at Waterbury Hospital, leads a cooking

demonstration at the hospital last week when the Food for Life program between Brass City Harvest and the hospital kicked off.

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