



**Connecticut Farm Bureau Association**  
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**Testimony in opposition to: H.B. 5139 AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF STATE FUNDS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS ON PRIME FARMLAND.**

Submitted by: Henry N. Talmage, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

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*The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.*

Senator Osten, Representative Rojas and Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

The Connecticut Farm Bureau Association opposes H.B. 5139 which would preclude the use of any form of financial assistance for the purchase or installation of photovoltaic energy systems on prime farmland. While we appreciate and share the interest in protecting CT's prime farmland, we are very concerned with the implications of this legislation and its potential impact on CT agriculture.

From the very early days of the farmland preservation program dating back over 30 years, private property rights of farmers were a key priority. It was recognized that in order to have long-term success, preservation efforts should be voluntary and not limit farmers' ability to develop their property if they chose to do so. Instead the farmland preservation program was designed to entice farmers to permanently preserve their land through the purchase of development rights by the state for a fair price. We are concerned that this bill begins to establish a different pathway that penalizes farmers with high quality farmland by precluding them from participating in this important state funded program. How long will it be until we see proposals to limit other state funding on prime farmland? Will we see a day when farm transition grants that might help a farmer build a new, more efficient dairy barn not be available for use on prime farmland?

Last year the Legislature passed the Comprehensive Energy Bill which included important provisions for on-farm energy programs including a monumental agricultural net-metering program. I am proud to serve as Co-Vice Chairman of the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development and one of the first recommendations to come out of Council's exhaustive work was to develop an on-farm energy program modeled after successful programs in Europe. The newly passed on-farm energy program is designed to help diversify our energy systems, encourage the use of clean renewable energy and provide significant cost savings and generate additional income for farmers through the use of net-metering. There are often multiple factors to consider when a farmer sites energy projects on a farm including proximity to infrastructure and buildings. By restricting placement only on non-prime farmland a farmer might not be able to utilize the program. H.B. 5139 would essentially eliminate the possibility of constructing solar projects on prime farmland and would be counterproductive to the progress we have made in this arena.