

March 2, 2015

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee –

My name is David Golembeski and I am a lifelong resident of the town of New Milford. I am writing to you regarding the value of the 19 regional agri-science programs in this great state that have greatly assisted myself and numerous others with career skills and decision making processes in order to be successful in today's workforce.

When I was in middle school I knew I wanted to pursue some type of agricultural career. I was fortunate enough to have attended the program at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury where I graduated in 2004 in the top ten percent of my class. While at Nonnewaug, I became a very active participant in the many activities offered in order to get the most out of my high school education experience. I competed in various contests, served as a chapter FFA officer, designed an FFA chapter website, won several awards at all levels, and much more.

One very important component of the agri-science programs is the Supervised Agricultural Experience or SAE portion. This is where each student is required to work a certain number of hours per year at an approved agriculturally related job while in high school with measureable goals. Additionally, while working at their SAE, all students are periodically visited by the agri-science staff in order to ensure a safe and applicable working environment. This whole part of the program played a large part in where I am today. During my sophomore year in high school a program graduate was at an agri-science college and career fair and mentioned that he was an assistant golf course superintendent at a local country club and they would be looking for summer help. I investigated this opportunity further and decided to give it a try for my SAE for that year to see if it was something that interested me. I enjoyed the experience immensely and have been a part of the turfgrass industry ever since. I even won a national FFA award for having one of the top turfgrass management SAE's in the country.

After graduating from Nonnewaug, I enrolled in the University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources majoring in turfgrass and soil science along with horticulture as a secondary major. While taking classes at UCONN, I found that some things were "repeat information" – stuff I had already learned about in the high school agri-science program which put me ahead of the other students. While enrolled at UCONN, I was able to secure many scholarships over my four years (totaling over \$63,000) from various sources, including the top scholarship in the country from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. I

attribute much of this success back to being in the agri-science program in high school which gave me the needed tools and skill set to produce competitive applications.

After graduation with a double major degree in 2008, I was employed as an assistant golf course superintendent through the end of 2012 when I accepted the position of head golf course superintendent at Pomperaug Golf Club in Southbury. At first glance one may not think that golf course management is agriculturally related but I can assure you that much of the job is from water management to soil fertility to pest management and beyond. According to a comprehensive study done in 2008, Connecticut's golf related economic impact with over 180 courses totaled \$1.1 billion annually.

As you are aware, there are several school choice options that parents and students can elect to pursue across Connecticut depending on where they reside and what they are interested in. I do not claim to be an expert on any of the other options such as charters, magnets, tech schools, etc. but I am sure they all have their place and value to those who benefit from them. What I am certain of, however, is that the agri-science programs were the first and original magnet schools created in this state and they receive the least amount of money from the state budget on a per pupil basis of any of the school choice options. I understand that the appropriations committee must make some tough choices to move the next biennium budget forward in all areas to balance revenues and expenditures but the governor's proposal has no equality to it whatsoever. Over the past few years there have been some increases in funding in per pupil expenditures by the state to the regional agri-science programs – for which we are very thankful, however on the other side of the coin charters, magnets, and others have received exponentially larger increases and are slated for more. In a time when state revenues are virtually flat I can't see the logic in equality of giving magnets \$36 million more, charters \$19.9 million more, and open choice programs \$11.9 million more while agri-science programs are only slated for a drop in the bucket increase that amounts to less than \$50,000.

In closing, I hope I have been able to show you how the agri-science program can lead an individual down a road of success for the future. These programs are extremely important to keep Connecticut's fast growing agriculturally related industries thriving. Increasing the funding level for the agri-science programs to a figure that is more comparable to the other school choice options such as charters and magnets is very necessary to meet this challenge so more students can have this great experience as I did myself and contribute to job growth here at home in the

great state of Connecticut. Again, I am 100% sure these other school choice options have tremendous value associated with them (as does all public education) and I know you probably can't make everyone equal across the board in one year but please give some serious thought to funding equality when you make your final decisions – agri-science has been left hoofing the bag for far too long.

Thank you for your time,

David R. Golembeski  
Golf Course Superintendent  
Pomperaug Golf Club  
Southbury, CT