

Testimony of Steven K. Reviczky
Before the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee
January 29, 2015

Good afternoon Chairpersons Duff and Janowski, Ranking Members Kane and Buck-Taylor, and other distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. For the record, I am Steven Reviczky. It has been my high honor and privilege to serve as Connecticut's Commissioner of Agriculture and to be nominated by Governor Malloy to serve for another term.

Prior to answering your questions, I wish to first offer the following statement.

On any given day, I can be dealing with matters of a vicious dog attacking a child or grandmother, negotiating the purchase of hundreds of acres of prime and important farmland, or dealing with a water main break at the Hartford Regional Market, the largest perishable food distribution hub between New York and Boston.

I am very proud of the agency's accomplishments over the last four years and the progress made advancing Connecticut agriculture. As one of the state's smaller agencies, it is not an easy task.

While other commissioners may have hundreds of employees to call upon, I do not. Agriculture has a small dedicated workforce that wears multiple hats, repeatedly steps up to do difficult and important tasks, and frequently goes above and beyond what can be reasonably expected of most.

Connecticut's farm families have been stressed and challenged by weather events in recent years. From the seemingly never-ending snows of 2011 to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Sandy that same year, to the blizzard, flooding, and tornado in 2013, as well as our most

recent winter challenges this week, the farming community and its families have shouldered it all. By their side have been Governor Malloy, members of the General Assembly, and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

When circumstances allowed, we provided warnings and information so they could prepare. When disaster struck, we were there to provide and direct assistance to clear roads, restore power, and protect life and property. And when the storm clouds cleared, we were there to provide technical and financial assistance to aid in recovery.

The Governor's Council for Agricultural Development has looked closely at the state of Connecticut agriculture and made detailed recommendations to advance farming and agriculture in this state as an economic engine.

As a result of the council's efforts, the Department of Agriculture has worked to implement many of those recommendations, including streamlining operations; focusing grant programs to assist farmers with food safety enhancements; strengthening the statewide marketing and promotion of Connecticut Grown farm products; making critical infrastructure repairs and developing a comprehensive master plan for Connecticut's last remaining regional market; building farm-to-institution pathways to provide more Connecticut Grown products to schools, higher education, and healthcare facilities; and accelerating the preservation of Connecticut's prime and important farmland soils, achieving the milestone of 300 farms and 40,000 acres while maximizing the use of available federal funding and launching the community farms program to preserve smaller farms closer to more densely populated areas.

Among the Department of Agriculture's other accomplishments over the last four years is the development and implementation of a plan to control the naturally occurring and potentially fatal saltwater pathogen *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* from reaching dangerous levels in shellfish. The agency's plan has proven so effective in reducing the presence of the bacteria at

levels causing human illnesses that FDA officials have recognized it as a model for the rest of the nation.

In the agency's Bureau of Regulation and Inspection, we have worked with the agricultural community to educate and provide technical assistance, improving compliance with laws and regulations in a collaborative and mutually beneficial approach.

We have sharpened our focus on animal abuse and neglect. In cooperation with the Department of Correction and the help of the DAS Division of Construction Services, we constructed a new barn where we rehabilitate seized horses and other livestock so we can ultimately place them in settings where they will receive appropriate care.

Our work on animal disease prevention has succeeded to a degree we can never measure, as it is impossible to count the outbreaks we stopped from occurring.

Prior to my appointment as commissioner, I served for four and a half years as the executive director of the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, our state's largest agricultural not-for-profit organization. Before that, I was employed for more than eight years at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in the Farmland Preservation Program, and worked for nine years at the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

In my hometown of Ashford, I served my community as a member of numerous boards and commissions, and was elected first selectman at the age of 26.

Agriculture has always been a major part of my life. I planted my first Christmas trees when I was a high school sophomore and continued growing and harvesting trees for twenty-five years. I produced maple syrup and raised sheep and beef cattle. My first jobs, outside of working for my father, who was a plumber, were at local chicken farms, where I cleaned coops and picked, washed, graded, and packed eggs.

Over the years, I have seen many changes. What was once considered a declining industry in our state has become the center of new interest, excitement, and innovation among our state's residents and its leaders. These are very exciting times for Connecticut's farmers and for the future of Connecticut agriculture.

While our agency may be small, agriculture is a significant and growing industry in Connecticut, contributing three and a half billion dollars to the state's economy and employing some 28,000 people. USDA's most recent Census of Agriculture showed Connecticut's 22 percent increase in number of farms over five years as highest in New England. Of particular note is the growth among young and beginning farmers who see agriculture as a viable profession and Connecticut as a fertile location in which to put down roots, both figuratively and literally.

Over the last four years, I have been involved in countless unique situations related to the production, promotion, and distribution of food and farm products. From each experience, I have learned a great deal. I believe I have become a stronger leader and better equipped to grow Connecticut farms.

Although the work has at times been more challenging than I could have anticipated, it also has been the most enjoyable and gratifying job of my life. I am honored to have earned Governor Malloy's trust and confidence, and his nomination to serve another term. I thank you for this opportunity to share with you my experience and my qualifications to continue as commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, and I welcome any questions you may have.