



**Connecticut Farm Bureau Association**  
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February 4, 2015

**Testimony in support of:**

**Senate Bill No. 347 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERCENTAGE OF STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS THAT MAY BE USED TO PURCHASE OPEN SPACE UNDER THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM.**

**And in support of:**

**House Bill No. 5119 AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF CERTAIN BRANDY BY FARM WINERIES.**

Submitted by: Henry N. Talmage, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association *the following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.*

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis and members of the Environment Committee,

**Senate Bill No. 347 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERCENTAGE OF STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS THAT MAY BE USED TO PURCHASE OPEN SPACE UNDER THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM**

The Connecticut Farm Bureau has a long history of supporting the voluntary protection of farmland throughout Connecticut through the sale of development rights by farmers and the use of permanent conservation easements. The primary program utilized for farmland protection is the Purchase of Development Rights program (PDR) administered by the CT Department of Agriculture. As diverse as CT agriculture itself the land base associated with our farms often include a mix of prime and important agricultural soils, woodlands, wetlands and lands of other conservation values. As a result highly effective farmland protection often requires the use of several conservation programs. The Open Space and Watershed Land acquisition Program administered by DEEP is often an important tool in protecting the portions of farms that have other conservation values. SB 347 would remove the limitation that state and federal funds must not exceed 70% of the appraised value of the transaction. Although the intent of this provision was likely to ensure that local municipalities and land trusts had “skin in the game” by requiring that they provide 30% of the funding the results have been detrimental to land protection. Because the 70% rule only applies to the appraised value of the property itself the other costs of transactions such as appraisal, survey and closing costs are often borne directly by local municipalities and land trusts in addition to the 30% required for the land transaction match. The result is that transactions that have high conservation value often cannot be completed because the 30% match is unattainable. This is especially true in communities that do not have municipal conservation funds available or the ability to raise monies privately through local land trusts. Therefore, under current law we are selecting for projects that “can” be done because of the availability of local funds not prioritizing projects that “should” be done based on conservation priority. SB

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347 will allow DEEP to protect the best land by removing the 70% cap requirement. The Connecticut Farm Bureau urges the adoption of SB 347.

**House Bill No. 5119 AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF CERTAIN BRANDY BY FARM WINERIES.**

Craft spirits is expanding quickly in the marketplace and HB 5119 would allow Connecticut farm wineries to take advantage of that movement by using their own farm grown fruit. Under current law a holder of a manufacturer permit for a farm winery can produce brandy on-site and sell it from their winery. This bill would allow holders of a manufacturer permit for a farm winery to sell “brandy manufactured from grapes harvested on the premises of such farm and distilled off such premises”. By adding this language to the existing law it will enable wineries to sell brandy made from their fruit at their wineries even if it is distilled off-site. This important change will allow wineries to make a related value-added product by adding brandy sales and expand their product offering without having to invest in very expensive distillery equipment. They would also be able avoid the added expensive and burden of obtaining a Federal Distilled Spirits Plant Permit. We would like to see the words “and fruit” added after the word “grapes” on line 61 so that other fruit brandy can be included in the bill as well. The Connecticut Farm Bureau urges the adoption of House Bill 5119.