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February 9, 2016

TO: Appropriations Committee

**FROM: Susan Pronovost, Executive Director
Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association**

**RE: H.B. No. 5044 An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditure for the Fiscal Year
Ending June 30, 2017**

My name is Susan Pronovost. I reside in Waterbury and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association. We appreciate the opportunity to offer brief comments about Governor's recommended reduction of \$934,000 to the budget of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.

By way of background, CGGA promotes the interests of the greenhouse industry which in Connecticut is largely comprised of family-owned small businesses that grow bedding plants, annual and perennial plants, and greenhouse crops. Connecticut does have several large, multi-million dollar greenhouse growers as well, who contribute heavily to the State of Connecticut through payroll taxes and the purchases of supplies and materials. There are about 200 active greenhouse operations in Connecticut.

According to the most recent analysis conducted by the University of Connecticut in 2007, the value of agriculture to the economy of the State of Connecticut was estimated at \$3.5 billion, with another \$1.7 billion in associated spending. According to the recently released census of Connecticut agriculture undertaken by the United States Department of Agriculture in 2012, the greenhouse industry utilizes more than 10.5 million square feet of production space and has been the fastest growing sector of agriculture in this state. In 2012, greenhouse greenery, floriculture, bedding plants, herbs, etc., exceeded \$131 million in value. Greenhouse grown vegetable crops totaled an additional \$6 million in value.

The greenhouse industry depends upon the diagnostic skills, cutting edge development of plant cultivars that are resistant to climate change, pathogens, and pests, and inspection services of greenhouse grown products so that our growers remain competitive and put forth agricultural products to regional retailers and wholesalers that are second to none in the market place.

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station has three full service offices that directly support the greenhouse industry – the Plant Science Information Office, the Insect Identification Office, and the Soil Testing Laboratory. These office routinely perform assays and diagnostic services on greenhouse crops. The Plant Disease Information Office was instrumental in the rapid diagnosis of chrysanthemum white rust epidemic. Over 133,500 mums were inspected for white rust during the 2014-15 growing season. Of

the 4,000 inquiries made during that growing season, 1,400 came from greenhouse growers. Quick action and identification saved millions of dollars of wholesale, retail, and export mum crops.

CAES performs routine plant inspection and regulatory services that are coordinated through the office of the State Entomologist at the Station. Over 200 nursery and greenhouse operations were inspected in the last fiscal year and certified. Plant phytosanitary certificates were issued for 1,151 greenhouse plants in order for them to reach their final market.

The greenhouse industry regularly depends upon CAES staff to perform public speaking at our many education sessions that are centric to the greenhouse industry. It is imperative that our greenhouse growers' knowledge and techniques evolve to remain profitable in the face of changing climate and economic conditions.

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station performs many other vital services that assure our greenhouse products contain no fungi, nematodes or other pathogens that would destroy shipments worth millions of dollars. We all know that Cheshire is the "Bedding Plant Capital of the World" – tens of millions of dollars of export trade would be in jeopardy if it were not for the diagnostic and regulatory services performed annually by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. The staff is readily available and quickly responds to emerging issues. The economic impact of infected shipments of plants to big box retailers, wholesale markets, and small farms could be catastrophic to our state's economy and detrimental to our export trade.

CAES provides ongoing research and is working closely with one of this state's premier greenhouse growers – *Geremia Greenhouses of Wallingford* – to study the long term effects of water and fertilizer conservation on the suppression of plant disease, while improving horticultural quality and shelf life of ornamental plants. As part of this study, CAES is looking at reducing the amount of fungicides that are applied. These practices are beneficial for the environment, our greenhouse growers' economic viability and competitiveness, our consumers, and ultimately – beneficial to the economy of Connecticut because it will enable the greenhouse growers to put forth higher quality products with longer shelf life which will increase demand.

Thank you for allowing this organization to put forth our viewpoints on the \$934,000 cut to the CAES budget and the potential impact to the greenhouse industry. We do not envy the decisions that must be made by the Appropriations Committee and indeed, by the General Assembly. Those decisions must be weighed by facts and their potential impact upon the state's economy and balance of trade.

Sincerely,



Susan G. Pronovost
Executive Director