

CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO REDUCING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BUDGET AND IN SUPPORT OF BLOCK GRANTS

FEBRUARY 10, 2016

The Connecticut State Grange opposes any reduction in the Department of Agriculture's budget and in particular opposes the 5.75% reduction recommended by Governor Malloy. The Department of Agriculture is a very small agency charged with many responsibilities concerning all phases of Connecticut's agriculture but lacks both the funds and personnel to accomplish those responsibilities.

Connecticut's agriculture industry contributes approximately \$3 billion annually to our economy but each year we are irretrievably losing as much farmland as the State preserves. The amount of land preserved each year has increased, but it is still limited by both the available funding and the limited personnel assigned to the purchase of development rights. While the funding comes from bond authorizations rather than current funding, additional personnel in this area are needed in this program.

A major responsibility of the Department of Agriculture is to inspect the farms and test animals to insure they are healthy and properly cared for in a suitable environment. One of the responsibilities in this area is to inspect the animals exhibited at our fairs to insure they are healthy and have received all their required immunizations to prevent the spread of disease when the animals from various farms are in close proximity to each other. Most of our fairs have not seen a State inspector for several years because the Department of Agriculture simply can not afford the necessary number of inspectors to do the job. The Department of Agriculture has virtually abandoned testing animals in puling contests at our fairs because they do not have the funds to analyze the blood samples necessary to test the animals.

In some instances the Department of Agriculture has had to seize animals from their owners because the owners do not have the financial resources to purchase adequate feed and provide proper care for their animals. In such situations the Department of Agriculture has to purchase feed and medications to care for these animals until they regain their health. The Department is presently involved in such a situation with a herd of horses. Last year the Department had to seize a herd of goats and then ask for an additional appropriation hay and grain to feed the goats. What will happen if the Department of Agriculture's budget is reduced? Will the Department have to put these animals down as some legislators have suggested? One of the principles of the Grange is to protect animals from neglect and abuse. Does the State propose to protect animals from neglect and abuse by reducing the Department of Agriculture's budget?

For these reasons the Connecticut State Grange opposes any reduction in the Department of Agriculture's budget. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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