



10 February 2016

Appropriations Committee
Connecticut State Legislature

**Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station
Conservation & Development Hearing**

CAES Friends L16.02.10csl:

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of the Appropriations Committee:

Given the strategic importance of CAES in protecting the health of Connecticut's human and animal populations, conserving its natural resources, and assuring food safety, especially the quality of our agricultural products, I urge the Appropriations Committee to keep the CAES budget intact. The mission of the CAES must not be jeopardized in the process of cutting the state budget. To do so would compromise the health, safety and welfare of the State's citizens and the environment alike and potentially expose the State to FAR greater costs for disease control, environmental restoration, and public health emergencies.

The Agricultural Experiment Station, the oldest state agricultural institution in America, monitors the quality of the state's agricultural products, and provides technical assistance to Connecticut's farmers and growers. Connecticut agriculture produces up to \$4.6 billion in annual sales and accounts for some 30,000 jobs (Source: CAES). There is a robust market for Connecticut grown vegetables, meat, milk, eggs, animal breeder stock, wood products, tobacco, cut flowers, and garden center plants and shrubs. Horticulture is a \$1 billion business in Connecticut, and 40 % of the plants grown here are exported (Source: CAES).

The CAES is also one of the leading research institutes in the country for the study of insect-borne diseases that inflict humans and animals, and is a leader in studying and mitigating the impact of plant pathogens. These include Lyme disease, and mosquito-borne equine encephalitis, West Nile virus, and now the horrifically painful and so far incurable Chikungunya virus. Lyme disease is rampant in Connecticut, and the state has had cases of equine encephalitis and West Nile virus. The Zika virus has now entered the United States and we know that the responsible insect vector is present in Connecticut. The State must be vigilant. It is the CAES that monitors the spread of insect diseases, and researches methods to combat them.

Connecticut's woodlands, wetlands, rural roadsides and waterways are being ravaged by invasive plants that are eliminating our native species. Our ash trees are being killed off by fungi and a virus carried by the emerald ash borer. The state's majestic hemlock trees are being killed off by a virus carried by the wooly adelgid insect. Ornamental boxwood, a common landscape planting, is being killed off by a fungus. Our ponds are clogged with invasives. Again, the CAES is our first line of defense against these pests.

Shavaun Towers PLA, FASLA

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Connecticut's Agricultural Experiment Station is also one of five regional facilities in the nation that is charged by the Federal government with doing the very high-tech analytical work to test food for chemical and biological contaminants...and did so in the wake of the gulf oil spill among other recent disasters. On a more mundane level, food is randomly sampled in the state's grocery stores on a regular basis, and sent to the CAES laboratory in New Haven for analysis to assure the health of the public.

My understanding is that the proposed state budget for FY 2017 was originally \$18,711 Million. The estimated state-funded FY2016 budget for the Agricultural Experiment Station is \$8,131,824 and for FY2017 is \$8,248,270. This means that the appropriation for CAES represents roughly 0.0004 of the total state budget. There are other places (and agencies) where budget cuts will not have such a dramatic impact on the health of the population, nor the State's economy.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shavaun Towers". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Shavaun Towers

Cc: Gov. Dannel Malloy
Sen. Toni Boucher (26th District); -
Rep. Tom O'Dea (125th District)
Rep. Fred Wilms (142nd District);
Rep. Gail Lavielle (143rd district).