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Appropriations Committee

RE: Conservation & Development Public Hearing
Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

I understand the need to balance the state budget, but cutting $934,000 from the already small budget of The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) is a false economy that will do far more harm than good. CAES is already "leaned out" and these cuts are much more than cosmetic. They will compromise the critical mission of CAES and have far-reaching, and probably unforeseen, consequences.

The proposed cuts would also cause collateral damage. Dismissing scientists, for example, could result in the loss of $500,000 in federal grants.

Surprisingly, more than one-third of the CAES budget doesn't even come from state coffers because they're partially funded by federal and industry grants.

They also have millions of dollars of high-tech equipment that's been donated by the federal government so they can perform their mission. Talk about value added!

Who is going to operate all this high-tech equipment if we send the scientists packing? Is it just going to sit there collecting dust like a CDC lab in the Zombie Apocalypse? These people are scientists, not administrators or bureaucrats ... their work can't be privatized.

The need for belt-tightening is obvious but these decisions shouldn't be made in a vacuum. Consequences, unintended and otherwise, need to be considered.

CAES is, at its core, a research facility that conducts research and disseminates scientific knowledge that benefits agriculture, horticulture, the environment, food safety, public health and our quality of life. James G. Horsfall, director of CAES from 1948-1971, said "The station was an invention for making inventions."

The Experiment Station was the first of its kind in the nation and served as the model for the many that followed. Established in 1875, primarily through the efforts of Samuel W. Johnson, The Station was founded to "put science to work for society." Johnson believed that agriculture could be advanced by scientific investigation performed in conjunction with practical experimentation.

Johnson was right and CAES has served Connecticut well for more than 140 years. It made it through the Great Depression and the Great Recession. It would be sad indeed to see it dismantled on our watch.

Crippling CAES would negatively impact agricultural and horticultural commerce, exacerbate public health problems, and would have far-reaching consequences. In the final analysis, compromising the mission of The Experiment Station does far more harm than good.

I didn't even begin to understand how much CAES does and how important it is to life in Connecticut until I got a tour of their facility in New Haven from the late Lou Magnarelli, a former director. Years later, in fact, I am STILL learning new things about them.

CAES arguably represents the best return we get for our tax dollars here in Connecticut. Unfortunately, most people don't know much about them.

I urge you to take closer look at The CT Agricultural Experiment Station. I'd be surprised if you aren't blown away by everything they do.

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