



Cloverleigh Farm

**Testimony to Environment Committee
In Support of HB 5383**

Submitted by: Susan Mitchell, Cloverleigh Farm

March 4, 2016

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, and Committee members:

My name is Susan Mitchell and I am the owner and operator of Cloverleigh Farm in Mansfield, a small, diverse vegetable business with a focus on a Community Supported Agriculture program. I am also one of the founding members and current Steering Committee member of the New Connecticut Farmer Alliance, a farmer-led and farmer-driven statewide network of new farmers. I submit this testimony in full support of HB 5383, An Act Concerning the Farm Viability Matching Grant Program and the Connecticut Farm Link Program.

I am a young farmer in Connecticut and started my own farm business in 2014 after managing farms for several years for non-profits and private individuals. I began on rented land in Colchester and after a season struggling with poison ivy and poor soil fertility, I moved my farm business to Mansfield to take advantage of an apparent opportunity. In 2016, my farm will again move to another location in Mansfield. Based on my experiences over the past few years, I can attest to the many issues young farmers face in securing access to suitable and affordable farmland. This is by far the number one challenge and barrier young farmers face in getting a new farm business started.

An active and enhanced FarmLink Program is needed to help young farmers like me find the farmland they need and to help older farmers or other landowners who are interested in leasing, but may need assistance in finding the right match and executing a lease. The changes to our current FarmLink program included in HB 5383 will help put more boots on the ground and provide the kind of direct, hands-on help that farm owners and farm seekers need, particularly first-generation farmers who have *not* grown up in a farm family and do not have the extended network that established farmers have. The New CT Farmer Alliance specifically supports these new, young, first-generation, beginning, direct-to-market, and sustainable producers who are the future of a vibrant agricultural community in our state and the most rapidly growing population of farmers.

The changes to the Agricultural Viability program will also help provide another pathway to support older farmers who may be thinking about retiring, but may need some help in working on ways their farm can transfer and stay in agriculture. We need their commitment to protecting our agricultural history and supporting our future.

I strongly support HB 5383 and urge this Committee to act favorably on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.