



Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
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Submitted by: Henry N. Talmage, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization representing 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.

Opposition to: Raised Bill No. 5370 AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE.

Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the members of The Connecticut Farm Bureau I wish to express our opposition to Raised Bill No. 5370 and specifically the provision to increase in the minimum wage beyond what was already passed in 2014 taking our minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour effective in January of 2017.

Connecticut agriculture contributes over 20,000 jobs to the state's economy according to a 2010 University of Connecticut study. Our farms and their workers, provide affordable fresh produce, dairy products, meats, seafood and eggs to Connecticut consumers. The 2012 USDA Agricultural Census reported that Connecticut currently has one of the highest farm labor costs per \$100 of farm sales in the nation. Connecticut's farm labor cost of \$33.25 per \$100 of sales is more than three times the national average. This was BEFORE the implementation of the minimum wage increases passed and scheduled to take effect after the census data was collected in 2012.

If passed and implemented as proposed our minimum wage rate will have increased by over 80% from \$8.25 in 2010 to \$15.00 in 2020. (Be assured CT farmers have will not realize an 80% increase in the prices they receive for the products they sell during the same period.) All CT farmers would be impacted because of the inflationary effect the minimum wage has on other wages. With the increase in specialization and value-added agriculture payroll is often the largest single expense for our growers. Many of our producers compete directly with growers from neighboring Northeast states and other low-cost areas from around the world. Further raising the minimum wage would put our producers at an even greater competitive disadvantage. Our farmers cannot simply raise prices and hope to be competitive.

The agricultural economy is especially important to our rural communities that often do not have opportunities for employment from other segments. Over the past two decades Connecticut has lost many of its farms as the high cost of farming, has discouraged family members from continuing the work of the family farm. Many of the new farm operations in the state are very small with no employees. If we are going to see real increases in the amount of CT grown products we need this group of farmers to hire employees and grow their production and sales. This is a hard transition for start-up farmers. We are concerned that the provisions of RB 5370 will have a chilling effect on employment growth of these start-up farms. In addition, we are concerned that by passing this Bill Connecticut will fall further behind our competitors in the marketplace and more Connecticut farms will be forced out of business, sold for development and lost forever.

Connecticut Farm Bureau Association - *The Voice of Connecticut Agriculture*