



WORKING LANDS ALLIANCE

A Project of American Farmland Trust

Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement
SB 102
Environment Committee Public Hearing
2-23-2017

Senator Kennedy, Senator Miner, Representative Demicco and members of the environment committee, my name is Terry Jones, I am the chairman of the steering committee of the Working Lands Alliance. WLA is an alliance of organizations concerned with agriculture, hunger, farmland access and land conservation dedicated to the preservation of working farmlands in Connecticut. Our hallmark is fierce cooperation.

This statement is to provide comments and concerns with Senate Bill 102 AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE-RELATED STATUTES.

Sections 5 and 6 align statutory language with federal programs that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture can benefit from, and we support these adjustments. It will allow the State of Connecticut to continue to leverage millions of dollars of federal funds for farmland protection.

Section 7 of the bill represents a significant policy shift, with potentially detrimental consequences. The proposed change is a significant departure from the current authority the Commissioner of Agriculture has with regard to the review of siting of solar facilities on prime farmland soils--soils considered by USDA to be our most resilient and productive.

It is our understanding that the Committee is likely to consider separate legislation soon addressing issues related to solar siting on farmland. Rather than move forward with the statutory change envisioned in Section 7, we urge the Committee to consider this potential policy shift in the context of these other siting issues, allowing for a comprehensive discussion of how to assess the impact on agriculture and natural resources when solar installations are proposed on prime farmland soils, and how to best protect our most productive agricultural soils for use in the future.

WLA looks forward to continuing to participate in policy discussions on this topic, with the hopes of seeing a balance between renewable energy, natural resources protection, and agricultural economic viability.

Thank you.