Testimony submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in Support of Governor Lamont’s Budget Proposal

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Governor Lamont’s budget proposal concerning the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg).

I have been the acting commissioner of the Department since shortly after Governor Lamont took office. In that time, I have been surprised and impressed by the diverse work performed by the Department and its relatively small staff.

Agriculture in Connecticut is a $4 billion industry that supports 22,000 jobs. The Department has fifty General Fund funded employees who work on programs as varied as the regulation of milk and milk products, to the acquisition of development rights on prime farmland, to ensuring the safety of agricultural and aquacultural food products as they enter the food system.

The governor’s budget makes responsible appropriations to the agency that will allow the Department to continue to meet its public health and safety obligations, and to grow the industry into a commodity area new to Connecticut – hemp. The governor’s budget provides for the necessary funding and staff to establish a program that will meet federal requirements recently adopted in the 2018 Farm Bill for the cultivation of hemp legally. Without the necessary resources provided for in this proposal, Connecticut would continue to lag behind 41 other states who have already established hemp cultivation programs.

The governor’s budget also brings the Community Investment Act (CIA) affecting Department programs onto the General Fund. This will be a more transparent approach to illustrate the programming available to the agricultural community through DoAg. These programs support individual producers, nonprofits and municipalities through matching reimbursement grants intended to diversify agricultural production in Connecticut. They also support the acquisition of development rights through our farmland preservation program and bolster the dairy industry in Connecticut. The CIA also supports many of the boards, councils and commissions housed within DoAg. Beyond added transparency, inclusion of CIA funds as an appropriation also provides surety to these crucial programs in terms of available funding levels.

Governor Lamont’s budget shows a commitment to maintaining a robust Department of Agriculture, and ensures that the agency has the resources they need.

My staff and I are happy to answer questions that committee members may have. With me today is Jason Bowsza, DoAg Chief of Staff; Nathan Wilson, DoAg’s incoming legislative director; Dr. Bruce Sherman, Regulatory Services Bureau Director, and his Assistant Bureau Director, Wayne Kasacek; Linda Piotrowicz, Bureau Director for Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation; David Carey, Bureau of Aquaculture Director; and Staff Attorney Carole Briggs.