



Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement
HB 7148 Appropriation Committee
Public Hearing February 27, 2019

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University of Connecticut

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University of Connecticut

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Cushman Farm

Keith Stechsulte
Farm Credit East

Shannon Yearwood
End Hunger CT!

STAFF

Chelsea Gazillo - Director
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Armando Paolino - Lobbyist

Dear Co-Chairs Osten and Walker; Vice-Chairs Hartley, DiMassa, and Horn; Ranking Members Formica and Lavielle, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 13th, 2021 and Making Appropriations Therefor.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo and I am the Director of the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes such organizations as American Farmland Trust, the CT State Grange, New CT Farmer Alliance, End Hunger CT!, CT Land Conservation Council, University of Connecticut, CT NOFA and the CT Farm Bureau Association, among many others. As an Alliance, we care deeply both about saving our state's farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for CT's farmers.

Governor Ned Lamont's proposed budget addresses several of WLA's 2019 policy priorities and makes a strong investment in promoting a healthy agricultural sector for all our state's residents. WLA was pleased to see the Governor has continued fund and make additional investment in the Department of Agriculture. A stand-alone Department of Agriculture remains one of the WLA's top priorities. The Department is a crucial component to continuing a strong and diverse agricultural sector, providing regulatory oversight, and guidance to farmers and agricultural service providers. The increased funded positions reinforced the administration and state's commitment to the department, as the department felt the negative impacts of attrition over the past few years.

Working Lands Alliance is committed to supporting efforts that will increase the profitability of farms. We were pleased to see the Governor's strong commitment to creating a USDA-approved, state program for industrial hemp. We strongly support the Governor's investment in funding additional personnel to develop and regulate a hemp program at both the Department of Agriculture and the CT Agricultural Experiment Station. Generating new revenues for an individual farm creates new market opportunities, increases the total acres of land that are in production, generates additional investments in equipment and labor, increase the agricultural services needed to maintain that land, and develops a hemp processing infrastructure.

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WLA offers the following comments on other areas related to our policy priorities in the proposed budget:

- *Community Investment Act (CIA) funding moved to the General Fund* – WLA supports the use of CIA funds for the core programs supported by the program. These programs include farmland preservation, open space preservation, dairy sustainability, affordable housing, and historic preservation. We were especially pleased to see funding for the farmland preservation program in the budget documented under the Department of Agriculture section. We strongly urge that these funding levels continue as statutorily required. WLA and members of the CIA Coalition are concerned that moving the CIA to the General Fund makes it easier to sweep the entire CIA fund in the future, and request that it remains a stand-alone fund.
- *Dairy Farm – Agriculture Sustainability Account* – The increased investment comes at a time when the dairy economy is in dire straits. WLA has supported an increase in the funds available for the Agriculture Sustainability account and will continue to support this much needed investment in CT dairy farmers.
- *Senior Food Vouchers* – The additional investment in the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) would increase the spending power of this population of seniors at farmers markets and attract new customers to the market. The Aging Committee has passed a bill that would increase the amount of the vouchers to \$50 per booklet. WLA suggests that if the booklet amounts are increased, that the total funds are increased accordingly, so that seniors have more vouchers to redeem at markets and not that fewer seniors have more vouchers to redeem.
- *WIC Coupon Program for Fresh Produce* – Support
- *CAES Increase in Funding and Personnel* – Support

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Governor's budget. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands Alliance Director