Bill No.: SB-1063
Title: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO IMPROVE FARMLAND AVAILABILITY FOR BEGINNING FARMERS.
Vote Date: 3/25/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/18/2019
File No.: 640

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Sen. Craig Miner, 30th Dist.


REASONS FOR BILL:

Connecticut has one of the largest percentage increases in the number of new farmers; however, there are concerns in regards to the barriers of entry for new and beginning farmers, and for aspiring urban farmers. The bill seeks to identify such barriers and potential remedies by creating a task force charged with studying (1) affordability of farmlands in urban, rural, and suburban areas of the state, (2) the availability of farmlands in the state, and (3) the accessibility of farm financing and farm worker housing.

In examining such issues, the task force must also (1) considering the accessibility of farmland for historically under-represented populations in the state's farming community, (2) reviewing the effectiveness of programs provided by the state, and (3) review programs administered in other states.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 6566
The original draft of the bill charged the task force to study issues relating to farmland access for “first-time” farmers, and, in part, requires the speaker of the House of Representatives to appoint two members to the task force who are beginning farmers. Testimony shared with the committee indicated that the term used by the industry for “first-time farmer” (any farmer who has farmed for less than ten years) is “new and beginning farmers.” Additionally, testimony shared with the committee recommended adding to the task force, a member who is an
existing farmer producing in the state for more than ten years. Substitute language charges the task force to study such issues as they relate to “new and beginning” farmers, and requires the speaker of the House of Representatives to appoint one member who is a beginning farmer and one who has been a farmer for over ten years.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Robert Chang, Owner, Echo Farm: Shared personal testimony as a beginning farmer in Woodstock, Connecticut. Although able to purchase a small farm in the state, the search was a two year process that included searching for landing in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Eastern New York. Beginning farmers with limited resources and capital will find it extremely difficult to establish a farm in Connecticut.

Chelsea Gazillo, Director, Working Lands Alliance (WLA): WLA provides examples from the following series of reports showing the values and issues facing Connecticut’s future farmers: (1) a 2017 report from the University of Connecticut shows the state’s agricultural sector is responsible for 21,696 jobs and an economic output of approximately $4 billion, (2) a 2014 report by American Farmland Trust states that “92% of Connecticut’s 1,892 senior farmers do not have a young (under 45) farm operator working with them” suggesting that the future of many farms are uncertain, (3) a 2018 report by the National Young Farmers Coalition states “the biggest issue facing young and beginning farmers in our country is access to land tenure,” and (5) the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports that the average price per acre of farm land is $11,200 – double the price of farmland in New England. Although the state has done a great job in protecting Connecticut’s farming community, through the Farmland Preservation Program and FarmLink program, more needs to be done to create an environment in which young farmworkers, managers, and aspiring farmers can become principal operators of their own farm business. WLA requests the bill be amended to include an existing farmer who has been a producer in the state for more than ten years.

Bryan Hurlburt, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association (CFBA): According to the 2012 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture, Connecticut had the one of the largest increases in new and starting farmers. However, there is still more than can be done to encourage and provide support for new farmers. CFBA provides a web address to data provided by the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) in regards to new farmers. CFBA requests the bill be amended to (1) include a member from the USDA to the task force, and (2) use the term “new and beginning farmers” in lieu of “first-time farmer.”

Jiff Martin: Shared personal testimony as a former State Director with the American Farmland Trust and as an Extension Educator with the University of Connecticut’s College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. The most significant structural barrier for beginning farmers is access to farmland. This bill is important because of, and the state must consider, the following: (1) the state needs new farmers, (2) farm seekers can’t find
productive farmland, (3) Connecticut farmland has become unaffordable, (4) the uncertainty of farmland tenure makes it difficult to grow a farm business, (5) barriers to land ownership are even higher for farmers of color, (6) protected farmland is not available to new farmers, (7) Connecticut has been a leader in policies to ensure agriculture remains a vital part of the state’s economy.

**Susan Mitchell, Owner/Operator, Cloverleigh Farm:** Shared personal testimony as a diversified certified organic vegetable farmer in Mansfield, Connecticut and as a co-founder of New Connecticut Farmer Alliance. Due to insecure leasing agreements, Cloverleigh Farm has moved three times in five years and cannot find affordable farmland that would support vegetable production and the needs of an expanding business. Connecticut’s current protection of farmland has not made the acreage affordable or accessible. The program has only protected typically larger parcels in the two hundred to five hundred acre size and do not permit partition into smaller sizes with structures on the property. The accepted value of one protected acre of farmland in Connecticut is $4,000; a hundred acre farm is $400,000 without the any structures on the land.

**Will O’Meara, Assistant Farm Manager, Waldingfield Farm:** Shared personal testimony of a beginning farming in Washington, Connecticut and as the treasurer of the New Connecticut Farmer Alliance. Although having studied Sustainable Food and Farming, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Massachusetts, the cost and access to affordable land is difficult. The rising cost of land in combination with student debt limits the aspirations of those who wish to operate their own farm.

**Shannon Raider:** Shared personal testimony as a “farmer in hiatus,” and agricultural educator/Farm to School advocate for the University of Connecticut Extension. After farming for sixteen years, other employment was needed due to the lack of affordable land and opportunities in Connecticut. Uncertain land tenure and weak leases has contributed to the unsustainability of owning a farm business.

**Kerry Taylor, Owner, Provider Farm:** Shared personal testimony as a beginning farmer in Salem, Connecticut. Purchasing land in Connecticut for agricultural use is difficult. While demand for product is strong, the absence of a long term land tenure places the farm in “endangered status.”

**Yoko Takemura:** Shared personal testimony as an operator of a certified organic vegetable farm in Putnam, Connecticut. Although extremely lucky to have found raw land that did not have any infrastructure or driveway, finding a mortgage lender was very difficult. Most new farmers will grow on small parcels of land; therefore, land access for new farmers does not necessarily require huge swaths of land.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed.

**Reported by:** Steve Smith / Ussawin R. Bumpen   **Date:** 04/11/2019