Dear Co-Chairs Osten and Walker; Vice-Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan; Ranking Members Miner and France, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of Governor Lamont's budget proposal for Fiscal Years 2022-2023 concerning the CT Department of Agriculture.

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

Governor Ned Lamont's proposed budget addresses several of WLA's 2021 policy priorities and makes a strong investment in promoting a healthy agricultural sector for all of Connecticut's residents. WLA was pleased to see the Governor has continued to fund and invest in the Department of Agriculture. A stand-alone Department of Agriculture remains one of the Working Lands Alliance'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 agency's consistent funding reinforces the administration and state's commitment to Connecticut’s agricultural sector.

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

- **Dairy Farm – Agriculture Sustainability Account** – The Governors continued commitment to our struggling dairy industry. This vital funding will help offset the higher production cost and any future market disruptions to the dairy industry.

- **WIC Coupon Program for Fresh Produce** – 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