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New CT Farmer Alliance

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University of Connecticut

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Cushman Farm

Latha Swamy
City of New Haven Food System
Policy Division

Keith Stechschulte
Farm Credit East

STAFF

Chelsea Gazillo - Director
cgazillo@farmland.org

Armando Paolino - Lobbyist

Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement
H.B. 6621 Education Committee
Public Hearing March 17, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. McCrory and Rep. Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Sen. Daugherty Abrams and Rep. Barry, Ranking members Sen. Berthel and Rep. McCarty and esteemed members of the Education Committee.

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.B. 6621 Sec.3 – An Act Concerning Certain Additions and Revisions to the Education Statutes.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I am American Farmland Trust's New England Policy Manager. In Connecticut, I direct the Working Lands Alliance, 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 Connecticut 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 both about saving the state's working farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for Connecticut's farmers.

Connecticut's agricultural industry has a \$5.2 billion impact on the state's economy and supports 29,163 jobs. CT's public schools are major food buyers. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, child food insecurity has increased significantly due to increased rates of poverty stemming from job loss. [Feeding America](#) estimated that between 24 – 30 percent of CT children are food insecure, as of October 2020.¹ The CT Grown for CT Kids bill will strengthen the connection between communities with high rates of food insecurity by providing healthy, affordable, and nutritious food from local agricultural producers. H.B. 6621 will also change food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care sites to inspire CT kids to learn more about how and where their food is produced.

In 2020, Working Lands Alliance was proud to participate in the Governor's Council on Climate Change -Working and Natural Lands – Ag./Soils Working Group. One of our sub-group recommendations was to increase the amount of farm to school opportunities in the state. This recommendation can be found on page 51 of our sub-committees [final report](#).

A CT Grown for CT Kids grant program will create more local markets for CT agriculture producers including new and beginning farmers. According to a 2017 report released by National Young Farmers Coalition, emerging farmers rely heavily on a single crop (predominantly vegetables) as their highest revenue and, although young farmers are diversifying their operations, many still depend on a

¹ https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf



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single enterprise to pay the bills (pg. 26, [Building a Future with Farmers](#), National Young Farmers Coalition).

Finally, Working Lands Alliance is a project of American Farmland Trust. AFT has led Farm to School efforts in New York, successfully advocating for and passing legislation that established a New York Farm to School Incentive Program. As such, AFT's New York Policy Manager, Samantha Levy, also drafted testimony in support of H.B. 6621 and we encourage the committee to read her testimony outlining the success of the NY Farm to School Grant Program and Incentive Program.

We strongly urge the CT General Assembly to pass this important provision that is the first step is creating a robust farm to institution sector in CT. This provision will promote climate change resiliency, strengthen local food systems including CT's agricultural sector, and promote the health of children across the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony supporting H.B. 6621. Please contact me if you have any questions.

With sincere regards,

Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands Alliance