

# Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6385

AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCEMENTS TO CERTAIN AGRICULTURAL  
**Title:** PROGRAMS.

**Vote Date:** 2/26/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** February 10, 2021

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Sen. Catherine A. Osten, 19th Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

The Department of Agriculture (DOAG) requests enhancements to various agricultural programs. Changes include adding product to the Farmers Nutrition Program, update to "CT Grown" program, consumer protection at egg stands, fees and citations.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Byan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture**

HB 6385 Sections 1 and 2 expands the definition of "fresh produce" to include chicken and eggs under the Farmers Market Nutrition program that WIC and Seniors are eligible to participate in. The expanded definition allows an additional source of protein available to program participants and increases markets for farmers.

HB 63885 Section 3 simplifies and harmonizes "CT Grown" language for commonality across all marketing efforts.

HB 6385 Section 4 increases fines to \$50 for first offense and \$200 for each additional offense for violation of "CT Grown" labeling.

HB 6385 Section 5 creates consumer protection at egg stands requiring eggs kept at 45 degrees or less, unadulterated and labeled. This is a standard at traditional farmers markets and does not burden the farmer.

HB 6385 Section 6 removes the Class D felony for improper seed labeling and leaves the monetary fine intact.

HB 6385 Section 7 requests Commissioners designees to issue citations under CGS 51-164n. Additional changes are required for this to occur. The Commissioner's powers under CGS 22-4c need to be updated, and second update to CGS 51-164n to correctly list the statutes that DOAG can issue citations. DOAG requests the submitted bill language to issue citations within the purview of DOAG.

If the submitted language is not approved, DOAG will continue to use the civil penalty method for enforcement. The current process is time consuming and burdensome. Current process is rarely used as it involved a hearing and if a civil penalty, the Attorney General's office gets involved bringing the case to superior court.

HB6385 Section 8 increases check booklet for the Farmers Nutrition Program for WIC (currently \$15) and Seniors (currently \$18) to \$20. This is likely to increase the participation rated for the check booklets.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

##### **Susan Provost, Executive Director, CT Greenhouse Growers Association**

CT Greenhouse Growers Association (CGGA) supports HB6385. CGGA supports the changes and enforcement of "CT Grown" products labeling, as it used to "denigrate CT agriculture" by mis-labeling less expensive, non-native products.

The additions of chicken and eggs to the Farmers Market Nutrition program is beneficial for those members who raise chickens and produce eggs and provides protein nutritional value to those on WIC and seniors' programs.

##### **Representative Mushinsky**

Request to Amend HB6385:

DOAG requests expansion of rabbit farming for meat in HB6385. If the state chooses to expand rabbit farming, the state must plan to address rabbit hemorrhagic disease spreading west to east across the country. DOAG and DEEP should be involved to create a plan to deal with this fatal disease. There is a vaccine, supply is limited, and the cost is high for domestic rabbits.

Amend the bill to require DOAG and DEEP to prepare a plan to deal with rabbit hemorrhagic disease.

##### **Bonnie E. Burr, Assistant Director, UCONN CT Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory**

CT Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (CVMDL) provides further information to amend HB6385. Rabbit hemorrhagic disease cannot spread from rabbit to humans. Transmission of the virus between rabbits can spread via droppings or blood. The virus survives in

carcasses, food, water, and contaminated materials and is easily spreadable. The CVMDL provides disease surveillance for other diseases in addition to rabbit hemorrhagic disease in support of state agencies, federal agencies, farmers and others to monitor Connecticut's environment.

**Mary Ellen Crawford**

Request to Amend HB6385. Requests additional language to HB6385 "to include a study and preparation for the arrive of rabbit hemorrhagic disease. Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is extremely deadly to both native and domestic rabbit breeds. Native species are prey for several animals up the food chain and the decimation of local rabbit populations will have a profound effect on Connecticut's ecology.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None

**Reported by: Steve Smith**

**Date: 3/11/2021**