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Amanda Freund
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CowPots

John Guskowski
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Eric Hammerling
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Terry Jones
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Joan Nichols
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Appropriations Committee Public Hearing March 19, 2022 RE: S.B. 36 -- An Act Concerning Agriculture Development and Innovation

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Osten and Rep. Walker, Vice-Chairs Sen. Harley and Rep. Dathan, Ranking Members Sen. Miner and Rep. France, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee:

Working Lands Alliance appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony ***in opposition*** to S.B. 36 - An Act Concerning Funding for the Farm Viability Grant Program.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I am American Farmland Trust's New England Policy Director. I also lead the CT 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, CT Forest and Park Association, New CT Farmer Alliance, City of New Haven Food Policy Division, CT Land Conservation Council, and the CT Farm Bureau Association, among 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. We are the voice of farmland protection in Connecticut.

We appreciate the intent of S.B. 36 and agree that state funding for hydroponic indoor growing operations will be critical to the state's efforts to fight climate change and increase food security in our urban communities. However, there currently is nothing in state statute that precludes hydroponic farms from applying to the program. Connecticut State Statute reads:

"Sec. 22-26j. Farm viability matching grant program. Eligibility. Purposes. The Department of Agriculture shall establish and administer a farm viability matching grant program to any agricultural not-for-profit organization, municipality, group of municipalities, regional council of governments organized under the provisions of sections 4-124i to 4-124p, inclusive, or group of municipalities that have established a regional interlocal agreement pursuant to sections 7-339a to 7-339l, inclusive, to further agricultural viability. Such grants may be used for the following purposes: **(1) Local capital projects that foster agricultural viability, including, but not limited to, processing facilities and farmers' markets;** (2) the development and implementation of agriculturally friendly land use regulations and local farmland protection strategies that sustain and promote local agriculture; (3) the development of new marketing programs and venues through or in which a majority of products sold are grown in the state; and (4) the development and



implementation of programs and services that promote farm and farmland access and transfer of such farms."

If passed, this legislation would be duplicative as the CT Department of Agriculture's Farm Viability Grant Program considers hydroponic farms as local capital projects that foster agricultural viability.

Working Lands Alliance sincerely appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony ***in opposition*** to S.B. 36 -- An Act Concerning Funding for the Farm Viability Grant Program.

Please feel free to reach out to me at cgazillo@farmland.org if you have any further questions.

With sincere regards,

Chelsea Gazillo
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