

Environment Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5295

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION.

Vote Date: 3/28/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/7/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To repeal, create, restructure, reconstitute and modify sections of the Department of Agriculture and the Governor's Council on Agricultural Development.

Substitute language- LCO 4067

Added last section regarding a working group to study centralized online dog licensure, remove rabbit processing section, remove egg labeling section, remove Ct. Grown License Plate Section.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture

Section 1 of this bill includes "long lines" in the definition of aquaculture. This is an update to reflect current aquaculture practices. Long lines are currently used in Long Island Sound for aquaculture production of kelp and the inclusion of long line gear type technology in the definition ensures it is considered aquaculture under existing statutes.

Section 2 of this bill would reconstitute and restructure the Governor's Council on Agricultural Development to the "Governor's Council on Agricultural Innovation." This proposal redefines the goals of the council, restructures the appointments of the members, and outlines new goals and metrics for the council. Changes include modifying leadership of the Council and the charge of the council would be to increase agriculture in Connecticut by developing innovative market opportunities. Because of the following discussions with industry members, such as Connecticut Farm Bureau, we would ask for the following revisions to this concept. • Revise the name of the council to "Governor's Council on Agricultural

Development and Innovation” • In subsection (c), any vacancy in the membership of the council shall be filled by the Chair and co-chairs of the council.

Section 3 of this bill allows for the subdivision of PDR (Purchase of Development Rights) properties in future PDR properties, as approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture. After discussing the proposal with various agricultural stakeholders, I respectfully request that this section be removed from the bill.

Section 4 creates a consumer protection provision for those who purchase chicken eggs from farms. Eggs would need to be clean, stored at a temperature forty-five degrees or less, (for example, in a cooler), unadulterated, and labeled. There was concern last year that cleaning the eggs would be cumbersome to the farmers, however, we have clarified that clean simply means free of dirt and debris and that no additional measures are necessary

Section 5 of this bill would allow for the processing of rabbits for consumption. DoAg supports the ability for farmers to engage in direct sales to household consumers, restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, and retail food establishments. As consumers increase their interest and awareness of locally raised and produced foods, this proposal would create the opportunity for them to purchase locally raised rabbit meat.

Section 6 of this bill would create a “CT-Grown” license plate to support and promote Connecticut agriculture. In 2020, the Department of Agriculture partnered with Miranda Creative to launch a full service marketing campaign, with the goal of shaping and identifying an overall marketing approach for the Connecticut Grown Brand and Connecticut’s agricultural industry.

Section 7 would repeal the Interagency Aquaculture Coordinating Committee, which has not been active in a number of years, and the Aquaculture Advisory Council which was never seated.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Joan Nichols, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau

The Connecticut Farm Bureau supports the bill but wishes to focus on Section 2 and Section 3 of the bill.

Section 2. The Connecticut Farm Bureau supports reinvigorating the Council and suggests it should be maintained as an independent advisory council and not reconfigured for administrative purposes under the state agency. We also support the proposed amendments allowing for the broader expansion of the council.

Section 3. Would make significant and fundamental changes to the potential subdivision of future agricultural land easements. Should the agency pursue this in the future we would support a study and task force to explore the potential for future subdivision in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board, farmers, farmland owners, funding partners and stakeholders.

Chelsea Gazillo, Director, Working Lands Alliance

Updating the Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development is long overdue and supported by the Working Lands Alliance. This is a critical advisory board to the Ct. Department of Agriculture concerning the development, diversification, and promotion of agricultural products, programs and enterprises in the state. We conditionally support Section 2, oppose Section 3 and support Section 6. Our opposition to Section 3 is because the potential subdivision of future land easements held by DOAG is a significant change to the program. We would support a task force to study and research best practices regarding the future subdivision of agricultural easements.

Susan Pronovost, Executive Director, Ct. Greenhouse Growers Association

The Ct. Greenhouse Growers Association represents the interests of more than 200 family-owned farms and greenhouses. We endorse the spirit of this legislation. The inclusion of The University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment station will foster dynamic leadership within the council. The mission and activities of the proposed Council for Agricultural Development and Innovation will strategize market opportunity, advance career pathways, include urban agriculture and promote the Connecticut Grown Brand. We request that one member be appointed by the minority leader of the Senate (who shall be from the green industry) and one member appointed by the majority leader of the Senate (who shall be from the green industry).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Kathleen Doherty, Conservation Manager, Connecticut Farmland Trust

We have been preserving farmland since 2002 and oppose section 3 of the bill. Subdividing a farm is not a one-size-fits-all solution and should not be done lightly. More research is needed before changing the Farmland Preservation Program

Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director, Ct. Votes for Animals

We strongly request the removal of Section 5 regarding the promotion of rabbits for food consumption. This would result in thousands of rabbits being slaughtered in Connecticut with the Department of Agriculture promoting a factory like farming program to kill rabbits. Where is the protective programs for the treatment of animals in this program. The Commerce Committees identical provision in HB 5263 received more than 100 statements opposed to the initiative. The Department of Agriculture should be promoting David Lehman's Future Meat, one of two cell-grown meat companies interested in expanding in Connecticut.

Annie Hornish, Senior State Director, The Humane Society of the United States

Connecticut already has cruel bird factory farms should we extend such obscene cruelty to another species. There is no public demand for rabbit meat and DOAG is attempting to create regulations for that product. I light of the emerging viral threats that jump the species barrier from humans to animals we should be promoting plant-based markets as a more diverse, safe and dependable protein source.

Andrea Dobras, Board Chair, Ct. Votes for Animals

Rabbits are the third most popular family pet after dogs and cats. This bill wishes to establish factory like farming for rabbits as food consumption. Factory faring is dangerous on our environment, health and planet. Connecticut is taking a step backward with this bill.

Christine Kaminski, CT. Votes for Animal Volunteer

As a voter and someone who cares about animals I do not want to see my tax dollars promoting the killing of rabbits. There is a fatal and highly transmissible disease associated with wild and domestic rabbits. Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV), viruses like Covid-19 jumping species barrier and cosmetic companies no longer testing on rabbits are just a few of the reasons not to allow this to pass.

Laura Simon, President, Ct. Wildlife Rehabilitators

We oppose encouraging the growth of confinement farming of rabbits for food. Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is prevalent in the western part of the United States and is making its way to the east coast. This virus is transmissible via oral, nasal and conjunctival routes and highly resistant to hot and cold temperatures and is fatal to wild and domestic rabbits.

Over 50 other people submitted testimony in opposition to the bill particularly the authorization of rabbit processing facilities in the state.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: April 4, 2022