

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6725

AN ACT REVISING CERTAIN FARMING AND AQUACULTURE PROGRAMS
Title: OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

Vote Date: March 24, 2023

Vote Action: JFS to the floor

PH Date: 2/27/2023

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:

Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To revise farming and aquaculture programs of the Department of Agriculture

JFS Language:

LCO: 6254: Deleted reference to "federal" in Section 1 and made clarifying changes concerning CT- Grown provision

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Agriculture:

Commissioner Hurlburt testified in support and gave a summary of each section of the bill and how they update Department of Agriculture programs.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Chelsea Gazillo, New England Policy Manager, American Farmland Trust:

Ms. Galillo testified on behalf of Working Lands Alliance and supporting the bill, but we oppose changes to the CT Farmland Preservation Program as outlined in Section 5, changes to the CT Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency Grant Program as outlined in Section 1 and remove the project cap of \$20,000.

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, CT Forest Park Association:

Mr. Hammerling testified that his organization supports the bill but has the same concerns as Working Lands Alliance expressed in their testimony.

Joan Nichols, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association:

Ms. Nichols submitted testimony in support of Sections 1 thru 4 and Sections 6 thru 11 but were in opposition to Section 5. Section 5 makes changes to the Farmland Preservation Program leaving uncertainty as to how this will affect future agricultural easements.

Beth Gnomes, Owner, Stonington Shellfish Farm:

Ms. Gnomes testified that the state's Commissioner of Agriculture reconsider the minimum market size for oysters. Currently it is illegal to harvest farmed oysters for sale unless they meet the minimum three inches. Rhode Island, Virginia, New York, New Jersey and Delaware have no minimum and Maryland only has a minimum size of two inches. Massachusetts only has a minimum of two and a half inches. The smaller farms are facing difficulties and it is hard to be competitive with all the regulations.

Amy Blaymore Patterson, Executive Director, CT Land Conservation Council:

Ms. Blaymore and her organization offered the following comments regarding a few sections so of concern as raised in testimony of the Working Lands Alliance presented by Chelsea Gazillo, its program director.

Section 1. We recommend removing the word "federal" from the language in Section 1 which would limit the combination of state and federal funds to 90% of a project cost. This cap may have the effect of penalizing farmers who are able to leverage federal matching funds to help fully fund a project.

Section 5. Considering significant questions raised by members of the agricultural community, we suggest that further study is warranted before amending the statute to allow for future subdivision of agricultural conservation easements. Issues to be addressed include the circumstances under which the provision would be permitted, the impacts on appraisals and easement enforcement, benefits to current and future landowners and the administrative efficiencies realized by the agency.

Steve Plant supports the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Robin Chesmer, Partner, Graywall Farms:

Ms. Chesmer is opposed to the bill because the changes will open the door for subdivision of PDR (Purchase of Development Rights) without any guidelines or guardrails. During my two-year tenure as chairperson of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board I repeatedly requested information from the Department of Agriculture regarding language changes but were not consulted or asked to advise.

Danielle Franks and Linda Sisson submitted testimony in opposition.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: March 23,2023

