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New CT Farmer Alliance

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Terry Jones
Jones Family Farms

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Jim Smith
Cushman Farm

Latha Swamy
City of New Haven Food System
Policy Division

STAFF

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Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement Environment Committee *In support of H.B. 6483* Public Hearing January 30, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, Vice-Chairs Sen. Hochadel and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Harding and Rep. Callahan, and esteemed members of the Environment Committee:

Working Lands Alliance appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony *in support* of H.B. 6483 – An Act Concerning the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program.

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 the state's farmland. WLA includes farmers and such organizations as CT Farmland Trust, CT 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 about saving the state's working farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and prosperous future for Connecticut's farmers.

Since 1998, the OSWA program has leveraged millions of matching municipal, federal and private dollars resulting in funding for 600 plus projects protecting over 38,000 acres of Connecticut land in both rural and urban communities. Many of these projects have helped advance farmland preservation efforts, created healthy food access opportunities for low-income individuals, supported municipal efforts in climate change mitigation and promoted the ability of land trusts, towns, and water companies to continue to plan for and pursue high caliber conservation projects throughout the state.

Thanks to the OSWA program, third generation farm owners like Marshall and Lynn Epstein of Rosedale Farms in Simsbury, CT were able to work with the Simsbury Land Trust and leverage USDA-NRCS funds to protect their farm in perpetuity. In 2004, Marshall and Lynn would have earned more money selling their farm to a developer but chose to instead protect their agricultural land and preserve its benefit to their community. Today, Rosedale's has been able to evolve with the needs of their customers. The farm started as a dairy farm in 1920, the cows are now gone, but in their place, Rosedale's now grows an array of fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers. It also has a vineyard, bakery, CSA program, and farm-to-table dinners; and it serves as a wedding venue in the area. The farmland provides valuable public access to the Farmington River. Below is a photo of Rosedale Farm in the fall season.



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For the state of Connecticut to build a zero-carbon future and meet the goals outlined in the GC3 Phase One Report, we must be prepared to take bold and innovative actions. The state has an immense opportunity to utilize our working lands as a tool to mitigate climate change. The OSWA program is a key component to helping us protect our working lands that can sequester and store carbon, recharge groundwater, prevent flooding, and allow habitat and agriculture to adapt to climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony supporting H.B. 6483, an act that if passed will continue farms both urban and rural for future generations to enjoy the CT Grown Brand. Please contact me if you have any questions about farmland protection or this testimony.

With sincere regards,

Chelsea Gazillo
Working Lands Alliance



Rosedale Farm, Simsbury, CT Photo Credit: Working Lands Alliance