

Questions for Department of Agriculture Commissioner Nominee

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Agriculture Commissioner (CGS §§ [22-3](#), [22-4](#) & [22-6](#))

The Department of Agriculture (DoAg) commissioner must encourage and promote the development of agriculture, investigate practical methods of husbandry, and publish (1) information and statistics about agriculture and animal industries and interests and (2) bulletins in cooperation with the University of Connecticut concerning the cost of producing farm products. The commissioner must also (1) obtain an inventory of state agricultural land, (2) establish criteria for designating land of which the state could acquire development rights, and (3) help municipalities identify agricultural lands worthy of preservation. Additionally, the commissioner must review proposed capital projects that would convert at least 25 acres of prime farmland, or at least one acre of shellfish grounds, to a nonagricultural use and file statements with the Bond Commission as necessary.

Questions for the Nominee

Agriculture

1. The 2022 budget implementer ([PA 22-118](#), §§ 145-146) expanded the state's farmland restoration program's purposes to include climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices beginning October 1, 2022. DoAg administers this grant program. How will the program expansion benefit farmers? Has the department fully implemented these program changes?
2. What is DoAg doing to encourage new and beginning farmers to carry on the state's agricultural traditions and increase agriculture's contributions to the state economy? Is the Farm Link Program, which matches farmers with available farmland, successful?
3. Are Connecticut dairy farms viable and competitive with those in other regions? What can DoAg do to help dairy farmers keep their businesses viable?

4. How would you characterize the current state of farmland preservation in Connecticut? How can the state further farmland preservation?
5. DoAg is authorized to enforce the federal Food Safety Modernization Act's produce safety rule, which sets standards for growing, harvesting, and packing produce intended for human consumption. What steps has DoAg taken to enforce the produce safety rule?

Animals

1. [PA 22-54](#), § 6, required the DoAg commissioner to convene a working group with the Connecticut Town Clerks Association to develop a plan for a statewide online dog licensing portal. How would this impact municipalities? What recommendations came from the working group?
2. DoAg is responsible for enforcing laws related to domestic animals. How does the department handle the disposition of biting or attacking dogs? How long do administrative proceedings take for disposal or restraint orders? What can be done to shorten the process while ensuring due process for animal owners?
3. DoAg collaborates with the Department of Correction to operate a facility at the York Correctional Facility to care for large animals seized in animal cruelty cases. How successful is this facility at rehabilitating the abused animals?

Aquaculture

1. Describe the state of Connecticut's aquaculture industry (e.g., shellfish, kelp, etc.).
2. DoAg shares responsibility for aquaculture in Connecticut with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. How well do the departments work together and communicate on shellfish issues?
3. Several years ago DoAg revised shellfish bed lease terms, to which some in the industry took exception. Describe any issues or concerns with the leases and DoAg's current relationship with the industry.

General Questions

1. What are the greatest operational challenges the department currently experiences?
2. Looking forward, what are your priorities for the department?

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