

# Legislative Program Review and Investigation Committee

## Connecticut General Assembly

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## SCOPE OF STUDY

### Department of Agriculture: Farmland Preservation Program

#### FOCUS

The study will focus on the effectiveness of Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) in protecting agricultural lands for current and future farming and food production. Employing a results-based accountability approach, the study will assess how well the program is meeting its statutory purpose of preserving prime farmland.<sup>1</sup> The contribution lands obtained through the program make to state goals for agricultural production will also be determined.

#### BACKGROUND

Over time, population growth and accompanying commercial and residential development have created logistical and economic challenges for farming in Connecticut. Recognizing agricultural land is one of the state's greatest natural resources, the legislature established a program in 1978 to preserve farmland. Now called the Farmland Preservation Program, its objective is to procure and preserve a base for in-state agricultural production to help promote the well-being of the state's citizens. Under the program, the Department of Agriculture can, after evaluating certain factors, purchase the development rights of existing farmland, while allowing landholders to retain ownership and continue operating farm businesses.

The department's current working goal for the Farmland Preservation Program is to protect 130,000 acres of the state's prime farmland, of which 85,000 acres will be dedicated to cropland. Since its implementation, the program has met roughly 30 percent of this goal by obtaining the development rights to 38,025 acres on 290 farms.

#### AREAS OF ANALYSIS

- I) Develop an RBA framework for Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program that identifies:
  - A) Desired result(s) the program contributes to
  - B) Its main contribution to the desired result(s)
  - C) Main partners, public and private, who work together toward achieving the desired result(s)
  - D) Possible key indicators for tracking state progress in achieving the desired results
  - E) Core performance measures for the program in terms of outcomes for those served

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<sup>1</sup> "Prime farmland" is defined by C.G.S. Sec. 22-26bb(g) as "soils defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as the best suited to producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops."

- II) Describe the Farmland Preservation Program's current structure and operations, including its:
- A) Organization
  - B) Resources (funding, staff)
  - C) Processes (major steps in program implementation)
- III) Collect and analyze data to prepare a program report card that answers the RBA performance questions:
- A) *How much did we do?* – program outputs, such as:
    - 1) Scope and size (e.g., applications processed, total farmland acreage preserved, expenditures/value of land obtained)
  - B) *How well did we do it?* – program efficiency and quality outcomes, such as:
    - 1) Trend in total acreage preserved
    - 2) Timeliness and accuracy of procedures
    - 3) Compliance with relevant program standards and regulatory requirements
    - 4) Overall client satisfaction (if measured)
    - 5) Best practices followed (where established, and in comparison with farmland preservation programs in other states)
    - 6) Adequate coordination and communication among agencies and other stakeholders
  - C) *Is anyone better off?* – program outcomes, such as:
    - 1) Comparisons of actual program end results with anticipated outcomes, national standards, and performance data from other states (if available)
    - 2) Farmland preservation policy and practices meet public's current needs
    - 3) Cost effectiveness in terms of resources expended to obtain the development rights (cost per acre for staff/administration and purchase price)
- IV) Identify data weaknesses (e.g., unavailable, incomplete, poor quality) and establish a data development and research agenda for addressing deficiencies
- V) Develop recommendations for improving program performance and achieving better progress toward desired results for farmland preservation in Connecticut, giving particular attention to no- and low-cost changes that could have a positive impact on outcomes

#### **NOT INCLUDED IN THE STUDY**

The study will not examine farmland preservation efforts of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (e.g., Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants Program). At the same time, the study should complement the efforts of the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development by more narrowly focusing on the effectiveness of the state's Farmland Preservation Program.