



**Working Lands Alliance**  
*A Project of American Farmland Trust*

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## **2011 Legislative Report: Keep Connecticut's Farms in Farming**

### **Victories for Farmland Preservation!**

#### **Bonding for Farmland Protection**

Despite a challenging fiscal climate, Governor Dannel Malloy and members of the General Assembly demonstrated their commitment to farmland preservation by authorizing \$10 million per year in new funding for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. This funding will help maintain momentum for the state's Farmland Preservation Program, which has been able to dramatically increase the pace of farmland protection thanks to sustained and reliable funding in recent years. At current average easement costs, \$10 million will allow the program to protect 2,000 acres per year and continue working toward the statewide goal of 130,000 acres (over 37,000 acres have been protected).

#### **Community Investment Act**

At the urging of WLA and others, state lawmakers enacted revisions to the Community Investment Act (CIA) to restore funding to the Farmland Preservation Program and continue the state's safety net for dairy farms. Public Act 11-48 re-establishes the funding stream to Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program, which, based on 2010 figures, should generate over \$2 million each year to supplement bond funding for the program. It also continues the state's dairy safety net, recognizing that dairy farms generate over \$1 billion in economic impact and support needed agricultural services and infrastructure around the state, in addition to keeping much of Connecticut's landscape open and working.

WLA also worked closely with partners to ensure that funding provided through the CIA, was not diverted for other state budget needs. Under the leadership of Senate President Don Williams, advocates raised awareness of the importance of the CIA and celebrated its success in protecting farmland and open space, preserving historic properties and providing affordable housing. Examples of agricultural and farmland protection projects that have been funded through the CIA can be found on our website, at [www.workinglandsalliance.org](http://www.workinglandsalliance.org).

## **Other WLA Priorities—Still Opportunity for Action**

### **Preservation of State-Owned Farmland**

WLA has made the permanent preservation of more than 1,300 acres of state-owned farmland a high priority. We were disappointed that legislation which would have granted an agricultural conservation easement on over 600 acres of farmland at the Southbury Training School and, in doing so, begun to implement the recommendations of the state's Farmland Preservation Advisory Board, did not pass this legislative session. However, Governor Malloy has indicated a willingness to work with WLA, the Advisory Board, and agency staff to explore protection options on at least some state-owned properties.

### **Community Farms Preservation Program**

Created in 2008, the Community Farm Preservation Program was designed to protect farms in small towns and suburban areas which contribute to community character and local food production, but do not meet the criteria for the state's Farmland Preservation Program. While WLA's efforts to include new funding for this program in this year's legislative bond package were not successful, WLA will continue to work with the CT Department of Agriculture to identify potential funding that could be used to roll out the program on a pilot basis.

## **Other Victories for Connecticut Agriculture**

The following bills are ones that WLA supported and were enacted this legislative session:

### **Governor's Council for Agricultural Development**

H. 5508 re-establishes and modifies the membership of the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development, a council that has been dormant for many years. WLA supported this legislation as a way to identify opportunities to grow Connecticut's \$3.5 billion agricultural economy. Connecticut residents spend an estimated \$13.75 billion on food, less than 1% of which is locally grown. The Council has been charged with identifying obstacles and recommending ways to increase the share of food dollars spent by Connecticut residents on locally grown products to 5% by 2020.

### **Local Agricultural Commissions and Consideration of Agriculture in Town Planning**

H. 5472 explicitly authorizes municipalities to establish town or regional agricultural commissions. Agricultural commissions can be important advocates for local farms and farmers by educating municipal officials, providing guidance about agriculture-related zoning issues, and helping to resolve conflicts around farm operations. The bill also requires municipalities to consider agriculture in local Plans of Conservation and Development and requires land use boards to use the state's broad definition of agriculture when considering the impact of zoning regulations on agriculture.

### **Health License for Farmers Markets**

With the passage of H. 6156, farmers will be granted "portability" of health district licenses. This is important to producers selling at farmers' markets, since they will no longer be required to obtain a license for every town in which they sell their farm products. One license will now suffice, though farmers will still need to notify each town's health district in advance that they will be participating at a farmers market in that community.

### **Transition from 10 Mill Program**

H. 6263 allows an owner of forest land currently enrolled in the state's "10 mill program" to convert to the state's forest preservation program ("490 program") without penalty. Without this legislation, CT landowners who steward more than 14,000 acres of forest and made a 100 year commitment to protect their land would have seen a 20-fold increase in their property taxes.