



#### STEERING COMMITTEE

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New CT Farmer Alliance

Joseph Bonelli  
University of Connecticut

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Paul Elconin  
Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust

Gordon Gibson  
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Eric Hammerling  
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Terry Jones  
Jones Family Farms

Kip Kolesinskas  
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Nathan L'Etoile  
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Elisabeth Moore  
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Joan Nichols  
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Will O'Meara  
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Amy Paterson  
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Shannon Raider-Ginsburg  
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Richard Roberts  
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Jim Smith  
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Commissioner Katie Dykes  
Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection  
79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106

November 8, 2019

Dear Commissioner Dykes,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit public comments on Governor Ned Lamont's Executive Order Number 3 that will strengthen the state's transition to a decarbonized economy and enhance resiliency of our economic, cultural, and natural resources to the impacts of climate change. Our working forest and agricultural lands are essential to this effort, as they have the potential to sequester large amounts of carbon, reduce flood threats, protect water resources, and their products help diversify the economy of Connecticut. The opportunity for increased climate change mitigation and decarbonization, that working lands in Connecticut can provide, must not be overlooked.

#### **Governor's Council on Climate Change**

As part of Executive Order Number 3, the Governor has committed to enhancing and expanding the scope of the Governor's Council on Climate Change. The Malloy administration did a commendable job in outlining how the state can achieve a net zero carbon future. However, in the inception of the initial plan many key stakeholders, including the agricultural community, were not included within the original Council.

Farmers, forest landowners, and agricultural stakeholders have a significant role in implementing climate-smart practices on our working lands that help the state mitigate and adapt. Working Lands Alliance strongly recommends that the GC 3 Working and Natural Lands Working Group includes farmers, land trusts, and agricultural service providers, in addition to the climate scientists, representatives from disadvantaged communities, climate activists, planners and community members already identified for their valuable participation in this effort.

#### **Climate Change and Agriculture**

Working Lands Alliance also recommends that the scope of the GC 3 Working and Natural Working Lands Working Group include evaluation of how to best utilize our working lands to combat climate change. Climate change threatens



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lives, livelihoods, food security, and our economy. It is no longer a distant problem and for farmers there is no more time to waste. However, with support for the continued adoption of climate-smart practices (also called regenerative ag. or soil health practices), agriculture can do its part to cut emissions and begin to pull carbon out of the air and store it. For example, as Dr. Jennifer Moore-Kucera (climate director for American Farmland Trust and soil health expert) recently testified to the U.S. House of Representatives, “If U.S. farmers adopted cover crops on 25% of our cropland and conservation tillage on 100% of tillable acres, we could potentially reduce one quarter of the total U.S. agricultural emissions.” In addition to this eye-opening opportunity, these working lands provide a variety of free or low-cost ecosystem services that enhance resiliency and adaption, including stormwater management, groundwater recharge, and vegetation cover that cools cities — while simultaneously shortening the distance our food travels from farm to the consumer and contribute to our economy and food system.

#### Climate-Smart Agriculture Recommendations

To build a zero-carbon future 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. In 2018 The Nature Conservancy and 21 institutional partners conducted a peer-reviewed study that found investing in natural solutions to mitigating climate change could sequester up to 21% of the current net annual emissions. There is a wide array of agricultural and working land goals we could set and programs we could expand to help achieve this outcome. Therefore, we recommend the Governor’s Council on Climate Change include the following working land programs and goals for consideration:

1. Expand upon successful conservation programs including CT’s farmland preservation and open space conservation programs. Commit to full funding for the Community Investment Act. These programs help protect the working lands economy and support better land use planning.
2. Leverage state-level innovations that offer reductions on crop insurance premiums for cover crop adoption. Significant research data has shown the use of cover crops to increase carbon sequestration in soil.
3. Incentivize farmers to participate in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative – an initiative of the New England and Mid-Atlantic states in the U.S. thus creating an economic opportunity for farmers and benefits for our environment.
4. Support additional research on practices that help address climate change and quantify their impacts to inform farmers and ensure sound public investments.
5. Restore funding for the state’s Farmland Restoration Program, which helps protect our prime and important soils and aids in farm adaption and production.



6. Find new ways to fund climate-smart practices and reward farmers for reducing greenhouse gases.
7. Provide incentives for farmers to reduce and utilize organic wastes from the municipal waste stream.
8. Utilize smart solar siting strategies to prioritize solar development on preferred sites (brownfields, roof-tops, landfills), avoid conversion of our productive farmland and core forests, and incentivize dual-use (co-location) solar on farmland as an opportunity for increased farm viability.
9. Increase the use of Connecticut grown farm and forest products which shortens the distance our food travels from farm and supports the economy and food system.
10. Support a statewide healthy soil program that encourages climate-smart and soil health building practices across our working lands.

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Connecticut is fortunate to have a small but innovative agricultural community that works in “fierce cooperation” to configure programs and policies which will benefit all farmers, our environment, and our economy.

We sincerely encourage the Governor's Council on Climate Change to prioritize the voices of our farmers, forest landowners, and conservation community when shaping policy and programming solutions that utilize the capacity of our working lands, which we have worked tirelessly to protect over the last 30 years, to be a part of the climate solution.

Thank you, again, for giving us the opportunity to submit comments on Governor Ned Lamont's Executive Order Number 3. We look forward to working with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Governor Ned Lamont administration in advancing climate adaptation strategies in the upcoming months.

With sincere regards,

Chelsea Gazillo  
Working Lands Alliance Director  
American Farmland Trust