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New CT Farmer Alliance

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University of Connecticut

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Dina Brewster  
CT NOFA

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Northwest Connecticut Land  
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Land for Good

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Latha Swamy  
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Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement  
HB 6385 Environment Committee  
Public Hearing February 10, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Cohen and Borer, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Slap, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and Members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 6385: An Act Concerning Enhancements to Certain Agricultural Programs.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I am American Farmland Trust's New England Policy Manager. In Connecticut, I direct the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes farmers and such organizations as CT Northeast Organic Farming Association, the CT State Grange, New 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 Connecticut's farmland and ensuring a healthy agricultural sector and a prosperous future for Connecticut's farmers.

Connecticut's agriculture sector has a \$5.2 billion economic impact on the state's economy and supports 29,163 jobs in the state (Farm Credit East, 2020). The State of Connecticut's Department of Agriculture developed the CT Grown program in 1986 to establish a brand for consumers to recognize products grown and produced here in Connecticut. Since the program's inception, the blue and green CT Grown label found at most CT farmers markets, farm stores, and some grocery stores provide transparency for informed consumers. Over the years, the program's integrity has come into question, and many producers have identified the need to strengthen the CT Grown program. This legislation will ensure that products produced in Connecticut are adequately labeled and will benefit Connecticut growers.

According to a 2017 Demographic of Connecticut's Seniors report written by the CT Office of Legislative Research, Connecticut's seniors account for nearly 16% of the total population. Nearly 7% of these seniors live below the poverty line, with an additional 8% of seniors having incomes between 100% to 149% of the threshold (CT Office of Legislative Research, 2017). The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides critical financial assistance for low-income seniors to purchase healthy and affordable produce at the vast number of farmers markets located across the state. A senior who qualifies for the program is given \$15 worth of vouchers to currently use on fresh fruits and vegetables at any CT Grown farmers market across the state. This legislation would expand the



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A Project of American Farmland Trust

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program and allow seniors to use their vouchers on chicken eggs, an essential healthy and low-cost protein source. We want to recommend that the legislature amend this legislation and allow seniors to expend the vouchers on all poultry eggs. As the state's agricultural sector looks at ways to diversity, farmers have started to produce duck eggs and other poultry eggs that should be included as an option for low-income seniors to purchase. The state should not limit the poultry egg options for low-income seniors.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, I urge this committee to support HB 6385. Thank You.

Sincerely,  
Chelsea Gazillo

Working Lands Alliance is a project of American Farmland Trust

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