



A Project of American Farmland Trust

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## Working Lands Alliance Policy Statement H.B. 6441 Environment Committee Public Hearing March 8, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Cohen and Rep. Gresko, Vice-Chairs Sen. Slap and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Miner and Rep. Harding and members of the Environment Committee:

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.B. 6441 – An Act Concerning Climate Change Adaptation, Sec. 3 and Sec. 19 -22.

My name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I am American Farmland Trust's New England Policy Manager. In Connecticut, I direct the Working Lands Alliance, a broad-based, statewide coalition dedicated to preserving Connecticut's farmland. WLA includes farmers and such organizations as CT Farmland Trust, 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 both about saving the state's working farmland and ensuring a prosperous agricultural sector for all of Connecticut's residents.

In 2020, Working Lands Alliance was proud to participate in the Governor's Council on Climate Change -Working and Natural Lands – Ag./Soils Working Group. As such, a few of the recommendations that we collaborated in developing as part of our Working Groups [final report](#) are outlined within this piece of legislation.

Most notably, Sec. 3 of this legislation would allow (but not require) towns and municipalities, to establish a dedicated fund to acquire, preserve, and steward open space and farmland at the municipal level by including a limited buyers conveyance fee program.

Farmland is at the heart of CT's agricultural industry. According to a 2020 study by Farm Credit East, agriculture contributes over \$5 billion in economic input and supports 29,163 jobs in the state.<sup>1</sup> Protecting and investing in CT agriculture's resources is an important piece of sustaining CT's agricultural viability and a diverse economy. The Department of Agriculture has made an essential investment in doing so through its Farmland Preservation Program. To date, the program has protected more than 46,000 acres of farmland on 386 farms.

<sup>1</sup> Farm Credit East, Northeast Economic Engine: Agriculture, Forest Products and Commercial Fishing, 2020



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Municipalities across Connecticut need innovative ways to create options to fund land use and environmental projects, including farmland acquisition and stewardship. This municipal funding option will aid the state's Farmland Preservation Program in reaching its goal of protecting 130,000 acres of farmland. Farms that are protected through Community Farms Preservation Program (CFPP) are required to leverage local funds, and this tool will create another means for local municipalities to authorize funds towards CFPP projects.

This provision will also enable towns to prioritize and invest in farmland that the local community and experts have identified as most important to contributing to the state's efforts to become resilient in the face of climate change. CT's farms are part of CT's green infrastructure that can recharge groundwater, prevent flooding, and mitigate emission; through soil carbon capture, among many other practices that can combat climate change.

Connecticut's natural resources are what make this state such a wonderful place to live, work, recreate, and visit. Giving communities the option to implement a buyer's conveyance fee will allow them to take a more active role in their local lands' conservation, stewardship, and build investment in ecosystem services for future generations. The benefits of these ecosystem services go beyond CT and strengthen our region and global efforts to adapt to climate change.

Working Lands Alliance also supports Sec. 19-22 of HB 6441 that will authorize the Connecticut Green Bank in establishing an Environmental Infrastructure Fund. The funds may be used on structures, facilities, systems, services, and improvement projects related to (A) water, (B) waste and recycling, (C) climate adaptation and resiliency, (D) agriculture, (E) land conservation, (F) parks and recreation, and (G) environmental markets, including, but not limited to, carbon offsets and ecosystem services.

This fund could benefit farmers who want to implement climate smart agriculture practices but lack the funding to do so. Farmers surveyed cited that the barriers to adopting practices linked to climate-smart agriculture included the cost of share/incentive programs, need for free technical assistance and for more peer information sources. If passed, HB 6441 will aid farmers and could influence their likelihood of adopting better practices.<sup>2</sup>

The benefits of compensating farmers to implement climate-smart agricultural practices, including but not limited to implementing healthy soil practices, are far-reaching. From increasing farm productivity, to improving farmland resiliency.

<sup>2</sup> Conservation Technology Information Center, North Central Region SARE, & American Seed Trade Association. 2017. Report of the 2016-17 National Cover Crop Survey. West Lafayette, IN. Available [https://www.ctic.org/files/2017CTIC\\_CoverCropReport-FINAL.pdf](https://www.ctic.org/files/2017CTIC_CoverCropReport-FINAL.pdf)



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However, these benefits extend far beyond agriculture, as healthy soils provide ecosystem services that are essential for all of Connecticut's residents and include such benefits as:

- Increased drought, flood, and heat resilience through improved water infiltration and retention.
- Water quality protection through reduced soil erosion and reduced nutrient and sediment pollution in surface waters and coastal ecosystems.
- Reduced dependence on fertilizer through increased nutrient retention.
- Greater biodiversity and biological activity leading to increased decomposition of pesticides and organic contaminants and reduced pesticide contamination.

In addition to implementing healthy soil practices, these funds could also be used to promote on-farm energy efficiency improvements, water harvesting and storage practices, as well as composting municipal and farm organics, manure management, and infrastructure to support greater food security.

The establishment of an Environmental Infrastructure Fund within Connecticut's Green Bank will advance the adoption of climate smart agricultural practices across the state. With greater state support, as detailed in HB 6441, Connecticut's agricultural community will have increased opportunities to understand and implement these practices – combating climate change, improving Connecticut's water quality and quantity, advancing farmland's resilience to extreme weather, and increasing the profitability of Connecticut's farms. HB 6441 provides an additional tool for the state to work towards building a climate resilient agricultural sector.

The Working Lands Alliance brings a broadly unique viewpoint to this issue based on the comprehensive nature of our organization. We would be happy to answer questions or make any clarifications on this bill, or on these topics more broadly. Please feel free to contact me anytime at [clgazillo@farmland.org](mailto:clgazillo@farmland.org) if you have any further questions regarding HB 6441.

On behalf of the Working Lands Alliance Steering Committee, we urge you to support HB 6441. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Chelsea Gazillo  
Working Lands Alliance