

New Directions for Agricultural Policy in Connecticut

Connecticut Food Policy Council

Northeast Sustainable Agriculture
Working Group

Hartford Food System

Full Report



May 2003

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Jeremy, formerly a professor at the University of Connecticut, served as a member of the Committee during the first half of the project. Jeremy's background in agricultural economics and ability to steer our data gathering processes towards effective ends were much appreciated. Jeremy is now a Professor at the University of Wisconsin.

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For a list of acronyms, please turn to page 5.

Acronyms

CAB	Connecticut Agricultural Business Cluster
CT	Connecticut
CFPC	Connecticut Food Policy Council
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
DAS	Dept. of Administrative Services, State of Connecticut
DECD	Dept. of Economic and Community Development, State of Connecticut
DOA	Dept. of Agriculture*
DOC	Dept. of Corrections, State of Connecticut
DE	Delaware
EAP	Environmental Assistance Program, CT Dept. of Agriculture
FEP	Farm Enhancement Program, CT Dept. of Agriculture
FSA	Farm Service Agency, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture
HFS	Hartford Food System
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
ME	Maine
MD	Maryland
MA	Massachusetts
NESAWG	Northeast Sustainable Agricultural Working Group
NH	New Hampshire
NJ	New Jersey
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture
NY	New York
PA	Pennsylvania
PACE	Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement
PDR	Purchase of Development Rights
RI	Rhode Island
VT	Vermont
WV	West Virginia

*Note: For simplicity sake this report uses DOA to refer to the all of the states' departments where agricultural programs are funded and managed.

State Agriculture Agencies in the Northeast

CT	Department of Agriculture
DE	Department of Agriculture
ME	Department of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources
MD	Department of Agriculture
MA	Department of Food and Agriculture
NH	Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food
NJ	Department of Agriculture
NY	Department of Agriculture and Markets
PA	Department of Agriculture
RI	Division of Agriculture, within Department of Environmental Management
VT	Department of Agriculture
WV	Department of Agriculture



Introduction

This report grew out of a partnership between the Connecticut Food Policy Council's Agricultural Policy Committee (CFPC/CAPC), the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG), and the Hartford Food System (HFS). Each organization was interested in studying agricultural policy and making recommendations that would enhance the region's agriculture.

Although CAPC and HFS' focus was agricultural policy in Connecticut, having an understanding of neighboring states' agricultural programs and policies would strengthen their policy recommendations for Connecticut. To expand the breadth of study, the three organizations formed a partnership to work on a research project that would study agricultural policy in the twelve-state Northeast region that includes West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. In the end, two final reports were created – one for Connecticut and one for the Northeast.

This report is a comprehensive examination of 42 specific policy recommendations with accompanying model programs from other Northeastern states and, in many cases, additional ideas generated through interview responses. As a useful reference point for policy-makers, we have also included an inventory of Connecticut State funded programs, agricultural-related statutes, relevant advisory councils, and publications as of 2002.

Readers with an interest in the Northeast version of this report are encouraged to contact NESAWG for a copy. For more information about this report, contact Jean King, The Parisky Group, 860-232-0641, or e-mail to jeank@pariskygroup.com.

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I. Executive Summary

In order to plan for the future of Connecticut agriculture, we need to take stock of where we are now, how we expect things to change, and what we hope to achieve. The recommendations in this document for agricultural policy in Connecticut are the result of taking inventory of Connecticut's existing policies, examining similar policies in the Northeast region, and constructing a vision of Connecticut agriculture in the future. We believe our recommendations are based on a sound assessment of existing and future challenges to a vital agricultural sector in Connecticut.

New directions are in store for Connecticut agriculture. Based on interviews and research, our analysis points toward **three principal directions:**

- A) *increasing the economic viability of farming;*
- B) *fostering the development and promotion of agricultural markets; and*
- C) *protecting farmland while encouraging conservation and sustainable land use practices.*

There are many different ideas on how to pursue these new directions. For example, to increase the economic viability of farming, suggestions include enhancing access to new technologies, increasing business

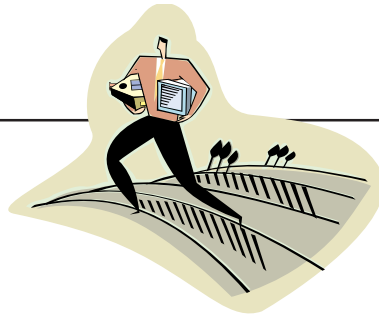
planning assistance, and targeting the special needs of new farmers (e.g. preferential loans and grants). For each new direction, we have provided an *un-prioritized* list of recommendations. To some extent, context and political commitment will determine which of these policy recommendations will evolve into a best fit for Connecticut. The policies presented here are consistent with the direction of Connecticut agriculture, are an accurate reflection of the recommendations of interviewees, and, in many cases, have been successfully applied in other Northeastern states.

Constructing a vision statement for the future of Connecticut agriculture was a crucial step in this analysis in order to define the challenges and opportunities ahead. From this, the investigation deliberately focused on policy recommendations that addressed these anticipated challenges and opportunities. For example, an opportunity in our vision statement centered on Connecticut's unique geographical position along the New York/Boston corridor. As a result, one policy recommendation is to create an agricultural identity for Connecticut and enhance the CT-Grown program—a strategy employed particularly well in New Jersey through their *Jersey Fresh* program. Another example is the challenge in our vision statement of preserving enough farmland to

meet the state's goals of protecting 130,000 acres. Two policy recommendations are to expand Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program by increasing the program's funding and staffing levels while taking advantage of the matching funding available through the Federal Farmland Protection Program.

Although this report presents 42 specific policy recommendations, there are also five fundamental strategies that are necessary to move Connecticut agriculture in a new direction. These strategies emphasize state agency coordination and capacity-building, as well as building enthusiasm and understanding about the contributions of Connecticut agriculture.

In conclusion, the future of Connecticut agriculture depends on a thoughtful and careful planning process with clearly defined objectives. We hope readers will use this document as a tool to design and implement policies that will move Connecticut agriculture successfully through the 21st century and beyond. The future of our state depends on the successful outcome of this process, including the integrity of our land base, our environmental and food security, the livelihoods of several thousand farmers, and a quality of life that all residents of Connecticut currently enjoy.



A Vision for Connecticut Agriculture

In looking to the future, we envision an agriculture that thrives in Connecticut. Our state's farms will produce high quality food and non-food products that will meet a significant share of the needs of Connecticut residents, public institutions, restaurants, and businesses. Connecticut grown agricultural goods will also be readily available and affordable to all Connecticut residents in outlets across the state, including supermarkets, farm stands, farmers' markets, schools, garden stores and nurseries. Our state's agriculture will enjoy a competitive advantage based on its location that sits astride the New York/Boston corridor, one of the largest and most important markets in the world. And Connecticut agriculture will capitalize on the state's comparative advantage in technology and related intellectual property.

In the future, we trust that agriculture in Connecticut will remain multifunctional. Not only will it provide food, fiber, and ornamental products, it will also provide jobs, scenic beauty, and a buffer against sprawl. Our hope is for increased consumer demand that will drive the production and marketing of Connecticut-grown products, creating an aggressive marketplace that strengthens both local and state economies.

As stewards of the land, more Connecticut farmers will seek to conserve and enhance their natural resource base while protecting the surrounding environment. Connecticut's agricultural operations will become more economically viable, their numbers throughout the state will increase, and farm profits will grow. From farm hand to farm owner, we look forward to an agricultural sector that provides an income that supports a comfortable livelihood for farm families. We also envision more young farmers that will enter agricultural livelihoods, lowering the average age of Connecticut farmers.

Finally, we predict that leaders, policy-makers, and communities will come to value the contribution of agriculture to the vitality of urban and agricultural communities. All of Connecticut's towns will have farmland preservation plans and a range of "farm-friendly" policies. Even the rate of farmland preservation will begin to exceed the rate of farmland loss such that Connecticut will make steady progress toward its original goal of preserving at least 130,000 acres. As a general rule, we foresee municipalities and state government agencies that will collaborate in support of laws, regulations, and practices that promote agriculture's growth, protect the environment, conserve farm resources, and recognize the unique and diverse characteristics of Connecticut agriculture.



II. Summary of Policy Recommendations

Based on this research effort, the following policy recommendations are presented as a means to improve the status of agriculture in Connecticut. Policy recommendations are based on these considerations: the common opinions of stakeholders; evidence from model programs in other states; and policy ideas that hold promise for replication in the context of challenges and opportunities facing Connecticut agriculture.

The recommendations are extensive (there are 42 specific recommendations). However, it is understood that not all of these recommendations can occur simultaneously. Rather, the policy recommendations are presented as a starting point for policy-makers to stimulate discussion, generate strategies, and hopefully lead to a more fully developed change in policy that will benefit the future of agriculture in Connecticut. To accomplish this task, policy-makers will need to acknowledge and commit to five fundamental strategies.

Strategy #1

Improve coordination on agricultural policy and programs between CT State agencies, encouraging collaboration for agricultural promotion and development.

Strategy #2

Enhance the capacity of CT's Department of Agriculture through increased funding, staffing, and overall strengthening for improved program effectiveness.

Strategy #3

Build enthusiasm among stakeholders and policy-makers while developing consumer awareness and appreciation for CT agriculture.

Strategy #4

Exploit Connecticut's unique potential to develop a market for CT-Grown agriculture directed toward buyers along the New York/Boston corridor.

Strategy #5

Recognize the mutual importance of promoting agricultural economic viability and farmland preservation for the development of CT agriculture.



Specific Policy Recommendations

A. Economic Viability

Profitability in the agricultural sector depends on farmers exercising a certain competency in business management. But in support of farmers, a variety of programs and policies need to be in place that provides access to technical and financial resources while promoting agricultural goals in the state. The recommendations in this category present strategies related to tax laws, business assistance programs, programs for diversification and enhancement, and other grant and loan efforts.

Recommendations, Economic Viability

- A1) Improve Connecticut's Farm Enhancement Program's (FEP) scope, operation, and participation. Increase FEP's funding, place greater emphasis on business planning assistance, and consider adding elements of farmland preservation as is done in other states' farm viability programs.
- A2) Enhance UConn's, the Department of Agriculture's, and other state agencies' quality of assistance, support, and focus for CT agriculture. Consider creating a comprehensive agricultural economic viability plan.
- A3) Provide more business planning assistance to CT farmers through UConn, the Department of Agriculture, and other state agencies. These groups should work together to provide the small business tools that farmers need to be successful.
- A4) Enhance Connecticut's Agricultural Technology Program. Create grant or loan programs to complement the informational services already provided by the Agricultural Technology Program.
- A5) Establish additional grant and loan programs to enhance the development of CT agriculture.
- A6) Encourage collaboration between state agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Economic and Community Development. Continue to educate policymakers about agricultural enterprises, highlighting how such enterprises are businesses just like any other businesses and deserve to be included in the state's business and economic development grant and loan programs.
- A7) In recognition that many agricultural enterprises are small businesses, support the needs of these small business owners.
- A8) Support and build on the efforts of the Connecticut Agricultural Businesses Cluster (CAB). CAB is an example of many individuals, organizations, and agencies working together on projects to foster the economic viability of CT's agricultural enterprises.
- A9) Create agricultural preference areas or rural economic development zones, officially designated places in which agricultural businesses would be offered particular economic advantages or incentives.

Recommendations, Economic Viability, cont.

- A10) Reinforce efforts to assist new farmers, including special loan programs, specialized extension agents, or other programs that would provide financial, technical, educational, or business planning support.
- A11) Create energy efficiency programs or a special electricity rate for certain farmers, dependant on the type and size of the farm.
- A12) Provide greater support for sustainable farming practices (such as integrated pest management). Increase the number of extension agents with expertise in sustainable farming practices and organic production.
- A13) Increase the number of extension agents who specialize in specific commodities. Also review how the Cooperative Extension System is working, and analyze ways to improve its service to the state's agricultural operations.
- A14) Support and strengthen Public Act 490 (Connecticut General Statutes 12-107). Have municipalities' tax assessors apply PA 490 with consistency and fairness throughout the state.
- A15) Improve coordination on regulatory issues between the Department of Agriculture and other state agencies with regulatory responsibilities, such as the Departments of Labor, Environmental Protection, Health, Consumer Protection, and Revenue. Such regulatory issues may relate to labor, housing for labor, environment, health, food safety, and taxes. The actual impact that regulations have on agricultural businesses should be taken into account.
- A16) Create or modify tax laws so that they are more beneficial to farmers. Examine the laws in other states and consider how they can be applied to Connecticut.

B. Market Development and Promotion

Developing and fostering markets for agricultural products is essential for maintaining the economic viability of an agricultural enterprise. As do other states in the Northeast region, Connecticut addresses the need for market development and promotion with a range of programs. These programs include supporting farmers' markets, providing marketing assistance, creating promotional logos and slogans for state-grown produce, and publishing agricultural directories for retail consumers and wholesale buyers. The recommendations in this category focus on enhancing the capacity of existing programs in Connecticut as well as proposing new strategies for market development.

Recommendations, Market Development and Promotion

- B1) Enhance the CT-Grown Program. Toward this end, provide CT-Grown with greater funding and staff resources. Use the program to create consumer awareness of Connecticut agriculture and to promote regular consumer purchase of Connecticut agricultural products.
- B2) Place a greater priority on providing farmers with assistance in marketing their crops to consumers. Part of this strategy should involve orienting the Department of Agriculture's toward the consumer as well as the farmer.
- B3) Create an agricultural identity for Connecticut.
- B4) Increase the visibility and accessibility of the CT Creative Store.
- B5) Facilitate efforts to link farmers, chefs (restaurants), and consumers.
- B6) Facilitate efforts to create regional buy-local organizations. Such organizations help promote the message of CT-Grown but on a more local level.
- B7) Continue to support the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs.
- B8) Create new marketing programs that encourage state residents to buy state-grown produce.
- B9) Create a branding program that adds value to agricultural products based on their product and food safety qualities. Just as a state-grown brand can be created, a food safety-brand can be created. Incentives can be offered to encourage farm businesses to become involved.
- B10) Increase the development of farmers' markets and ensure that participating farmers sell CT-grown products exclusively.
- B11) Support efforts by farmers to form and operate cooperatives. Cooperatives enable farmers to aggregate supply, making the marketing and selling of this produce supply easier in the face of growing food industry consolidation.
- B12) Facilitate efforts by farmers to increase markets and profitability through the creation of value-added agricultural products. This encouragement can take the form of a Department of Agriculture of other supporting agency business development/grant program or can be provided as more general marketing assistance.
- B13) Encourage and promote the purchase, marketing, and selling of state-grown produce by supermarket chains, either directly from growers or indirectly through food wholesalers who support locally grown produce.
- B14) Encourage, promote, and facilitate the purchase of state-grown produce by state institutions and state-agencies. Potential institutional purchasers include prisons, hospitals, schools, and colleges. Potential state agency purchasers include state departments, such as the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Corrections, and Education.

C. Farmland Preservation, Land Use, and Conservation

In order for agriculture to contribute to Connecticut's rural character and to benefit the state's economy, Connecticut must have a permanent land base available for agricultural use. If there is no viable land to farm, or if the land available is too expensive or degraded, pursuing or sustaining an agricultural enterprise holds little appeal. The recommendations in this category focus on the state's farmland protection, land use, and conservation programs and policies. Model programs from other northeastern states that hold the most promise for replication in CT support these recommendations.

Recommendations, Farmland Preservation, Land Use & Conservation

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>C1) Expand the Farmland Preservation Program so that more land can be preserved. Increase the program's funding and staffing levels to adequately reflect this expansion and the state's farmland preservation goals.</p> | <p>threatened by development but still important, smaller parcels such as many organic farms, and farmland that can contribute to the state's overall food security.</p> | <p>state plan. Include farmland preservation concerns among the issues discussed and considered by state planners. Include farmland preservation sections in the plans that planners write.</p> |
| <p>C2) Consider utilizing additional, alternate means of funding for the state's Farmland Preservation Program.</p> | <p>C6) Reduce restrictions on the types of agricultural operations permitted on state preserved farmland. Regulations and restrictions in any type of program should allow for diversity and for any technological changes that may occur in the future.</p> | <p>C10) Foster local initiatives that increase towns' farm-friendliness. Encourage the creation of town committees that support agriculture, and continue to educate the public about the benefits of farms and what is involved with agricultural enterprises.</p> |
| <p>C3) Take advantage of available federal and other matching funding. Increase funding for the Farmland Preservation Program so that Connecticut can capitalize on matching funds available through the Federal Farmland Protection Program.</p> | <p>C7) Improve communication with landowners so as to inform them about all of Connecticut's farmland preservation tools and options and how they work.</p> | <p>C11) Make more land available for farmers. Create a state policy to rent or lease out state-owned land to state farmers. Provide tax incentives that make it more desirable for landowners to lease their farmland to farmers. Encourage land trusts with farmland to make their land available.</p> |
| <p>C4) Improve integration of farmland preservation with economic viability programs.</p> | <p>C8) Strengthen the state's Farm Link or Land Link system. In addition to supporting New England Land Link, establish a complementary CT Land Link Program.</p> | <p>C12) Minimize the cost-share provided by the farmer to participate in the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Environmental Assistance Program.</p> |
| <p>C5) Consider additional foci and criteria for selecting land through the Farmland Preservation Program. Such alternate foci may be blocks of land that would preserve an agricultural infrastructure, farmland not immediately</p> | <p>C9) Strengthen the state's Plan of Conservation and Development and apply, at the state level, the policies and strategies described in the</p> | |



III. Methodology

Data gathering for this project began in March 2002. After beginning with internet-based research of each state's Department of Agriculture site in the Northeast region as well as websites of agriculture-related organizations (e.g. Farm Bureau, Grange, American Farmland Trust), the project continued with phone interviews of agricultural stakeholders in each state. Sixty-three people were interviewed in the 12-state region. The interview questions were piloted in Connecticut and refined during the two month, June to July interview process. Stakeholders were chosen based on their position in the key categories of people that CAPC, HFS, and NESAWG felt should be interviewed. To the greatest extent possible, a person was interviewed from each state's Department of Agriculture, Farm Bureau, organic farming organization, and land-grant university or Cooperative Extension System. Farmers interviewed included people with dairy, vegetable, or nursery operations. A portion of these farmers followed organic farming practices. In the 'Other' category, interviewees included individuals from nursery and landscape associations, Farm Link organizations, a land trust, food wholesaling companies, and a variety of non-profit organizations interested in agricultural issues.

Connecticut State Representative Jefferson Davis, Co-chair of the Planning and Development Committee of the Connecticut Legislature, authorized the Office of Legislative Research (OLR) to compile a report on state agricultural policy in the Northeast. This report was completed in June. The OLR report provided useful background information.

A check-off survey was also sent to each state's Department of Agriculture. The survey was a three and a half page document listing the agricultural programs and policies that could exist in any given state. The survey was organized according to the three main divisions consistently used in this project. Department of Agriculture officials were instructed to place a check mark next to any program or policy offered in their state. For some questions, officials were also encouraged to provide a single line of additional information.

Directing the Connecticut portion of the work was the five-member CFPC/CAPC. Members included Erica Fearn (Connecticut Farm Bureau Executive Director), Jeremy Foltz (UConn Professor), Sandy Rotival (Woodstock, CT citizen), David Yandow (major commercial produce wholesaler), and Mark Winne (Hartford Food System Executive Director). Directing the work on the regional side were Mark Winne and Kathy Ruhf (New England Small Farms Institute and NESAWG). The research and analytical work was completed by all of these individuals as well as by David Kimmel, an intern with the Hartford Food System. Molly Messick, an intern with the New England Small Farms Institute, assisted with the research.



IV. Inventory

The following inventory provides a comprehensive list of Connecticut State agricultural programs, policies, incentives, and resources that already exist, as of 2002.

Agricultural Programs

Agriculture Technology Program -

DOA has identified five technologies to support: aquaculture, plant, farm waste management, transgenic animal technology, and animal vaccine and diagnostic technology. The program works on breaking down barriers (such as aiding and assisting people in looking for grants), changing policies and procedures (such as getting many departments to meet together about energy ideas or getting a company to rethink its investment policy), strategic planning with UConn, and outreach and education.

Connecticut Creative Store – Located in DOA on the second floor, selling gourmet foods and crafts that have been produced by Connecticut companies using Connecticut products.

CT Grown Program – The program was created in 1986 to brand CT products through the use of a logo and advertising. The CT Grown program provides directional signage and point-of-purchase materials, funds matching grants for commodity groups, hosts the annual Farm City event for children, and maintains a presence at food shows and expositions.

Dairy Farms of Distinction Program – Begun in 1985, this program promotes the industry by annually recognizing an outstanding dairy farm. The program is funded privately through donations by milk processors and farmer organizations.

Environmental Assistance Program

(EAP) – In this program, a farmer can be reimbursed for up to 75% of the cost of complying with a CT DEP agricultural waste management plan.

Export Program – This program focuses on small- to medium-sized food and beverage companies, providing start-up assistance and export information. CT is a member of Food Export USA-Northeast, a co-op of 10 states which offers matching grants to companies for overseas promotion and trade show attendance assistance.

Farm Waste Management Grants

Program – Farmers can receive technical assistance – help with waste management planning, structure design, and permit acquisition. Financial assistance is also available through participation in the federal, NRCS-sponsored Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). This program provides cost sharing grants and incentive payments for meeting water quality and other environmental standards.

Farmland Preservation Program –

Established in 1978, the program enables DOA to purchase farms' development rights. The state buys the development rights and acquires an easement that permanently limits development on the land to agricultural uses. The landholder retains ownership of the land and can continue to operate the farm business.

Farm Enhancement Program –

This farm viability program offers matching grants to eligible farmers for capital improvements to expand or diversify their operations. There is

a \$40,000 ceiling per application, and applicants must attend a seminar and create 10-year business plans.

Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs

(FMNPs) – Through the Senior and WIC FMNPs, seniors and low-income mothers and children receive coupons redeemable for CT grown produce at CT farmstands and farmers' markets. 70% of the WIC FMNP funding comes from the federal government, and 30% comes from the state.

Harvest New England Program –

In this program, large grocery store chains in New England buy produce from New England states and then market the combined loads as New England grown (so as not to lose the local identity).

Specialty Food Assistance

Program – DOA gives technical information and marketing assistance to small to mid-sized food production businesses. It helps with marketing, production, and start-up. It also provides information on labeling laws, state and federal guidelines, financing, and other resources.

State Food Buying Program –

Since 2002, DOA has been working with the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), and US Foodservice (the state's food vendor) on a program through which CT's correctional facilities are supplied with state grown produce. US Foodservice owns the state contract, and one of its sub-contractors, M & M Produce, takes care of the buying and supplying of the CT grown produce.

Advisory Councils and Agribusiness Promotion Groups

Connecticut Agricultural Business Cluster (CAB) – Launched in 2002, CAB is a government-industry partnership designed to promote the growth, competitiveness, and profitability of CT's agricultural industry. CAB priorities are developing a waste management program, organizing collective promotion and marketing, and reviewing buying, labor, environmental, and agricultural building regulations.

Connecticut Food Policy Council – This council serves as an advisor to state government on food and agricultural policy. The Food Policy Council's goals are to recommend and support legislation that promotes food security, educates the public and policy makers about the food system, and promotes the preservation of farming and farmland.

Seafood Council – This council promotes the Seafood Industry, a \$34 million slice of the CT economy.

Wine Council – This council promotes the wine industry, specifically the planting of grapes and the marketing of wine.

Tax Policies and Legal Supports

PA 490 – Public Act 490 - according to this statute a town assessor assesses farm property according to its current use. Because a farm is assessed at the land's value as a farm rather than the land's market value as a site for development (the 'highest and best use'), the farmer pays less taxes. A conveyance tax penalty is assigned if the owner sells the property within 10 years of the initial farm assessment.

Estimated Income Tax – Those farmers and fisherman who are required to make estimated income tax payments are required to make only one payment instead of four.

License plates law – Vehicles with farm license plate do not have to pass emissions testing. Registration of farm tractors and self-propelled agricultural equipment is not required, but proof of \$2500 in agricultural sales is.

Plan of Conservation and Development – CT has a document describing the state's conservation and development policies and strategies. Municipalities are encouraged to adopt measures included in the state plan in their own local plans of conservation and development.

Property tax exemption for farm machinery - Farm machinery as well as horses or ponies used exclusively in agricultural production are exempt from local property taxes (assuming the farmer qualifies and properly applies for the tax exemption). Having \$15K in gross agricultural sales is one measure of a qualified applicant. The exemption reaches an upper limit of \$150,000 at the state level and \$250,000 at the town level.

Right to Farm Law - Agricultural operations are protected from nuisance complaints if the farm has been in operation for at least a year and follows generally accepted agricultural practices.

Sales tax exemption on sold items – A farmer selling goods has to register for a sellers' permit and collect sales tax on taxable goods (plants, flowers, livestock, poultry, Christmas trees, decorated items, seed, etc.). Food products such as syrup, eggs, honey, fruits, vegetables, etc. are not taxed.

Sales tax exemption on purchased items – Purchases of items used exclusively in agricultural production (e.g. tractors) can be exempt from sales and use taxes.

Reports - Resources

Agricultural Resources Directory – The DOA maintains an on-line list of agricultural organizations.

CT Weekly Agricultural Report – A four-page newsletter that contains an editorial, agricultural articles, pricing information, ads, and meeting notices.

Farm Database – DOA is developing a database of all the farms in CT.

Farm Map – The Connecticut Farm Map, a collaborative effort of Departments of Transportation and Agriculture, is an official road map that pinpoints, describes, and guides people to the "more than 280 farms, farmers' markets, and other agricultural businesses that make up Connecticut's scenic landscapes."

Publications

DOA produces the following publications, which can be accessed on their website at: www.state.ct.us/doag/pubs/pubspage.htm:

- Connecticut Agricultural Fairs
- Connecticut Dairy Farms
- Guide to CT Sugarhouses
- Hay Producers
- Honey Producers
- Connecticut Food Products (18 categories)
- Cut Your Own Christmas Trees
- A Guide to Connecticut Apple Growers & Retailers
- Pick Your Own Fruits and Vegetables
- Pick Your Own Pumpkins
- Wholesale Orchards
- Wholesale Fruits and Vegetables
- Farmers' Markets
- Visit the Connecticut Wine Trail

Chart 1: Economic Viability Programs

	Farm Viability or Farm Enhancement Program	Agricultural or New Technology Program	Specialty Crops or Diversification Programs/Grants	Agricultural Business Planning and Development Assistance	Other Loan, Grant, or Business Assistance Program for Farmers	Farm Link Program	Other Program or Assistance for New Farmers
CT	J	J				J	
DE				J			J
ME	J	J	J	J	J	J	
MD				J		J	J
MA	J	J		J	J	J	
NH			J	J		J	J
NJ				J		J	
NY	J	J	J	J		J	
PA		J		J	J	J	J
RI			J	J		J	
VT		J	J	J	J	J	J
WV			J	J	J		J

Sources: Interviews, Department of Agriculture surveys, web sites.

Chart 2: Tax Laws and Statutes

	Differential / Use Value Property Tax Assessment	Circuit Breaker	Property Tax Exemption on Farm Machinery	Property Tax Exemption on Farm Buildings	Statute Reducing Estate Taxes for Farmers	Sales Tax Exemption on Equipment used in Agricultural Production	Estate Taxes Exemption for Donation of Agricultural Preservation Easements	Tax Credit for Donation of Agricultural Preservation Easements	Tax Credits for Farmer Owned Cooperatives
CT	J		J			J	J		
DE	J		J		J	J	J	J	
ME	J		J			J		J	
MD	J		J						
MA	J		J	J					
NH	J		J	J		J			
NJ	J	-	-	-	-	J			
NY	J	J		J		J			
PA	J					J			
RI	J		J	J		J			
VT	J	J -	J	J		J	J		J
WV	J		J			J		J	

Chart 3: Market Development and Promotion Programs

	State Grown Promotional Program	Multi-state Domestic Promotional Program	Ag. Marketing Matching Grant Program	Farmers' Markets Support	WIC FMNP	Senior FMNP	Assistance with Access to State Grown Food	Food Commodity Boards, Advisory Councils, or Producer Associations	Foreign Trade Assistance	Farm to School	Efforts to Foster Purchase of State Grown Produce by State Institutions
CT	J	J	J	J	J	J		J	J		J
DE		J	J	J				J	J		J
ME	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J		J
MD	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J			
MA	J	J	J	J	J	J	J -	J	J	J	J
NH	J	J	J	J	J	J		J	J		
NJ	J	-	J	J	J	J	J	J	J		J
NY	J		J	J	J	J		J		J	J
PA	J		J	J	J	J	J -	J	J		
RI	J	J		J	J		J	J	J	J	J
VT	J	J	J -	J	J	J		J	J	J	J
WV	J		J	J	J	J		J	J		

Chart 4: State-Published Promotional Directories

	Whole Sale	Retail Farms	Farm. Markets	Farm stands	Pick Your Own	CSA farms	X-Mas Tree Growers	Specialty Produce	Greenhouse	Nurseries	Vine-yards	Mail-order Farm Goods	Stores or Restaurants that Use State-Grown Produce	Ag. Fairs or Agri-Tourism Events	Agric. Organizations in the State
CT		J	J		J		J	J						J	J
DE															
ME	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
MD	J	J	J		J		J			J	J			J	J
MA	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J			J	J	J	J	
NH	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J				J	J
NJ															
NY	J	J	J -	J -	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
PA	J	J	J	J	J		J	J		J	J		J	J	J
RI															
VT	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
WV		J	J		J		J	J	J	J	J		J	J	J

Chart 5 - Farmland Preservation and Land Use

	Agricultural Districts	Agricultural Protection Zoning	PACE (PDR)	Right to Farm	Differential Assessment	TDR	Executive Order	State Development Plan	Local Development Plans	Agricultural Impact Statute	Eminent Domain Statute
CT			J	J	J	J		J	J		
DE	J		J	J	J		J	J	J		
ME			J	J	J			J	J		
MD	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J		
MA	J		J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
NH			J	J	J			J	J		
NJ	J		J	J	J	J		J	J		J
NY	J		J	J	J	J		J	J	J	J
PA	J	J	J	J	J	J	J				J
RI			J	J	J			J	J		
VT			J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	
WV			J	J	J				J		

Sources: AFT web site, Interviews, CT OLR Report, USDA ERS Report, websites, and Department of Agriculture surveys, web sites, and officials

Chart 6 - Conservation Programs

	Nutrient Mgmt. Programs	Waste Mgmt. Programs	Other State-run Conservation Programs	Federally-run Conservation Programs	Forest landowner assistance Programs	Harmful Weeds or Invasive Plants programs	Pest Management assistance, such as IPM
CT		J		J	J		J
DE	J	J		J	J	J	J
ME	J	J	J	J	J	J	J
MD	J	J		J	J	J	J
MA			J	J	J	J	J
NH	J			J	J	J	J
NJ		J	J	J	J		J
NY	J		J	J	J		J
PA	J	J		J	J	J	J
RI				J	J		J
VT	J -		J -	J	J	J	J
WV				J	J	J	J

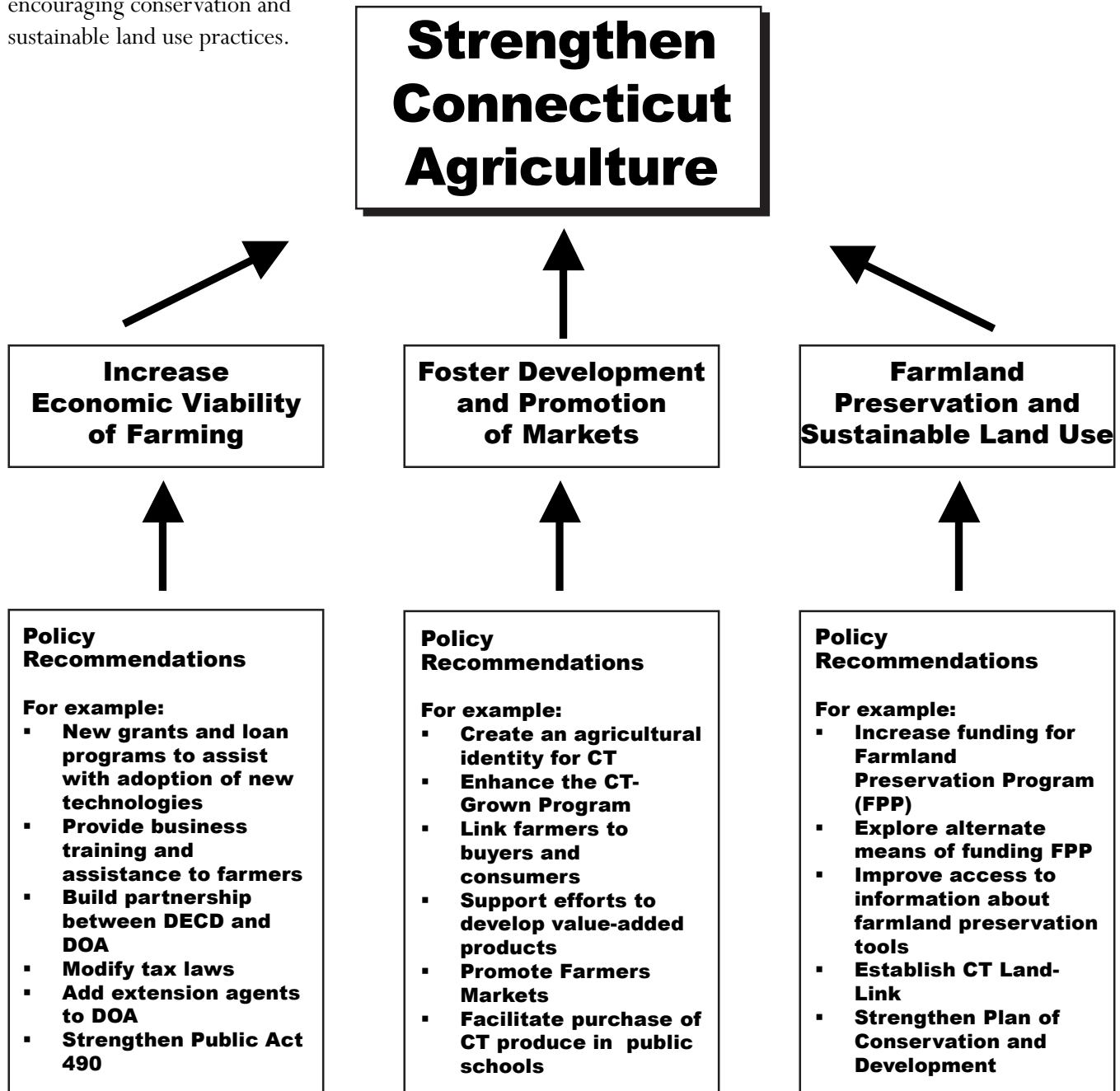


V. Policy Recommendations

New directions are in store for Connecticut agriculture. Based on interviews and research, our analysis points toward three principal directions: A) increasing the economic viability of farming; B) fostering the development and promotion of agricultural markets; and C) protecting farmland while encouraging conservation and sustainable land use practices.



This model illustrates how recommendations are intended to build capacity in all three directions.



Policy recommendations are based on the following considerations: the common opinions of stakeholders; evidence from model programs in other states; and policy ideas that hold promise for replication in the context of challenges and opportunities facing Connecticut agriculture. In this section, recommendations are supported by descriptions of model programs and ideas on their implementation.

A. Economic Viability

Profitability in the agricultural sector depends on farmers exercising a certain competency in business management. But in support of farmers, a variety of programs and policies need to be in place that provide access to technical and financial resources while promoting agricultural goals in the state. The recommendations in this category present strategies related to tax laws, business assistance programs, programs for diversification and enhancement, and other grant and loan efforts.

Recommendations

A1) Improve the Farm Enhancement Program's (FEP) scope, operation, and participation. Increase FEP's funding, place greater emphasis on business planning assistance, and consider adding elements of farmland preservation as is done in other states' programs.

There are many farmers who could use assistance from an FEP-style program but who cannot take advantage of it because of its limited size and focus. To address this, increase funding for FEP and encourage applications from farms of all sizes. Also ensure that FEP continuously attracts and helps new applicants rather than a pool of similar applicants every year. Too often, the same farms who already have substantial business capacity are the ones who receive the funding. Another concern is the limited emphasis on business planning. Connecticut's FEP disperses grants for capital improvements to expand or diversify one's operations. Participants are required to attend a one-day seminar and create a ten year business plan, but business training and viability plan development support are not as intensive as in the Massachusetts and Maine programs. By increasing emphasis on business planning tools, farmers can

better plan for the future and create concrete visions of how the next ten years will look. In this manner, FEP could become less of a straight grant program and more of an in-depth business development and planning assistance program. FEP could also include elements of farmland preservation as do farm viability programs in Massachusetts and Maine.

(A1) Model Programs

MA's *Farm Viability Program* and ME's *Agricultural Farms for the Future Grants Program* provide business planning/grant assistance in exchange for short-term agricultural preservation restrictions. To develop approved farm viability plans, farmers get help from experienced agricultural, economic, and environmental consultants. These plans may involve direct marketing, diversification, agritourism, or other improved management and conservation practices. NY's *Farmland Viability Program* provides matching grants for projects that will help counties implement their farmland protection plans or assist farmers in developing and implementing farm viability plans. All projects must be designed to "contribute to overall farm profitability and sound environmental management."

A2) Enhance UConn’s, the Department of Agriculture’s, and other state agencies’ quality of assistance, support, and focus for CT agriculture.

Consider creating a comprehensive agricultural economic viability plan.

One improvement suggested by the Agricultural Policy Committee is that feasibility studies be conducted of different types of successful models of Connecticut agriculture. Models of successful farms can help other farmers to know what is working and how it is working. (Criteria for determining “success” may include owner satisfaction, income satisfaction, and lifestyle satisfaction). Another suggestion is that DOA create an updated plan for developing Connecticut agriculture. Such an initiative can utilize the previously mentioned FEP improvements and feasibility study ideas as important elements. This plan or initiative can also take the form of something similar to the “Food and Farmland Protection Act” that has been filed in Massachusetts. As mentioned in another recommendation, the DOA could also improve its quality of communication and assistance by improving its web site. Besides revisions to make the web site more user-friendly, additions to the site could include a page that answers common questions concerning crop growing and a page that provides uniform quality and packing requirements for farmers interested in wholesaling large quantities.

**(A2)
Model Programs**

A bill was filed in MA called *The Massachusetts Food and Farmland Protection Act*. First filed in the spring of 2001 with the support of forty legislative co-sponsors, the bill was re-filed in December 2002. The act contains eighteen sections that are collectively designed to address the economic viability concerns of the state’s agricultural sector. Its stated purpose is the following: An omnibus farm viability act whose purpose is to ensure the continued availability of fresh local food and stewardship for 570,000 acres of open space by

- Improving market connections between farms and consumers
- Helping farmers succeed in the marketplace (rather than through reliance on subsidies such as those the federal government provides in other regions)
- Providing incentives to preserve farmland for future generations, and
- Making Massachusetts a leader in family farm-oriented agricultural economic development

Among the act’s provision are the establishment of a preference for MA-grown products by state agencies and institutions, a progressive loan program for new farmers, agricultural impact assessment requirements, the authorization of installment payments for agricultural preservation, and an integrated pest management fund.

A3) Greater business planning assistance should be provided to CT farmers by UConn, the Department of Agriculture, and other state agencies.

These groups should work together to provide the small business tools that farmers need to be successful. Areas of assistance can include value-added products, economic development, business development, business planning, feasibility studies, cooperative plans, and nutrient management plans.

The Departments of Agriculture in most states provide some type of business planning assistance. Included in this assistance may be technical or financial help to develop or implement business plans, help in locating other funding sources to work on these plans, the provision of directories of people and organizations that are good planning resources, and assistance from other partnering organizations. Agricultural business planning assistance is also provided through farm viability programs. Some examples of the types of assistance provided are listed in the next paragraph.

(A3) Model Programs

MD runs an *Agribusiness Development Program* through its Marketing Services division. ME supports the FastTrac and NxLevel business planning programs, granting scholarships to complete the courses and grants to write business plans. One requirement is that an individual be an *Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund Program* participant. MA has an *Agricultural Business Training Program* in which it subsidizes farmers' costs for participating in a NxLevel course. NH's University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension has a *Business Management/Marketing Program*. VT and PA support NxLevel courses. NJ runs an *Agricultural Re-Engineering Program* through Cook College that helps farmers write business plans, assess and manage financial risks, and redevelop their businesses. RI administers a *USDA Risk Management Agency Program* on Business Management/Crop Insurance Planning; RI contracts a person from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to run the program. VT provides business planning assistance by similarly partnering with the local SBDC.

A4) Enhance Connecticut's **Agricultural Technology Program.** Create grant or loan programs to complement the informational services already provided by the Agricultural Technology Program.

Connecticut's Agricultural Technology Program is focused on seven critical technologies: Aquaculture, Plant Biotechnology, Farm Waste Management, Transgenic Animal Technology, Animal-Vaccines & Diagnostics, Greenhouse Technology, and Integrated Pest Management. Much of the Agricultural Technology Program activities are dedicated to information dissemination, fostering research collaboration and initiatives, and limited funding support to novel projects. (e.g. an agricultural plastic recycling cooperative). The Agricultural Policy Committee noted that similar programs in many northeastern states included substantial loan and grant programs for new technology adoption.

(A4) Model Programs

MA's *Agro-Environmental Technology Grant Program* provides grants for a range of projects that investigate or implement new technologies and organizational frameworks. Two similar grant programs exist in NY. One is the *Innovation in Agriculture Grant Program* through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. The other is the *Food and Agriculture Industry Development Program* in the Grow New York initiative, which provides matching grants for research and development projects. ME promotes new technology adoption through two programs: the *Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund*, in which farmers receive low interest loans for projects similar to those receiving grants in MA's and NY's programs, and the *Agricultural Technical Assistance Grant Program*, in which the lenders who make these loans receive grants that enable them to provide the lower interest rates. One component of NJ's *Food Industry Research and Extension Program* (FIRE) is facilitating the transfer of new technologies in the state's food processing industry. FIRE is sponsored by Rutgers University and the NJ Agricultural Experiment Station, making it possible to provide additional assistance with product development and business planning.

A5) Establish additional grant and loan programs to enhance the development of CT agriculture.

Many states have grant and loan programs for implementing new agricultural practices, adopting environmental conservation guidelines, or undertaking research in the areas of production, promotion, and conservation.

**(A5)
Model Programs**

ME's *Agricultural Development Grant Fund* provides farm businesses with grants to implement market research, market promotion and new technology projects. MA's *Aquaculture Grants Program* provides grants to improve products and processes and develop and install new technologies. WV's *Rural Rehabilitation Loan Fund* provides prime or near prime rate loans for varied agricultural projects. WV's *Micro-loan Fund* provides small loans (there is a \$1000 cap) to youths for FFA and FHA projects and to small agricultural businesses for occasional assistance with making bill payments. PA's *Agricultural and Rural Youth Grant Program* provides matching grants of up to \$10,000 and direct grants of up to \$2,500 to youth organizations for educational field trips, seminars,

safety training, and equipment purchase for capital/agricultural projects. NY's *Farm Family Winery Act of 1975* has helped develop the state's wine and grape industry from 20-30 wineries in 1975 to 120-130 wineries today. The comprehensive program created from the Act includes technical support, market development assistance, and low-interest loans.

A6) Encourage collaboration between state agencies such as the Dept. of Agriculture and the Dept. of Economic and Community Development.

Continue to educate policymakers about agricultural enterprises, highlighting how such enterprises are businesses just like any other businesses and deserve to be included in the state's business and economic development grant and loan programs.

The level of collaboration between states' Economic Development Agencies and Departments of Agriculture varies by state. The typical arrangement involves some type of partnership in which farm businesses are made aware of, and encouraged to apply for, business grant and loan programs offered through a state's Economic Development Agency. Partnerships with Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) also exist.

**(A6)
Model Programs**

The Vermont Agricultural Credit Corporation (VACC), a non-profit organization created by the Vermont Economic Development Authority, provides loans to farmers for agricultural operation and farm purchase projects. VACC's loans are designed for farmers who need more credit than normal agricultural loan sources will provide. Loan funds may be used to enhance or diversify one's operation, help new farmers, or support marketing or processing projects.

NY DOA partners with the Empire State Development Corporation on economic development and job creation programs. Two examples of such programs are the *Small Cities Program* and the *Micro-business Program*. Both programs provide grants for which farmers can apply. NY DOA also works with the Office of Small Cities on a US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) *Community Development Grant Block (CDGB)* project. The project has components for rural development and agricultural projects. NY DOA helps to score applicants.

MD DOA works with the state's Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) to leverage resources for agriculture. The aquacul-

ture coordinator collaborates with DBED on an aquaculture loan fund project. With the DBED's Office of Tourism Development, the MD DOA is working on highlighting agriculture more often in tourist articles and having agri-tourism sites included in tourist guides (such as the general guides for tourists and field trip guides for schools and scout groups). DBED also operates an *Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund*. The Fund disperses grants to organizations that support agriculture and rural MD. These organizations include organic organizations and community colleges. Recent grants have been used to work on forestry projects and a feasibility study of an organic slaughterhouse. In addition, seven of MD's 23 county-based Economic Development Offices (ECDs) have an agricultural development specialist. These specialists focus on agricultural marketing and development issues, and their presence in ECDs ensures that agriculture is considered more equally with other local businesses when policy and programs are created.

The PA DOA web site has a direct link to *the Business and Loan Assistance Programs* viewable on the state's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) web site. Legislation was also passed in 2002 that enables PA farmers to participate for the first time in DCED's *Small Business Loan Program*. The program provides low interest loans.

A7) In recognizing agricultural enterprises as businesses, recognize and support the needs of small business owners.

One issue of importance to small agricultural business owners is the issue of health insurance. CT loses full-time farmers because these farmers for one reason or another lose their benefits or think that they can't afford benefits. The state could do more to help small businesses, including farms, with health insurance concerns.

A8) Support and build on the efforts of the Connecticut Agricultural Business Cluster (CAB). CAB is an example of many individuals, organizations, and agencies working together on projects to foster the economic viability of CT's agricultural enterprises.

Officially launched in 2002, CAB has a detailed *Plan for Economic Growth* for the state's agricultural industry. CAB's board includes representatives from the major agricultural commodity sectors in CT, as well as representatives from CT Farm Bureau, CT Green Industries, and CT Department of Agriculture. CAB's vision is "to raise the level of competitiveness and increase the profitability of individual CT agricultural businesses, while

maintaining responsible stewardship of the state's natural resources" (CAB Plan for Economic Growth). Listed below are CAB's mission and proposed program initiatives from its *Plan for Economic Growth*.

A9) Create agricultural preference areas or rural economic development zones, officially designated places in which agricultural businesses would be offered particular economic advantages or incentives.

Like urban enterprise zones that are designed to foster the redevelopment of cities through incentives to businesses and industries, it is possible to use this same approach toward 'rural enterprise zones.' These rural enterprise zones could have incentives for agricultural development, such as for upgrading local processing structures, starting a new farm business, establishing better shipping facilities, or improving aspects of the regional agricultural infrastructure. The Department of Community and Economic Development could be involved in the creation of such incentive areas in collaboration with other state agencies. Some possible variations are a zone that gives preference to sustainable farming practices or a zone that builds on regions where land is already preserved for farming.

A10) Reinforce efforts to assist new farmers, including special loan programs, specialized extension agents, or other programs that would provide financial, technical, educational, or business planning support.

Ideas for assisting new farmers include a mix of beneficial tax laws and support programs. One beneficial tax law would be a reduction in the property tax burden for landowners that lease land to farmers, new or otherwise. Land leasing for agricultural purposes is thus encouraged, and the landowner could pass the tax savings on to the farmer in the form of smaller rental rates. For people just entering farming, there could also be income tax incentives. In general, new farmers would also benefit from more outreach since many do not know what is available in terms of helpful services and programs. Ideas for beneficial programs for new farmers include mentor programs that would pay successful Connecticut farmers to train or assist agriculture students and new farmers. Another program model is a combination of school classes with apprenticeships on three to four farms. For start-up purposes, new farmers could make use of a low interest loan or grant program with a percentage cap on the amount that can be spent on buildings. The idea is to focus the money

on acquiring land, which is more important than structures for growing the crops. To generate funding resources for farmers, the State could use a credit card program that applies interest rates toward a program for small new farmers.

In terms of resources, there could be a published directory of farms that are amenable to apprentices. The state could create this directory or make it part of a state sponsored educational program, like the mentor program or class/apprentice programs described above. The Vo-Ag schools or universities could be involved in these programs, as Vo-Ag graduates are often unprepared for the agricultural jobs that are available when they graduate. Another useful input would be education and training courses for people interested in farming and other agricultural employment but who are unable to attend UConn for classes. A representative from the Connecticut Green Industries described how his organization is working with UConn to sponsor a 13-week school to teach the basics of the green industries. He suggested that similar courses be created for the rest of the agricultural industry. To help new farmers find land, an improved Land Link-type program would be useful, (described more fully under Category C). Necessary services include estate and farm transfer planning, assistance with access to land, financial and planning assistance, and family-mediation

training for service providers. To encourage a new generation of farmers and agricultural advocates, school-to-work programs might encourage kids to work on farms.

**(A10)
Model Programs**

PA's *Next Generation Farmer Loan Program* provides low interest loans to beginning farmers. An individual is eligible for the program if he or she has not had prior ownership in a significant amount of land. The maximum loan a person can receive is \$250,000, and this money can be used to purchase land, buy farm equipment or machinery, or make improvements to farm buildings or agricultural structures. The program is co-sponsored by the PA DOA and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. WV's *Rural Rehabilitation Loan Fund* allows new farmers to apply for prime or near prime fixed rate loans. The New England Small Farms Institute has a Northeast-focused program called *Growing New Farmers*. The program identifies farmers with little or no experience and links them with protected farmland held by land trusts. A team of experts from key land conservation groups, public agencies, non-profit organizations, and for-profit companies provides the new farmers with training and technical assistance, help with access to land and capital resources, and other assistance. In NY, a group of farms in the eastern Hudson Valley run an apprentice-sharing program, which exposes apprentices to a greater diversity of farming practices.

A11) Create energy efficiency programs or a special electricity rate for farmers.

(A11) Model Programs

MA's *Farm Energy Discount Program* enables farmers who employ fewer than 75 people to take a 10% reduction in their electricity rates. Farmers are expected to take advantage of the beneficial rates by installing more energy efficient components like light bulbs. In VT, farmers do not have their own energy bracket, but they are eligible for business rates. VT also has a cost-sharing program for conversion to alternative energy sources, such as methane. In ME, there is a sales tax exemption on electricity for farmers. Greenhouses are not included in this exemption.

A12) Provide greater support for sustainable farming practices. Increase the number of Extension agents with specialties in sustainable farming practices or organic production.

In support of sustainable farming practices, some ideas included creation of an organic transitioning program. The state could tax the non-farm use of pesticides, and the revenue from this tax could be shifted to support a program that would support farmers looking to transition. A similar tax was passed in VT, but the money was used for other purposes. Other ideas included development of extension agent expertise in organic or sustainable agriculture. Such an agent could particularly be of use to new farmers too, given the trend that many of those choosing to enter farming seem to be choosing to farm organically.

(A12) Model Programs

ME's *Agricultural Farms for the Future Program* provides support for organic farms and farms that are transitioning to organic methods. One element of the program, which is state-run but administered by the non-profit economic development organization Coastal Enterprises, Inc., is providing financing to organic and transitioning farms. These farms are eligible to receive loans with below market interest rates. One component of WV's *Consumer Driven Marketing Program*, SARE-fund program to promote more diversified farming, is educating agricultural professionals. These professionals include extension agents, lenders, and USDA representatives, and the program is designed to bring them – that first line of professionals that farmers work with – to a similar and up-to-date level of knowledge about different farming and marketing strategies (such as organic production, value-added projects, and direct marketing).

A13) Increase the number of extension agents with specialties in specific commodities. Also review how the Cooperative Extension System is working, and analyze ways to improve its service to the state's agricultural operations.

A concern regarding extension agents is their knowledge of less mainstream market crops. To address this issue, extension agents could be hired who specialized in less mainstream commodities. Or extension agents could be offered professional development opportunities to learn more about specific crops. Another concern is the orientation of the Cooperative Extension System that demands a significant amount of time writing grants, meaning less time working with farmers in the field. Some examples of good programs and approaches can be found in what is done by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension in NJ.

A14) Support and strengthen Public Act 490 (Connecticut General Statutes 12-107). Have municipalities' tax assessors apply PA 490 with consistency and fairness throughout the state.

The Connecticut Farm Bureau often receives complaints from farmers that tax assessors are arbitrarily interpreting or misinterpreting PA 490. During tight economic times, towns might also encourage their tax assessors an earlier application of the act in order to create more revenue. Striving for a consistent and fair application of CT's differential assessment law is important because it provides for a property tax that is more in line with the actual use of the land. This fairer base for the property tax encourages agricultural production, indirectly promoting both farmland preservation and economic viability. Related to this concern regarding fair application of property taxes, one proposal is to move toward income rather than property based taxes.

A15) Improve coordination between the Department of Agriculture and other state agencies with regulatory responsibilities, such as the Departments of Labor, Environmental Protection, Public Health, Consumer Protection, and Revenue, on regulatory issues. Such issues include regulations relating to labor, housing for labor, environment, health, food safety, and taxes. The actual impact that regulations have on agricultural businesses should be taken into account.

A16) Create or modify tax laws so that they are more beneficial to farmers. Examine the laws in other states and consider how they can be applied to Connecticut.

(A16) Model Programs

Estate Tax Exemption: In DE there are no provisions to levy estate taxes.

Farm Building Tax Exemption: A number of states in the northeast offer property tax exemptions on farm buildings. Connecticut does not offer such an exemption at this time.

Property Tax Exemption: Farmers in DE do not pay property taxes on undeveloped land. Over the last fifteen years, the formula controlling DE's use-value assessment law has been calculated such that farmers do not have to pay local or school property taxes on land that has not been developed. Farm buildings and residences are taxed under the state's regular tax laws. Undeveloped land that is enrolled in DE's farmland preservation program is automatically exempt from property taxes. RI passed a law in 2002 that enables towns, at their option, to exempt farmland from property taxes. The farmland in question must already qualify for differential assessment under Farm, Forest, and Open Space assessment law.

Local School Property Tax Credit: NY has a law that enables farmers to offset the local property tax bills they pay by receiving credits on their state income taxes. To cover 100% of the cost of local school property taxes (which represent one of a number of local property taxes) qualified NY farmers can claim state income tax credits on the first 250 acres of farms' production farmland. For acreage above 250 acres, farmers can claim state income tax credits to cover 50% of the cost of local school property taxes. If a farmers' NY adjusted gross income exceeds \$100,000, the credit becomes limited. It decreases by two percent for each \$1,000 on income earned over \$100,000 and phases out completely at \$150,000. The credit is claimed yearly on the farmer's personal income tax return.

Property tax exemption on forestland: DE's Commercial Forest Plantation Act provides a thirty-year property tax exemption for landowners who manage their land for timber production, have at least 10 contiguous forest acres, and have approved forest management plans.

Conservation tax adjustment: MD offers farmers an income tax subtraction modification for conservation equipment. An individual, on his or her income tax return, can subtract the cost of buying and installing the following equipment: conservation tillage equipment, liquid manure injection equipment, and poultry or livestock manure spreading equipment. In practice, this adjustment represents a tax credit for environmental stewardship.

B. Market Development and Promotion

Developing and fostering markets for agricultural products is essential for maintaining the economic viability of an agricultural enterprise. As do other states in the Northeast region, Connecticut addresses the need for market development and promotion with a range of programs. These programs include supporting farmers' markets, providing marketing assistance, creating promotional logos and slogans for state-grown produce, and publishing agricultural directories for retail consumers and wholesale buyers. The recommendations in this category focus on enhancing the capacity of existing programs in Connecticut as well as proposing new strategies for market development.

Recommendations

B1) Enhance the *CT-Grown Program*. Provide *CT-Grown* with greater funding and staff resources, and use the program to create consumer awareness of Connecticut agriculture and promote the regular consumer purchase of Connecticut agricultural products.

As CT continues to develop and move towards a market-driven or consumer-driven agricultural economy, capturing the food buying preferences of state residents will increase in importance. Currently, about \$1 billion is spent each year on Connecticut agricultural products. However, this represents a very small percentage of food and other agricultural product consumption by Connecticut consumers. By enhancing *CT-Grown* and other market development programs, Connecticut can capture some of this import market. Local or regional identity is also becoming more important, and the DOA can build on this trend through the *CT-Grown Program*. Efforts to enhance the marketing, promoting, and advertising of the program, perhaps with the aid of a high profile state pitchman, can help to educate state residents that choosing the *CT-Grown* brand is a positive way of supporting local farmers and enjoying fresh, nutritious, and good-tasting produce. Connecticut, situated in the middle of the populous Boston-New York corridor, can also use *CT-Grown* to increase its share of the export market.

(B1) Model Programs

Every state in the Northeast except DE has a branding program to promote its state-grown food and agricultural products. At the center of every program is a promotional logo and slogan. Most programs also have related point of purchase promotional materials, such as price cards and produce availability. In general, stakeholders highlighted the success of NJ's *Jersey Fresh from the Garden State* as something to strive for. NJ spends the most money, has one of the largest departments supporting the program, and has high program visibility through frequent in-state and multi-state ads featuring prominent people such as the state's governor. One stakeholder from DE DOA related how corporate supermarket buyers in DE buy *Jersey Fresh* products because their customers want it. New Jersey is also working on a *Jersey Fresh* logo for organic agricultural products, an addition to the program that would further help consumers further distinguish locally-grown produce. Often cited as reasons for Connecticut's and other states' programs not achieving the desired success include a lack of funding, inadequate staff resources, and a lack of political support.

State-Grown Branding Programs

Connecticut Grown
Get Real, Get Maine!
Maryland's Best
Massachusetts Grown ... and Fresher!, Massachusetts Made with Pride
New Hampshire Stories: We Have a Story to Tell.
Jersey Fresh from the Garden State
Pride of New York
Pennsylvania Produce - Simply Delicious
Rhode Island Grown
Vermont Seal of Quality
West Virginia Grown

B2) Place a greater priority on providing farmers with assistance in marketing their crops to consumers. Part of this strategy should involve orienting the Department of Agriculture's and other support organizations' focus toward the consumer as well as the farmer.

The Agricultural Policy Committee concurs with following remark made by a number of stakeholders: growing the crops is not the problem for farmers, selling them is rather the problem. Connecticut agriculture is moving towards more of a consumer-driven model, and farmers need to know how to farm for the crop as well as farm for the consumer. DOA, UConn, and other assistance for farmers should therefore include production as well as marketing assistance. On the consumer side, the DOA should be more accessible to consumers. A few stakeholders noted how Massachusetts' DOA web site is more consumer-oriented than others. The way in which a DOA web site is presented also makes a difference. Connecticut's DOA web site is difficult to navigate and not very user-friendly. States that have particularly user-friendly and consumer-helpful web sites include Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Maine.

B3) Create an agricultural identity for Connecticut.

Some states are known for certain agricultural products or for agriculture in general, such as Maine for its potatoes, Vermont for its maple syrup, or New Jersey for its *Jersey Fresh* program. If Connecticut had an agricultural identity of its own, people living in Connecticut, neighboring states, and perhaps the entire Northeast or greater region would have a predilection for purchasing a certain type of Connecticut agricultural product. Connecticut's market would grow, and the state's agricultural economy would benefit. An example of this strategy comes from Connecticut Green Industries which is attempting to create an agricultural identity called *Connecticut Blooms*. This project is currently being worked on and focuses on the greenhouse, nursery and landscape sector of Connecticut agriculture.

B4) Increase the visibility of the CT Creative Store.

The CT Creative Store is a good tool for selling and promoting CT agricultural products. Its current location within the Department of Agriculture building is difficult to find, however. Were the store moved to a more public and accessible setting, more business would be transacted and CT agriculture would be on a more visible display for the public.

B5) Facilitate efforts to link farmers, chefs (restaurants), and consumers.

Restaurants are another potential market in which farmers can sell their produce and of which consumers can increase their awareness and enjoyment.

The *Celebration of Connecticut Farms* is an annual fundraising event in CT sponsored by the Working Lands Alliance, Connecticut Farmland Trust, and Hartford Food System. The event is held at a different CT farm each year and features CT wine, cheese, and locally grown food prepared by prominent chefs and restaurateurs from across the state. Approximately 500 people attend the event to enjoy the high quality food, art, music, participate in live and silent auctions, and listen to celebrity speakers. An important component of the event is that the food prepared by the chefs is grown in CT. Signs, displays, and literature at the event further promote this fact.

(B5) Model Programs

The purpose of the Vermont Fresh Network (VFN) is to create farmer-chef relationships that expand the use, consumption, and appreciation of Vermont-grown products. VFN links farms

and restaurants in a number of ways: holding networking meetings for farmers and chefs; producing directories for both groups (“A chef’s guide to Vermont farm products” and “A farmers guide to Vermont restaurants”); and producing weekly Vermont Fresh sheets that highlight which farm products are currently available. VFN was originally begun by the VT DOA and VT-NOFA VFN but is now a separate entity. Other private organizations, such as the South Central Farmers’ Market Association in PA, also have farmer-restaurant linking programs.

Maine Menus Month is a unique sub-program of ME’s state-grown promotion program, *Get Real, Get Maine!*. For the past two years, October in ME has been *Maine Menus Month*. Individuals who dine at restaurants using Maine produce in their menus are given an opportunity to vote on which restaurants they like best. The highest-ranking restaurant is recognized at a press conference with the Governor. Other restaurants receive regional awards, for which they are awarded plaques. Winning restaurants also receive prizes, such as the 2002 grand prize of a weekend Cape Elizabeth getaway, or other prizes, such as agricultural fair tickets, state park passes, or a gift basket of Maine food products (*Get Real, Get Maine!* Web site).

B6) Facilitate efforts to create regional buy-local organizations.
Such organizations help promote the message of *CT-Grown* but on a more local level.

(B6) Model Programs

MA has links on its Department of Agriculture web site to the websites of five MA “Buy Local” organizations. These non-profit groups, which receive Department of Agriculture marketing grants for their buy-local campaigns, provide consumer education and promote the purchase of locally grown produce. The groups’ websites have directories that list farmers’ markets, farms, and available farm products. The sites also have lists of restaurants, retailers, and supermarkets at which local produce is either used or sold. One buy-local group, Berkshire Grown, provides business-to-business support and networking services similar to those described above for the Vermont Fresh Network’s Farm and Chef Partnerships. Berkshire Grown’s program helps connects growers with ‘white tablecloth’ restaurants.

B7) Continue to support the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs. Consider expanding the programs.

Through the Senior FMNP and WIC FMNP, low-income seniors and mothers, and children receive coupons redeemable for state-grown produce at state farmstands and farmers’ markets. The programs help to boost farmers’ incomes, maintain the viability of farmers’ markets, and improve the diet and nutrition of the participants. The programs should be continued for the mutual benefits they provide farmers, consumers, and the communities which host the farmers’ markets. Funding for the WIC FMNP is split 70-30 between the federal government and each state. Funding for the Senior FMNP does not require a non-federal match and is much more flexible than the WIC FMNP. Connecticut has included several programs in its Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system; however EBT needs greater technology and more funding to move to include FMNP.

(B7) Model Programs

ME DOA runs a *Senior FarmShare Program* as its Senior FMNP. The program provides qualified senior citizens each year with \$100 worth of state-grown produce. Seniors are eligible to participate if their total income is less than 185% of the poverty level. Farms are eligible if they can provide a range of fruits and vegetables to senior shareholders. After applications have been completed and the participants have been approved, the farmers and seniors decide which organizational format to follow. In 'Shareholder Selects,' seniors visit their partnering farm and choose the fruits and vegetables they want, drawing down on the \$100 credit balance. In 'Farmer Selects,' the farmer creates a weekly market basket of the available produce. If shares go unused, farmers are required to distribute the unused portion to other senior participants or agencies. Farms that only grow a few crops may participate in the program by partnering with Senior Meal Sites or Food Pantries. Farmers who participate in the program receive payments for their shares from ME DOA.

B8) Create new marketing programs that encourage state residents to buy state-grown produce.

Creative marketing campaigns and ideas are needed to expand consumer participation in the purchase of state-grown produce. An innovative NJ farmer proposed the creation of a new summer holiday for which people would buy lots of local produce—since most holidays are associated with food but usually only September-October seems to bring local people out to farms. Another idea was to use a community currency (e.g. 'Jersey Bucks') for local produce purchase. The community currency would be sold by the state (e.g. \$15 Jersey Bucks for \$10), but the Jersey Bucks can only be spent on local produce. Another creative marketing strategy could mimic the Cabot Cheese approach, emphasizing the origin of family farms.

B9) Create a branding program that adds value to agricultural products based on their product and food safety qualities.

Just as a state-grown brand can be created, a food safety-brand can be created. Products that are produced using certain methods become eligible to advertise, through a certified brand label, how they were created using such consumer-preferred methods. Incentives can be offered to encourage farm businesses to become involved.

The strategy behind this approach matches consumer demand for safe food with farmer voluntary participation in a certification process of agricultural practices. For example, one idea is to generate an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) label. IPM programs encourage farmers to use fewer pesticides, and farmers participating in these programs, and the retailers to whom they sell their products, could label and market their products as IPM-grown.

(B9) Model Programs

RI's *Good Agricultural Practices Program (GAP)* is a food safety program in which the state certifies farmers. Participation is voluntary, but farmers can market their involvement in the program as a means of adding value to their products. One way to view GAP is as another local marketing niche for farmers. The New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program (NYSCHAP) has a similar framework and objectives. NY DOA works with veterinarians who then help farmers develop herd management plans. The implementation of these plans helps to ease biosecurity fears, and NY farmers can market their participation in NYSCHAP just as RI farmers can market their participation in GAP. NY also has a similar program for eggs.

B10) Increase the development of farmers' markets and ensure that participating farmers sell CT-grown products exclusively.

Farmers' markets help farmers market and sell their produce, enable consumers to buy, enjoy, and become aware of fresh local produce, and foster a sense of community. Markets may also stimulate additional economic

activity in the places that they are held. Ensuring that only state-grown produce is sold is important for quality control and for correctly promoting CT agriculture and consumers' awareness of it.

(B10) Model Programs

Some states in the Northeast region, such as MD, enhance farmers' markets' effectiveness by tying them in with tourism. MD and other states have welcome centers that highlight their state's agriculture. The MD welcome center on I-95 has a store where MD agricultural products are sold in season. The DE DOA has collaborated with the DE Department of Transportation to create a farmers' market at a popular inter-state rest-stop, with the DE River Bay Authority to create a successful farmers' market at a beach, and with the DE Division of Administrative Services and the City of Wilmington to create a farmers' market in an abandoned building lot.

B11) Support efforts by farmers to form and operate cooperatives.

Cooperatives enable farmers to aggregate supply, making the marketing and selling of this produce supply easier in the face of growing food industry consolidation. Like New

Hampshire, Connecticut might benefit from exploring the application of a CSA cooperative. Another idea is the provision of greater marketing assistance through organizations that help farmers. A program could be created, for instance, to educate cooperative representatives who negotiate sales for large groups of farmers. From a wholesaler perspective, projects that build packing sheds or packing out models would enhance cooperatives' ability to supply wholesalers with consistent graded produce and also improve the ability of food wholesalers to serve farmers.

(B11) Model Programs

Two examples of existing cooperatives include the *NJ Tomato Co-op* in New Jersey and the *Pioneer Valley Growers' Association* in Massachusetts. A unique idea being worked on by a farmer in New Hampshire is *CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Cooperative*. This *CSA Cooperative* will consist of nine growers and a baker. Growers serve members like a regular CSA, but pool their crops so that every farmer would not have to grow every crop. The NH farmer who described the project said that it could be the most workable viability solution as the NH market grew, expanding beyond its current framework in which farmers' markets dominate.

B12) Facilitate efforts by farmers to increase markets and profitability through the creation of value-added agricultural products. This encouragement can take the form of a Dept. of Agriculture or other supporting agency business development/ grant program or can be provided as more general marketing assistance.

Many people do not have time for cooking. As a result, they purchase ready-made products for some meals. Farmers and other agricultural businesspeople can enter this market by creating their own value-added products. Connecticut can encourage these efforts by creating business development, grant, or loan programs and hiring experienced staff to encourage value-added projects. Such programs could be used to create enterprise kitchens, follow the example set by the Chesapeake Fields Institute, or work on other projects such as new freezers, mobile slaughterhouses, transportation vehicles, or other processing facilities. Two potential ideas include lowering taxes on value-added products and requiring supermarket chains to reserve shelf space for products made from state-grown produce. An

additional idea is to support some kind of cooperative processing kitchen where vegetables, for example, could be cut and packaged; where farmers could bring their goods to a central location and people could be hired to do this work on the produce.

(B12) Model Programs

DE DOA is working with state universities and farming organizations to create an enterprise or commercial kitchen. The model that DE is following is the kitchen created by Hudson Valley Foods in Poughkeepsie, NY. Hudson Valley Foods is a non-profit organization with an understanding of grants, food business, inspection laws, etc. After remodeling a building with enterprise kitchens, the organization began renting kitchens out to farmers and others interested in making value-added products. Access to these workspaces enables farmers to do something with the left-over, perishable produce they have at the end of a farmers' market. Farmers can take this produce to the kitchen and rework it into saleable value-added products. RI has a new farm kitchen law that allows the production of value-added products in farm kitchens. A certification process is involved, and kitchen must comply with regulations.

MD's Chesapeake Fields Institute is working on a project to promote value-added grain products from MD farmers. The purpose of the project is to make money from value-added grain products. At the moment, all grain grown on MD farms gets mixed together and thus loses its value, being sold as a commodity for the lowest price (such as feed for the poultry industry). To counter this situation, the different grains could be separated to preserve their identity and value. The grain could then be marketed to manufacturers and distributors, or the farmers could do value-added processing themselves. Examples for such processing exists in western states, where farmers have made pasta from their grain (Dakota Pasta) or pizza crust (Oklahoma pizza crust) by growing specialty grains instead of feed grains. Chesapeake Fields Institute has raised some money for the project through grants, done marketing surveys to determine growth points for grain, and set up a food science lab at the University of Maryland to identify food attributes in grains that can be marketed in new ways. The next steps are feasibility studies and infrastructure construction.

B13)

Encourage and promote the purchase, marketing, and selling of state-grown produce by supermarket chains, either directly from growers or indirectly through food wholesalers who buy locally grown produce.

Many people buy their food at supermarkets. Having locally-grown food options to choose from while shopping at supermarkets can increase consumers' awareness of locally-grown food and their willingness to purchase it. The role of the DOA, in this case, could be to facilitate purchase of state-grown or locally grown produce by working directly with supermarkets, monitoring and recognizing supermarket commitment to state-grown produce, and/or marketing support to wholesalers interested in prioritizing state-grown produce.

(B13) Model Programs

In the ME's *Hannaford/Local Purchase Project*, the state's DOA works with vegetable growers and Hannafords, a supermarket chain, to increase the sales of local vegetables to stores. The DOA web site states that grower workshops have been planned for the winter of 2002/2003 to go over the quality, quantity, and pricing requirements that are involved with selling wholesale to Hannafords.

MD and DE a related program called Shore-to-Store. In this program, the Departments of Agriculture in MD, DE, and VA promote produce grown on the Delmarva peninsula by encouraging and facilitating supermarkets to buy directly from growers. Stores are provided with promotional materials such as banners, signs, and buttons. In one aspect of the program, the three states' Departments of Agriculture rank the participating stores through a point system that awards points for correctly identifying the local produce, using state-provided promotional materials, and providing consumers with large numbers of locally grown product choices. Produce managers at the top-ranking stores win prizes. The program also runs potato and watermelon display contests in which prizes are awarded to the winning store managers in each state.

Efforts to facilitate supermarket purchasing of locally grown produce may also involve intermediary food buyers or brokers. Examples of such brokers include *Red Tomato*, a non-profit marketing organization; the *Pioneer Valley Growers Association*, a western Massachusetts farmer cooperative; and the *Fowler and Hunting Company*, a food wholesaler in Connecticut.

B14)

Encourage, promote, and facilitate the purchase of state-grown produce by state institutions and state-agencies.

Potential institutional-purchasers include prisons, hospitals, and schools and colleges. Potential state agency purchasers include state departments, such as the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services,

Corrections, and Education. Each of these entities represents an additional market that can support local farmers and be supplied with state-grown produce.

Several strategies would replicate what is already happening in other states, such as working with institutions and state agencies on purchasing projects, increasing farm-to-school marketing efforts, and creating a

state purchasing preference law. Another idea is to have a dedicated employee of the state who promotes state-grown produce to institutions or companies, as exists in Massachusetts. DAS could also review its buying policies and shape the bidding process to maximizing opportunities for purchase of state-grown produce. Noting the national subsidized fresh fruits and vegetables school lunch program, there may exist an opportunity to capture federal dollars for Connecticut farmers and wholesalers through local purchase contracts in the public schools as well.

Common stakeholder viewpoints:

The interviews conducted on this subject revealed a number of common opinions about institutional and state agency purchasing. These ideas include the following:

- A large potential exists for such purchasing and should be developed
- Producers may not be interesting in participating in these plans if doing so means receiving wholesale prices
- The current operating systems/infrastructure make buying-local cumbersome
- The links between producers and state departments/institutions (or their buyers) need to be developed
- Educating the public and policy makers about the

value of state/institutional purchasing is as important as creating consumer demand

- Success rests on building enthusiasm in state departments/institutions
- Mandates for institutional buying are ineffective without participant enthusiasm

Additional assorted ideas related to state/institutional purchasing:

- Start small and with easier products such as milk, apples, salad bar veggies, hamburger.
- Give vouchers to state institutions to make them aware of locally grown food.
- Offer tax break for farms that sell wholesale to schools.
- Develop a position for a special broker, or somebody who can be educated as a special broker, in the school systems who knows more than school purchasers.
- Schools can be a natural step for other in-state purchasing efforts.
- Reform food safety standards in bid system so that all produce companies would have to meet some sort of guideline.
- Create a law to require uniform grading, packing, or use of packing shed/packing out models. Such a system would make it easier to compete with California produce that already has such regulations.

- Create a program to connect food service companies with growers or a program that creates a regional marketing structure that allows farmers to sell to supermarkets in multiple states.
- For farm-to-school activities, emphasize child obesity and how locally grown food can help change diets.

(B14) Model Programs

Prisons

NJ has instituted a state-grown food-purchasing program with state prisons in 2002. The Treasury Department, working with Southwoods Prison System, modified the bidding regulations so as to allow larger broker-growers (who typically grow crops on 500-600 acres), to bid on the contract. These modifications made the bidding process less cumbersome and complicated, thereby allowed a pool of local farm business vendors to bid. The vendor that is selected has to supply all of the prisons' fresh produce needs, and in-season supply comes from NJ farms. One contract modification is that vendors are allowed to offer tomatoes that have been graded out (off-grade tomatoes that are still edible) for prisons' processing needs. Important to note is that the bidding process still takes place, only it does so among local vendors. Whenever public money is spent, there cannot be a pure waiver of the bidding process. Also important was the enthusiasm behind the project by the Secretary of Agriculture,

(B14)

Model Programs, cont.

Commission of Corrections, and prison food service staff. A number of stakeholders described the requirement for institutional/state-agency purchasing that the important players involved be enthused about the project. According to a representative from the NJ Farm Bureau, the Secretary of Agriculture appealed to the Commissioner of Corrections to make it a cabinet level priority that fresh food purchases in prisons give a preference in their bid processes to local growers.

Schools

The farm-to-school marketing efforts in NY are noteworthy in this category. NY's Farm-to-School Initiative is designed to facilitate and promote the purchase of NY farm products by educational institutions. The initiative was passed into law in 2001. Current work includes a state Department of Education survey of all of the school districts in the state to analyze their procurement policies and potential for buying local food. School lunch and breakfast programs operate ten months a year. The NY State School Food Service Association formed a task force that is working on the Farm-to-School Initiative with the state's Departments of Agriculture and Education. Cornell University, which helps support the state's Farm-to-School Initiative, also operates a Farm-to-College Program.

RI recently used a grant to hire an Agricultural Education Coordinator whose job it is to develop farm-to-school connections. DE hired a person to talk with state agencies about buying local food, analyze the existing purchasing systems, and investigate the potential for school purchasing.

VT-FEED (Food Education Every Day) is a VT-NOFA program designed to promote local-food purchasing by elementary school cafeterias. The project looks at schools' purchasing methods and how major distributors operate their systems. Program officials then sit down with school cooks, talk to them about what modifications can be made, and do community organizing to build support for the changes (because if local products will cost parent more, their support is needed). There is an annual application process for *VT-FEED*, two schools are accepted each year, and previous schools serve as mentors for the schools beginning the local-food purchasing process.

State-grown preference purchasing laws

Several states have laws that encourage or require institutions or state agencies to purchase state-grown produce under similar circumstances. RI has a law that requires state-grown produce be purchased if it is of the same price and quality as competing produce, however there is limited wholesale agricultural to satisfy this statute. VT and ME have similar laws that encourage institutions to buy state-grown produce. Officials in DE are working with the Governor to create such a law as well. ME requires institutions buy 10% of their goods from local producers; a drawback to this approach is food buyers who will buy local produce only up to the 10% level, but not higher. The PA DOA has worked with the Department of General Services, which does food buying for about 50% of PA's school systems, to establish a preference for state-produced goods, all things being equal. WV has a policy that says in-state growers can be 5% more expensive than the least costly option in the bidding process and still get the sale. NY has two enabling laws that encourage government agencies and educational institutions to alter their bid processes to favor the purchase of locally grown food. One of these enabling laws was used to issue a memo that favors the purchase of locally grown produce by state institutions. Food buyers in ME stop after their 10% requirement or do not obey it at all. A concern regarding this trend in policy is that as states adopt preferential treatment for their own state-grown produce, other states may respond with reciprocity threats that can hurt regional exports.

State Agencies

NY's Office of General Services, the purchasing agency of NY, issued a memo in August 2001 to all state departments and agencies. This memo, permissible through one of the NY's enabling laws (State finance law S165: Special provisions for purchase of available NY Food Products), eased the discretionary spending limits of state agencies. The memo authorizes each agency to buy, every 15 days, up to \$10,000 of locally grown produce (fruit, vegetables, and eggs) without having to go through the usual bidding process.

**(B14)
Model Programs,
cont.**

State Agencies, cont.

Without this memo, agencies are only allowed discretionary spending, or spending without bidding, of \$15,000 every 60 days. The State Finance Law usually requires agencies to solicit for bids before making purchases, with the lowest satisfactory bidder winning the contract. Agencies planning to spend more than \$15,000 in 60 days must use the bidding process. This memo facilitates the ability of state agencies to buy locally grown produce without having to solicit for bids.

In MA, using funding from a grant received by the Pioneer Valley Growers' Association, one state employee goes to colleges and corporations and asks them why they are not buying locally grown. He circulates the handout promoting *Mass Grown* and putting the responsibility for purchasing locally grown produce back on the institutions and businesses.

**C. Farmland
Preservation, Land
Use, and
Conservation**

In order for agriculture to contribute to Connecticut's rural character and to benefit the state's economy, Connecticut must have a permanent land base available for agricultural use. If there is no viable land to farm, or if the land available is too expensive or degraded, pursuing or sustaining an agricultural enterprise holds little appeal. The recommendations in this category focus on the state's farmland protection, land use, and conservation programs and policies. Model programs from other northeastern states that hold the most promise for replication in CT support these recommendations.

Recommendations

- C1) **Expand the current farmland preservation program so that more land can be preserved. Increase the program's funding and staffing levels to adequately reflect this expansion and the state's farmland preservation goals.** Although the state's purchase of development rights (PDR) program was created in 1978, by 2003 less than 25% of the program's goal of preserving 130,000 acres of farmland had been met.

**(C1)
Model Programs**

New Jersey has a large, dedicated source of funding for its farmland preservation programs. Following a state referendum in 1998, a constitutional amendment and legislative act were passed guaranteeing \$98 million/year for 30 years for the preservation of open space, farmland, and historic places. The act's goal was to collectively preserve one million acres. The fund that was created through the act is called the Garden State Preservation Trust Fund (GSPTF). Farmland preservation gets \$36 million/year from this total, but in any given year, through other appropriations, the total can become as high as \$80 million. NJ is also using this money creatively. The legislature can authorize bonding for 10 years, to complement PDR funding, and the state can repay these bonds with a portion of the final 20 years worth of the GSPTF. This arrangement takes advantage of lower land prices today and saves some land that would otherwise be lost in the next 10 years. One way that NJ has expanded its farmland preservation program is by adding a fee simple purchasing program. In this program, the state can buy a farm outright to protect it from development. The state then retires the property's development rights and auctions the property back to interested farmers at the property's now less expensive, agricultural value.

**(C1)
Model Programs,
cont.**

In MD, a land trust, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC), operates a similar program with its Land Rescue Revolving Fund. If a property for sale is deemed a preservation priority, ESLC will use money from this fund to purchase the property, install a conservation easement, and then resell the land to a farmer. Calvert County, MD also has a revolving loan fund. The county does not use money from the fund to buy threatened land itself but rather uses the fund to provide loans to local land trusts. These land trusts will either follow the retirement and reselling process described above or will pursue another preservation process.

C2) Consider utilizing additional, alternate means of funding for the Farmland Preservation Program.

The program is currently funded through legislative acts that authorize the State Bond Commission to issue bonds. The legislature considers these acts on an annual basis, and the level of funding the acts have been authorizing is not meeting the demands of the program. As of late 2002, there were more than 200 farms on the program's waiting list.

**(C2)
Model Programs**

In MD, the state PDR program has a stable and reliable source of funding: the conveyance tax. Maryland's farmland preservation program receives 14% of the state transfer tax, the tax that is collected during real estate transactions. MD's program receives further funding through an agricultural transfer tax, a tax that is assessed when land is changed from agricultural use to some other use. 100% of the agricultural transfer tax goes to farmland preservation programs in MD. The state gets about 2/3 of the agricultural transfer tax for the state's program and the county gets about 1/3. If the county doesn't spend its portion of the money on farmland preservation in the next three years, the money reverts back to the state for its farmland preservation program.

VT's PDR program, run by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), has a similar funding mechanism. Approximately 50% of the property transfer tax is set aside each year in a fund called the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund (VHCTF). About 55% of this money is used for affordable housing projects while the remainder is used for the preservation of farmland, open space, recreation land, and historic places. VHCB has about ten additional sources of funding, including federal grants or additional appropriations by the general assembly during good economic times. The funds that come from the property transfer tax make up the greatest contribution to the VHCTF. About \$11-13 million of the \$20 million raised in 2002 came from the property transfer tax.

WV passed legislation in 2002 that allows counties to enact property transfer taxes and use the resulting funds towards the purchase of agricultural easements. The DOA reports that the tax is allowed to be a maximum of \$1.10 for every \$500 of a property's value.

C3) Take advantage of available federal and other matching funding. Increase funding for the Farmland Preservation Program so that Connecticut can capitalize on matching funds available through the Federal Farmland Protection Program.

Between 2002-2007, as much as \$25 million will be available to Connecticut for farmland preservation as matching funds

through the Federal Farmland Protection Program. If CT can increase state funding for its PDR program it will be able to leverage these federal funds. Matching funds and other assistance are also available through other conservation programs sponsored in part by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Forest Service. Connecticut could take greater advantage of the financial, technical, educational, and research assistance provided through these programs.

C4) Improve integration of farmland preservation with economic viability programs.

By linking farmland preservation efforts to programs that support the economic viability of agriculture, some policies in the region are building insurance by increasing the likelihood of viable agribusiness models on preserved farmland. For some farmland preservation advocates, economic viability issues are of equal or more importance than farmland preservation issues. Farm Bureau representatives, extension agents, farmers, and many would support the following statement made by a RI Farm Bureau representative: “The best way to conserve farmland is to keep farmers in business.” Another stakeholder cited the motto of his value-added project as “Preservation through Profitability.”

C5) Consider additional foci and criteria for selecting land through the Farmland Preservation Program.

Such alternate foci may be blocks of land that would preserve an agricultural infrastructure, farmland not immediately threatened by development but still important, smaller parcels such as many organic farms, and farmland that can contribute to the state’s overall food security.

**(C4)
Model Programs**

In NY, county farmland protection boards can receive state grants to help implement their farmland protection plans. These plans define ‘farmland protection’ so as to include both PDR and business development projects. For example, Wayne County’s farmland protection board has hired an agricultural economic development specialist (who obtained state and federal grants to purchase development rights on 2000 acres) and created a revolving loan fund for four farm businesses (which are required to go through business training before getting the 2% below prime rate loans). MA’s *Farm Viability Enhancement Program* and ME’s *Agricultural Farms for the Future Grant Program* provide business planning and grant assistance in exchange for short-term development-restriction agreements. Experienced consultants help develop the business viability plans.

PA has an *Installment Purchase Agreement (IPA) Program* for purchase of development rights. The IPA Program benefits the state by freeing up money to be spent on additional farmland preservation projects. Farmers benefit by being able to defer capital gains taxes while also collecting tax free interest payments. IPA programs originated in MD where four counties – Howard, Harford, Calvert, and Anne Arundel – currently have IPA programs. The program in Calvert County goes by a different name, Leverage and Retire, but operates in the same manner. Burlington County, NJ also has an IPA program.

DE, MD, NJ, NY, and PA also have agricultural districts. In exchange for becoming part of an agricultural district – a covenant that may involve a temporary agreement not to develop one’s land – a farmer may be entitled to differential property tax assessment and additional RTF protections. NJ’s *Eight-Year Preservation Program* has a framework of benefits and restrictions similar to that of agricultural districts. In return for agreeing not to develop one’s land for eight years, a landowner is eligible to apply for NJ’s *Soil and Water Conservation Grants Program*.

Given increasing concerns about homeland security, and by extension, food security, an idea is to focus on farmland preservation efforts as a means of ensuring statewide food security or food supplying capacity. Having a local food shed is important, and this idea could be made a primary or secondary focus of CT’s PDR

program. Another suggestion is that size requirements should be lowered to allow smaller farms to participate. Also proposed was the use of preference to PDR applicants with plans to turn their farms over to the next generation.

(C5) Model Programs

NJ's Planning Incentive Grants (PIG) program provides grants to counties and towns (that have farmland preservation plans) to acquire agricultural easements. The program is unique in that the funds are distributed, after a competitive process, for localities' approved plans to preserve a group of farms in a designated project area. PIG's emphasis is more on continuous blocks of farmland than just the best land. Project area proposals, and not individual properties, compete against each other in the PIG program. One focus of MD's Rural Legacy Program (RLP) is preserving large blocks of agricultural land, forestland, and natural areas

NJ is working on new approach to its PDR program that places a greater emphasis on land use planning issues. This Strategic Targeting Initiative is looking at smart growth, land use options, and rural economic development. Also under consideration are the merits of preserving an agricultural infrastructure, a focus that could shift the state's PDR program's selection criteria from prime land to land that can be preserved in contiguous blocks

C6) Reduce restrictions on the types of agricultural operations permitted on state preserved farmland. Regulations and restrictions in any type of program should allow for diversity and for any technological changes that may occur in the future.

(C6) Model Programs

MD's *Rural Legacy Program* (RLP), which serves as a partial complement to the state's PDR program, has more flexibility than the PDR program in how it tailors the restrictions in its easements and how it compensates for these restriction. The PDR program can't be as flexible because the restrictions are set by statute. RLP is run by MD's Dept. of Natural Resources and provides grants to sponsors, such as land trusts and local governments, to create Rural Legacy Areas. Landowners in "Legacy Areas" are eligible to apply for the Rural Legacy Program. A number of stakeholders expressed the opinion that choosing to participate in a PDR program, and thereby restrict their land to agriculture forever, was enough of a restriction. Should circumstances change over time to increase the value of implementing a currently restricted agricultural use, landowners would be unable to take advantage of the new circumstances. There should not be restrictions on the number of cows someone can have or restrictions on certain value-added operations, for instance.

C7) Improve communication with landowners so as to inform them about all of Connecticut's farmland preservation tools and options and how they work.

One way to improve communication between CT DOA, landowners and the public is by improving the Department's web site. In general, the DOA web sites for other states in the Northeast region are more user-friendly and easier to navigate. Another idea is create an informational brochure for landowners that clearly describes all of the state's farmland preservation tools. Rather than the state and other organizations having separate brochures describing their own programs, the state could create a master brochure describing all of the preservation options that exist throughout the state.

C8) Strengthen the state's Farm Link or Land Link system. In addition to supporting New England Land Link, establish a complementary CT Land Link Program.

**(C8)
Model Programs**

Every New England state belongs to New England Land Link, a program sponsored by the New England Small Farms Institute. New England Land Link provides assistance to farmers and landowners who are beginning, retiring, or moving. The services available include land matching support, specialized and technical assistance, publications, and workshops. In New England, Maine and Vermont have individual land links to complement their participation in New England Land Link. In the Northeast region, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania also have Land Link Programs.

C9) Strengthen the state's Plan of Conservation and Development and apply, at the state and local levels, the policies and strategies described in the state plan. Include farmland preservation concerns among the issues discussed and considered

by state and local planners. Include farmland preservation sections in the plans that planners write.

The Plan of Conservation and Development has sections on Food Production and Rural Development that address the issues of farmland and economic viability. State agencies, planners, and municipalities could revisit the policies and strategies presented in these sections. Municipalities' plans of conservation and development could be further encouraged or required to include farmland preservation related sections. As Connecticut's state plan exists now, it is similar to the state plans of conservation/development/planning/growth management that exist in other northeast states: each state's plan is a guide that towns and counties are encouraged, but not required, to follow.

C10) Foster local initiatives that increase towns' farm-friendliness.

Encourage the creation of town committees that support agriculture, and continue to educate the public about the benefits of farms and what is involved with agricultural enterprises.

Fostering local initiatives such as farm-friendly town committees can build synergy between town

governments and the farming and non-farming communities. Town committees can investigate ways to address issues such as the importance of buffer zones between farmland and other land uses, right-to-farm issues such as complaints and nuisance suits, and the use of local programs that support agriculture and farmland preservation.

Throughout the northeast region, many described the need for educating the public better about what agriculture entails, both what it takes to run a viable farm business and what such agricultural enterprises add to the character and environment of a state, region, or town. Residents should know more about accepted agricultural practices, the relationship between agricultural needs and land use, and realize that non-farmers can be greater sources of pollution through their lawn treatments than farmers through their farming. Part of this education process can also be the by-product of a greater cooperation, coordination, and awareness between agricultural organizations in the state. The DOA could also create a position to work on farm-friendly town issues or work in partnership with USDA NRCS, UConn, the Extension System, and others on operating such a position.

C11) Make more land available for farmers.

Create a state policy to rent or lease out state-owned land to state farmers. Provide tax incentives that make it more desirable for landowners to lease their farmland to farmers. Encourage land trusts with farmland to make their land available.

One Connecticut stakeholder commented that large blocks of state land exist, some of which is being rented to farmers but much of which is not. The state could establish a policy to rent this land. Two examples of land that is available but currently unused are the areas of land formerly used by Fairfield Hills, a mental institution, and Southbury Training School to produce food for the institutions.

**(C11)
Model Programs**

In RI, many towns have planning provisions that allow farmers to retain and farm open land left over after cluster zoning. When cluster developments proposals are made to local planning boards, applicants are required to identify how they intend to use the left over open space, be it passive recreation, agriculture, or some other use.

In MA's *Farmland Stewardship Program*, the DOA leases state-owned land to MA farmers. As stated on the program's web site, it is the Department's policy to lease land to farmers "whenever possible." This policy can be found in Massachusetts General Law (MGL, chapter 20, section 13-19) and the Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR 18.01). MA DOA licenses to farmers land that other state agencies have transferred to the Department's ownership over time. MA DOA also has cooperative agreements with other state agencies, such as the Dept. of Public Health, Dept. of Mental Retardation, and the Metropolitan District Commission, to manage parcels of their state-owned land (hospital and watershed land) for use by MA farmers in the *Farmland Stewardship Program*. Farmers participate in the program by submitting proposals in a request for responses (RFR) process. MA DOA chooses the winning proposals, creates management plans with the winners, and signs five-year licensing agreements that can be renewed once before the RFR process begins again. MA also has a *Community Garden Program* that leases land for community gardens to support gardens' growth and generate interest in them.

C12) Minimize the cost-share provided by the farmer to participate in the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Environmental Assistance Program.

This measure will allow cash poor farmers to more easily meet environmental needs and regulations.



Sources, References, and Resources

The following is a list of organizations, documents, and other resources that were cited, used, or otherwise reviewed during the course of the project.

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Maine

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