Governor Ned Lamont and Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz joined Department of Agriculture (DoAg) Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt for a tour of Connecticut agricultural businesses on Tuesday, October 22.

"Connecticut farmers have continuously evolved over hundreds of years to stay viable, vibrant and an essential segment of our state's economy," said Governor Lamont.

"There is nothing more important than supporting Connecticut grown products—from shellfishing to wine to providing families with affordable and nutritious food options—it is important to my administration to meet with the farmers from around the state and learn about their stories, understand the heritage of their farms and hear how we can work to help them grow for generations to come."

The day of touring included stops at some of Connecticut’s thriving agriculture business including Copps Island Oysters in Norwalk, Jones Family Farm in Shelton, and the very first walk-through of the construction phase of the Brass City regional food hub facility in Waterbury.

The estimated completion date for the first-of-its-kind regional food hub is expected in December 2019. Federal, state, municipal, and non-profit resources were aggregated to execute the agriculture and urban development project—a replicable model for other regions to use and project which has the potential to change food distribution and local food production in Connecticut.

"When innovation and agriculture meet, you get Brass City Harvest," said Lt. Governor Bysiewicz. "This exciting new regional food hub facility—the first of its kind in our entire state—will be a game changer in the farming industry and I can’t wait to see this project through to completion."

The new food hub will support the development of the local food system, creating an aggregation point for farmers to meet larger contract needs.

"These farm businesses are great examples of the diverse agricultural economy of Connecticut," said Commissioner Hurlburt. "Our hard working farm families are finding innovative ways to take advantage of technology and market forces to meet the demands of their customers and expand their businesses."

The visit to food hub highlighted the regional significance, revenue pathways, food processing, and transportation options which will make this facility a Connecticut landmark for food import/export.

"The Brass City Regional Food Hub has the potential to create a paradigm shift in the way we view our food system—and its economic potential," said Sue Pronovost of Brass City Harvest. "As a partner to our state’s agricultural producers, we will be prepared to advance their products to more lucrative markets through innovative technologies and strict adherence to the Produce Safety Rule under FSMA."

In 2019, Brass City Harvest was awarded $99,700 through U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crop Block Grant program administered by DoAg for a Regionalization of a Connecticut Grown Specialty Crop-Based Food System project.

The tour included a stop at Copps Island Oysters, a fourth generation family of oystermen that have been harvesting from the waters of Long Island Sound since the 1940s. As the largest shellfish producer in Connecticut, Norm Bloom and his son Jim Bloom operate a fleet of 15 vessels that harvest year-round along the

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Connecticut coast and employ 70 employees at facilities in Norwalk, New Haven, and Noank.

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz and DoAg Commissioner Hurlburt tour the Brass City Regional Food Hub in Waterbury, CT, with Sue Pronovost.

Copp's Island Oysters and DoAg’s Bureau of Aquaculture have been recognized nationally and internationally for their success in improving the safety of Connecticut shellfish. Their innovative large-scale rapid-cooling system for oysters was the first of its kind developed in the nation.

During the tour Governor Lamont and Commissioner Hurlburt boarded an oyster boat to travel out to shellfish beds where the Governor learned about the oyster growing process. The tour included oyster harvesting and a demonstration of the rapid cooling system along with an explanation of the shipping and distribution process and the economic impact of the oyster industry in Connecticut.

“The reason for interest in Connecticut oysters is year-round quality and the reputation for food safety, which is the result of handling procedures and state testing,” said J.P. Vellotti.

Aquaculture’s success in Connecticut is the result of a cooperative program between DoAg and the aquaculture industry. DoAg’s Bureau of Aquaculture works to assure safety and quality for consumers through water quality monitoring.

Following Copp’s Island Oysters, the tour continued at Jones Family Farms in Shelton with a visit to the former dairy barn turned tasting room where participants learned about the history of the farm and significance of the Connecticut Farm-land Preservation Program to the long-term sustainability of the seven-generation family farm.

“Nearly all the money received from the state of Connecti-

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cut for farmland preservation, we plowed it back into the farm for land purposes,” said Jaime Jones. “We used the money to purchase more adjoining farmland, which is important for buffers and crop rotation. With help from the UConn Cooperative Extension and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station we’re doing more with crop rotations for improved soil organic matter and cover crops.”

On the tour, the Jones family explained to Governor Lamont how the family farm has taken advantage of recent developments in production technology to respond to increased visitors and as a result demand for product.

“For us technology includes growing the newest and best variety of crops,” said Jaime Jones. “We’re not growing the same varieties as years ago. New crops have been developed with improved taste, yield, and disease resistance.”

“It was an honor to have the Governor visit and show him how our farm operates,” said Jaime. “And we appreciate the support the Department of Agriculture has provided to help our business grow.”

FARM VIABILITY GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE NOVEMBER 12

Grant guidelines and applications for the Department of Agriculture’s Farm Viability Grant program are available online and must be submitted by November 12. Grant guidelines and forms can be found at www.CTGrown.gov/grants.

The Farm Viability Grant can provide matching funds to Connecticut municipalities, groups of municipalities, regional councils of governments, and/or agricultural non-profit organizations for projects that foster agricultural viability.

The maximum award under this program is $49,999. Applicants must provide a 40% match through cash or in-kind services. Previously funded projects have included town-owned farm improvements, efforts related to farmland preservation, marketing and promotion for Certified CT Grown farmers’ markets, and a host of other efforts that foster agriculture viability.

CONNECTICUT AG WELLNESS SUMMIT

Save the date for the upcoming Connecticut Ag Wellness Summit on December 5, 2019 at Maneely’s Conference Center in South Windsor, CT. This event is a follow up to UConn Extension’s Farmer Stress Support Training that was held for Connecticut Ag Service Providers in May 2019. This upcoming event will be for farmers, producers, and agricultural providers in Connecticut. There will be limited space. Stay tuned for more details. For more information go to http://s.uconn.edu/farmstress.

2019 UCONN BEEF AUCTION

The UConn Department of Animal Science will hold the 2019 UConn Beef Auction on Sunday, November 3, 2019 at the UConn Cattle Resource Unit (Heifer Barn), Horsebarn Hill Road, Storrs, CT 06269. The event is free and open to the general public. Preview of animals begins at 10:00 a.m., the auction will be held at 12:00 p.m. Approximately 25 UConn animals are expected to be auctioned. For more information go to http://animalscience.uconn.edu/beef/beefCalfSale.php#.