

**Governor's Council for Agricultural Development  
Listening Session held September 19, 2012  
New London County Extension Center, Norwich**

**Council Members and Staff in Attendance**

Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, council chair  
Winter Caplanson, Coventry Farmers' Market, member  
Michael Keilty, Maple Springs Farm, member  
Kevin Sullivan, Chestnut Hill Nursery, member  
Vicky Wallace, UConn Cooperative Extension, facilitator  
Stacey Stearns, UConn Cooperative Extension, recorder  
Steve Anderson, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff  
Jiff Martin, UConn Cooperative Extension, staff  
Linda Piotrowicz, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff

**Other Stakeholders in Attendance**

Chris Bourque, Colchester  
Steven Bousquet, Norwich  
Wayne Budney, Lebanon  
Tracy Burrell, Groton  
Todd Burnett, Canterbury/Salem  
Brian Civitello, Lebanon  
Tom Kalal, East Lyme  
Joyce Meader, Brooklyn  
First Selectman Cathy Osten, Sprague  
James Smith, Lebanon  
Anne Staebner, Franklin  
Matt Staebner, Franklin

**The following notes are intended to capture the essence of the discussion.  
They are not presented as a transcript of the session.**

**Discussion Question 1: What are the opportunities for strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

- Chris Bourque: I have a small sustainable beef and pork farm in Colchester, if we can develop a market, we would produce more beef. I have been pushing for opportunity to enter the institutional market, we have a lot of beef but I can't compete with that market because of price our farm needs to make our production viable. I would like to see a level playing field so that we could produce more and grow our farms more.
- Steven Bousquet: I am the current past president of the Connecticut Nursery Landscape Association (CNLA). CNLA has a garden trail and garden stars program that have been very successful. CNLA had a consumer research grant through fall purchasing, the members developed programs to increase the demand for fall plants. I would like to see CT Grown pushed and keep the marketing in Connecticut; it works.

We have an opportunity, and that is to identify what consumers' want and when they want it. We can do the research and then market that. CNLA hired a marketing research firm that did two different tests; they interviewed groups of consumers and asked questions. After the results of the first interviews they developed new questions and went back and asked more questions. We found that people are more interested in buying plants in the fall – they weren't buying currently because the supply was low. Plants were in-state, but producers were thinning in the fall so they didn't have to carry the plants over the winter. Consumers weren't buying because of the low supply/thinning mentality, the research showed that if the supply is there, people will buy it.

- Tom Kalal: I have a beef and pork operation. I would like to see the GCAD look at property taxes; we have the the PA 490 program but need more. In my town buildings are not tax exempt; and getting the town to look at things to take off of the taxes is hard. Other states have better farm inheritance laws so it is easier to pass the farm to the next generation, there are fewer taxes etc.

My wife is working on institutional beef too with a marketing staff member from the Department of Agriculture, but the price point the institutions pay for ground beef is too low for us to compete with as a Connecticut producer. We can't even consider it.

- Brian Civitello: If we are going to do market research, we should develop marketing for sectors that are in most demand and then grow those sectors. I am from the dairy sector. Dairy also needs more value added products.
- Joyce Meader: I work with the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension, and think that Brian and other farmers could benefit from more cooperative efforts of marketing between the different farms. Too many farms are working on their own to establish their markets and grow, I would like to see more effort on the part of farmers to get together and increase their options. Some options are a cheese guild or freezer trade marketing in livestock, so each farm isn't working on their own.
- Wayne Budney: We are doing so much with farm preservation and development rights, which is great, but when farmers pass on and the heirs get hit with inheritance tax you can't get away from it. Pennsylvania re-wrote their tax codes so that if the farm is kept intact for 7 years, it doesn't go through the inheritance tax anymore. I would like to see Connecticut pass the same law – so that farms are passed on intact. It's hard to watch pieces of a farm get sold off to pay the taxes.

I am in the beef business and raise 150 head of cattle each year. We would like to enhance our private treaty business, we sell a lot of USDA beef to people we know, and would like to find an inroad into the education sectors or schools. It's hard to compete against the low cost ground beef substitutes. We need to do a study on what the students like – the CT grown beef or the beef they are currently getting and that may convince the schools to pay more. The potential is there to ramp up production, on our farm and many others.

- Matt Staebner: We need to work with DEP to open up the wildlife management areas. Instead of paying someone to brush hog it ever year, farmers could plant crops there that are good for wildlife. Farmers could access that land on a competitive bid process.

### **Discussion Question 2: What are the obstacles to strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

- Todd Burnett: I am a horticultural producer, and one of my concerns is regulations. One example is the water diversion permitting process. I could spend a large amount of money to dig a rainwater pond and install irrigation. However, the permitting process can cost as much as the cost of the irrigation equipment and digging the pond. I realize there are needs for regulations; but they can make it very difficult to prove that you aren't creating an obstacle.

Property tax valuations can also be a real burden for a small business. The permitting process can be lengthy – I thought I was grandfathered and wasn't at my nursery. I can't remember the entire length, but know other producers that had the costs run into tens of thousands of dollars or more – it varied depending on the town and what level the DEP wanted to look into it and how much research they wanted to do.

- Steve Bousquet: CNLA has had two big fights in the past years. Land availability, fuel costs, truck weight limits etc have all been problems for them. If we could address some of these problems – input costs and regulations, it would be easier for the producers to be more viable.
- Matt Staebner: The trucking regulations are a huge detriment. We are only allowed 80,000 lbs, but the truck can hold 100,000 lbs and are safer on the road when they are full – a partial load sloshes around and is harder to control.

The second obstacle we face is health insurance. We have 25 employees and had to do serious negotiations with health insurance this year to keep going. Farm Bureau and our dairy cooperative have been helpful with this.

- Chris Bourque: Regulations are a big obstacle, at the national level too. We went from local food networks to national and international; and regulations were adopted to protect consumers because of the movement of products. But, those regulations encumber local food production. When I'm dealing with people twenty miles from me, if I sell a bad product everyone knows quickly. The regulations need to be for local markets and local buyers.

Another challenge is that every town is different and it can be extremely expensive. I know a farm with "as right" wetlands; it cost \$15,000 to defend their point and be given permission to expand their barn. But, after defending their point they couldn't afford to expand the farm into that wetland, even though they were approved. Every town has their own regulations, and we need central regulation. Colchester bans piggeries, there is no good justification and we will eventually win, but each of these things takes a lot of time and effort. Regulations should be a state issue, not a local issue. Things like piggeries shouldn't be banned and regulated at the town level, it should be more uniform across the state.

- Wayne Budney: I don't go to local farm markets but I support them. In Pennsylvania there are lots of farm stands selling baked goods, but we can't do that in Connecticut unless you go through elaborate regulations for certified kitchens. How do they do it successfully in Pennsylvania, but we can't? How come they don't need a certified kitchen in Pennsylvania? How can we make it easier for Connecticut farm stands to sell baked goods?
- Tom Kalal: What Chris said is true, we need a liaison to help with the regulation process. We have an existing farm pond; the town came out and said that we had dammed up the stream. We had to go through applications with DEP to address this issue and make it right. We need an agricultural person to communicate with the towns about the regulations. Town regulations are made by two or three citizens who think they are doing a good job but don't always know about agriculture.

Another issue is the beekeepers are in deep trouble right now. There are seven truck loads of formic acid on the state border, but DEP is having a snafu with the label. Beekeepers need to treat now for the Varroa mite; their biggest predator, and formic acid is the only product that works, but can't get it in the state.

- Brian Civitello: As we grow the different agricultural sectors, we need to find a way to get products to market at a reasonable cost and talk about what a competitive price is. We need to get everyone together to work on this.

### **Discussion Question 3: What specific recommendations would you like to see included in the plan to *Grow Connecticut Farms*?**

- Chris Bourque: For meat producers we don't have a lack of slaughterhouses as much; but they need to be state inspected not USDA inspected so they can be more competitive. If beef producers did ever ramp up production there would not be enough meat cutters in the state though. I would really like to set up the taste test for institutions and let students decide if they like CT Grown beef – Massachusetts did this and then institutions were willing to pay more for local beef. We need a lot more meat cutters to process that meat if we do this though. The state education level, UConn and others, could pass meat-cutting courses along to the trade school level as well. We would have meat cutters course training if the demand were there.
- Steve Bousquet: One of CNLA's recommendations is that the state has regulatory power and lets the towns know the state has it. There are 169 towns in the state – our industry can't fight every town in Connecticut. There are too many towns to keep track of to help our producers. States need to get that across to the towns. There are only three million people in state, it's not that big, but we need the

state to have leadership in the regulatory processes that effect farms. The state also needs to level the playing field with trucking – the surrounding states all have 100,000 lb truck weight limit.

CNLA wants to see a plan to bring local youth into the agriculture industry through education. Right now we are getting our employees from various sources like UCONN and Naugatuck Community College, we need a wider net though. Only two schools in state to get talent from isn't enough. The state should help the university market the need for those talents at the high school level. High school programs are pushing dairy, and they should push nursery harder at the high school level too. CNLA has a program to train youth too, but it needs more promotion.

- Jim Smith: We need to strengthen the Department of Agriculture and staff it fully. So many people are removed from agriculture, and we need a strong department to educate the people making the policies that effect agriculture. With fuel costs the way they are its challenging. Many of our products are trucked in from west and it's detrimental to expenses. We need a fully funded department to help with all of these recommendations.
- Anne Staebner: I am a day care head teacher. We all know about the state standards for education, but very little in them has to do with agriculture. We need to change that if we want to grow Connecticut agriculture. There is a lot of science in the standards and history too; it can include agriculture and Connecticut farms. Students have to learn about the history of our farms to make it worthwhile to understand what farmers have to do now to grow food and feed our country. If we change the standards, and the Department of Agriculture works with the Department of Education, it will also decrease the obesity problem because people will understand nutrition. We really need to think about how everything can work together.
- Vicky Wallace: Has seen first hand that lessons come from grants and there can be a bias based on where the grants come from.
- Matt Staebner: We need to utilize more of the vacant lots and homes beyond rehabilitation and get that land back into production. Smaller farmers might be able to utilize the ground, and it would make the state look better than allowing multi-flora rose to grow everywhere on the vacant lots.
- Tom Kalal: In Detroit they are baling hay because there was so much demolition. We also need to help young people get started in agriculture. In the last 15 years I think the level of graduates from UConn has decreased. Young people ask him all the time how he got his land. How can we get them started? I also have an issue with some of the grants. I don't have the time/interest/desire to do the paperwork, and would rather be out there farming. Somehow if there was a person on the phone that could give some tips or advice on filling out applications; to make the task a little less daunting, it would be a good thing. If we had more support staff in the Department of Agriculture, and they came out to your farm to see if they could help, or at least someone he could call for help filling out applications.
- First Selectman Osten: We need assistance for smaller farms. In Sprague they could use assistance with farms. We are working with students at the schools to grow their own food, and are setting up other programs, but would like assistance paying for some of these. We did upside down tomato plants this year, and even a small amount of money (\$3,000-\$4,000) can be hard for the town to come up with. We also have a community garden at the senior center.

Sprague changed our zoning regulations to make them more farm-friendly, and we are trying to help people understand where their food comes from. We also do tax abatements and have small parcels of land, from 20 to 50 acres; that we are trying to save instead of having a subdivision go in, a lot of it is prime farmland. We are at the point where we could use additional assistance to save the smaller parcels, in conjunction with Department of Agriculture and USRDA. We are really proud of what we have done, but we could make improvements and we will need help to do this. The land won't be there forever if we don't start to save it. Sprague is trying to do this progressively, but we need that small amount of assistance. The financial assistance, even in small amounts is helpful. We would like a go to resource at Department of Agriculture for our grant writer too. If there were more staff at Department of Agriculture who could provide technical assistance, for instance – how to overlay a

wetlands map on topographical map. Doing title searches that go back 150 years to find out how property was set up can make things even more complicated and can cost 30-40,000 dollars as well.

- Tracy Burrell: I am a Master Gardener and composter. I always takes brochures that are available to different events and it's amazing how much people don't know about the free resources that are available. I wear my Master Gardener badge as an UConn docent at the arboretum, and talk about farms and the master gardener program. People don't realize it's out there. We need to make the information easier for people to get to. We also need to expand the market share so that people know the products are available, there are opportunities available throughout the year, we just need to know what to market to the people.
- Brian Civitello: Do we have a marketing person in the Department of Agriculture? Commissioner answered that we had a marketing division in the bureau – dedicated funding for CT Grown marketing too, and the Governor's Council is looking at what we are doing now and what we could be doing better. Winter is chair of the marketing group in GCAD, and will be examining this.

*Submitted by Stacey Stearns*

DRAFT

**Governor's Council for Agricultural Development  
Listening Session held September 20, 2012  
Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, Windsor**

**Council Members and Staff in Attendance**

Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, chairman  
Henry Talmage, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, vice chairman  
Dean Weidemann, UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, vice chairman  
Shelly Oechsler, Botticello Farms, member  
Jennifer Riggs, facilitator  
Stacey Stearns, UConn Cooperative Extension, recorder  
Jiff Martin, UConn Cooperative Extension, staff  
Linda Piotrowicz, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff

**Other Stakeholders in Attendance**

Joe Bonelli, Vernon  
Leah Johnson, Bridgeport  
Diane Miller, Woodstock  
Paul Miller, Woodstock  
Julian Pon, Woodstock

**The following notes are intended to capture the essence of the discussion.  
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**Discussion Question 1: What are the opportunities for strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

- Paul Miller: We've talked about a lot of these things in the past. With farm energy, I wonder why can't we do what other states in New England have done with their green energy plans? Our power companies think the best way is to get new transmission lines in from Quebec and that really bothers me. I think that politically we need to work on getting some key people in key positions. If you have a key person that will put up roadblocks, you have to find ways around them.
- Julia Pon: I am here to observe. I am in a working group with Leah Johnson and we are from Wholesome Wave.
- Shelley Oechsler: We need to strengthen agriculture in education. It needs to be in K-12 because that is the foundation; we can't wait until students get to college. Agriculture needs to be exciting and imaginative for younger kids, and somewhat sexy at the high school level. It has to appeal to the kids; it's not just about getting your hands dirty but about our entire livelihood. As children learn they bring it home to their parents.
- Paul Miller: Back to the energy source, I talked to Allyn Brown yesterday and he is big in hydroponics. It makes the whole circle of energy go; you generate a lot of heat and that's what you need for greenhouse growth. You can utilize some of the plants to tie into greenhouse growing and then go into a lot of other exciting things like growing algae and using it for animal feeds etc. In turn these projects need to work with university and the state; projects don't come at no cost and need the challenges of people to get them off the ground.

Our dairy farm is part of the Farmer's Cow and has tremendous challenges fighting gorillas in the market place every day. The meat and poultry industries have the same situation. Their industry comes with federal inspectors, and meat producers need them on board so that the cost isn't prohibitive. But the general public doesn't understand all of the challenges we face with these issues. When we ship cattle to slaughter, we send them where they bring the most money; Albany, New York, and Taylor Packing in Pennsylvania are the places where we get the most money for them. The drought has been a real challenge for everyone and that is a good reason to develop Connecticut agriculture; it's insurance for consumers that they will have food.

We face challenges every day—public relations issues with smells, equipment on the road, etc. It's totally different than when I started with a couple of cows years ago.

- Leah Johnson: Market demand is a huge opportunity. I came out of Wholesome Wave in June and have been working at markets in Bridgeport and see an incredible demand for local food. People are excited when they hear that the produce is from nearby. Market demand is a huge opportunity and there is a lot of excitement in places you don't expect it to come from.
- Julia Pon: Our programs increase farmer's revenue through federal benefit and incentive purchases at farmers' markets. Four years ago, no farmers would come to Bridgeport because they didn't think there was a market. We knew we needed local food, so drove up to Cecarelli Farm and purchased produce and sold it at the market ourselves. Based on that, we proved the demand and Cecarelli's started coming the next year and they are now a fixture in the community. People in urban areas are a potential customer.
- Paul Miller: How do the markets survive in the winter? Are they year round, what kind of food is sold, etc?
- Julia Pon: It's a great challenge that we run into, and it's what we hear from the City of Bridgeport and our customers. The markets shut down on October 31 and don't start again until the following summer. Looking into the larger scheme of things, we ask, "is there a better infrastructure that can be built to connect processing and distributing food in Bridgeport?"
- Paul Miller: I had a choice when I started farming between vegetables and dairy, and chose dairy because I wasn't sure how vegetables would support my family in the winter.
- Shelley Oechsler: A processing facility is the way to make the product go further. You can take it into institutions as a processed item and sell it.
- Leah Johnson: If there was a way to make local produce a year-round thing; there wouldn't be an end to the markets. We just need to figure out the best way to make that happen.

## **Discussion Question 2: What are the obstacles to strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

- Henry Talmage: The only thing I would say about the list of top obstacles is that market competition ranks low but it relates to input costs in that everything is relevant to each other. Input costs are a problem and that means you can't produce a product as cheaply as your neighbor, whether that neighbor is down the road or across the country. Every obstacle on the list is relative to all of the other ones. You think about what to do about these obstacles, but some of them seem more easily solved than others as a reality of where you are. We need to think about how we are going to navigate through them. One question I had was in terms of the 200 surveys, were there differences in the rankings compared to the interviewees and should we have a discussion on those differences at some point? (The list is currently survey and interview responses together.)
- Linda Piotrowicz: The 200 surveys were filled out mostly by producers.
- Shelley Oechsler: Market competition can be as important as anything else. I can sell vegetables directly or I can sell to distributors, but I have to sell to them for less. My market competition is also my customer.
- Paul Miller: Distribution costs are a problem too; the state's infrastructure is a headache in trying to set up a distribution. Getting quality employees that take pride in their job is another whole issue in itself. Getting stores to sell your product is hard; if you are going to a major chain you have to fight with a receiver to get it in the door. Big box stores have to be delivered in a certain time frame, usually before noon, and it presents a distribution problem. Labor costs in the state are one of the big challenges for me—employees work long hours and do it for the pleasure of doing it more than for the salary. Minimum wage was going to go up in the state and that was going to put the dairy industry at

a major disadvantage, but it also costs more to live in the state, so we understand why they wanted to increase it.

When you are moving a large amount of milk, the face to your product doesn't necessarily come with an increase in profit (us creating the Farmer's Cow is an example of this). You have to convince the grocery store to give you some space where the big companies buy their space. The space we have in Stop and Shop stores across the state is worth \$250,000, and we are reminded of that all the time because we don't pay for it. Mr. Chapman of Pinecroft Farms got out of major distribution to big stores because they wanted his corn first thing in the season, and then when corn was ready in Canada, they dropped his product. Vegetable growers face a lot of these challenges in big supermarkets. They are told one price and get there and are given a lower price for their product. What can they do about it? I put in a self-service cooler at our farm, and people like it because they can go 24 hours a day.

- Shelley Oechsler: One thing I like about the Farmer's Cow is your advertising; it's in the consumers face so it's consumer driven because the consumers are asking grocery store for Farmers Cow.
- Paul Miller: We are doing that on purpose; its gorilla marketing—you convince the consumer that they need your product and let them convince the retailer to stock it.
- Shelley Oechsler: That has to be really expensive though, and that cost has to be made up somewhere else. But, the customer pull needs to happen and go into the large stores.
- Paul Miller: Grocery store markup averages 30% at the large stores. They mark up Farmer's Cow products, too, and told us that we can't tell them how much to mark it up.
- Henry Talmage: A lot of discussion was around getting product to where consumers are in the retail markets but that doesn't automatically guarantee that you will sell at a volume that will make sense to pay for all of those other things. If the retail price is double a similar store brand product, you won't sell through to a level that makes a huge impact. We need to get it into stores and have it sell at significant volume. It's not as simple as "consumers want it and it will sell."
- Shelley Oechsler: If you sell to a large distribution center, you will get paid at the bottom, and the store will charge quite a bit higher. We need to figure out what the larger margin is and how to do it better. Then you have to figure out how to deal with the receivers at stores. Their trucks take precedence and you can be halfway unloaded and have to move and wait for them. There has to be a tax incentive because you are bringing business into this community. We need an incentive to get our products into the local grocery stores and support our own tax base.
- Paul Miller: Another obstacle is the truck weight limit of 72,000 lbs or 80,000 lbs with special permit. There are no baffles in milk tankers because they need to be washed inside so it's dangerous when they are not full. Other states can max out at 99,000 lbs and that is a problem for us. We've talked to Joe Courtney and many legislators and don't know where to go federally to get it changed, but it would help us compete. We are running three loads of milk every two days off of our farm and it costs a lot of money. My milk goes 40 miles, but who wants to get hit with a \$1 per pound fine for being overweight? My tanker fits 67,000 lbs but we're only allowed to put in 48,000 lbs. When you come to a stop sign and put on the brakes, the milk sloshes forward and sends you forward three feet. If the tank was full it wouldn't happen. I've even had our manure truck stopped and paid an \$800 fine because the manure truck was 800 lbs overweight. Even though we have farm plates on all our trucks, we have to abide by safety regulations of the DOT. The trucks would be safer if they were full.
- Commissioner Reviczky: Connecticut's limits are set lower because of federal transportation funds. Connecticut opted for the lower limit years ago, and the federal goal was that everyone would go to lower limit but it didn't happen. If we try to go to the higher limit now, the federal government will withhold our highway funds. Other states had a provision to go to the lower limit in a certain window, but it never happened. New York now has a special permit to go to 100,000 lbs. Our state is at a total disadvantage.

- Paul Miller: The limit depends on wheel bases and truck specifications too.
- Henry Talmage: It also impacts the input costs because truckers don't want to bring stuff into Connecticut.
- Paul Miller: Another obstacle for us is creating energy with manure. The power companies own the rights to the lines on the roads, so you can't run your own power lines in. It's gotten to the point where the power companies control the lines and they won't let me do it. They will give me 5 cents a kw for any power I produce. Vermont has it so that they get paid 18 cents a kw. Some of the solar energy has worked out special deals, but the power companies own the solar panels. I'm hoping some of that will change.
- Commissioner Reviczky: If you generate power on the farm, then it's bought at wholesale. If you buy it you pay retail.
- Paul Miller: We have three meters on one of our farms. We can't even put it in one meter and take it out of another one on our own farm. Net metering could be done but farms don't have that ability.
- Henry Talmage: Some of these things have to be really big ideas. To make a difference on input costs, the idea on truck regulation is a no brainer. Why should we be at a disadvantage compared to our neighbors? Like the power thing there are political barriers that aren't solved easily. What it takes to get beyond something like that is a much bigger initiative; farm energy is one of those. Europe is the model because on farm energy is entirely integrated into agriculture; it's part of what agriculture is and dealing with the input costs. From an industry point of view, there are little things we can do to make adjustments—i.e., a regulator that is a pain in the neck, etc.

The bigger question is, if we are going to be competitive, how do we deal with our input costs? Energy is a big deal; it's the biggest expense, and more expensive here than anywhere else in continental United States. Julia talked about the seasonality challenge; we have a short growing season. Demand is year round or in schools it's when the product isn't available. We need to solve something there if we are going to make a big difference. We need to think really big in this process and make the case that these things are important. Perception is that people want to buy local and we need to tell them where the farms are, but there are real structural things that need to happen to make things work. Looking at 5% from 1% is a long way up.

- Shelley Oechsler: On energy, was it part of the solar auctions in CL&P buyback?
- Paul Miller: We would be paid 12 cents with anaerobic digester as an incentive and that would be great. Solar panels were special programs. Solar panels are fine if your usage is in the range; if you make excess you can get a credit, but you can't sell it. With anaerobic digesters we would make 15x more than we would use, and wanted to sell it to our community. Digesters can be profitable with recycling of grocery store food waste too. I visited four digesters in Germany and saw where they were heating a 250-unit apartment complex with one digester on the North Sea, and powering homes. They were using fish waste from the fishing industry to power the digester and are also allowed to use sewage sludge. We can't use sewage sludge here, but there are other things we can use—chicken manure, horse manure, grass clippings, and any other organic source will create heat and methane. Decaying trees even create methane. Methane is 27x more equivalent to greenhouse warming than carbon dioxide. Digesters are really good for the environment. There are 5,000 digesters in Germany and fewer than 100 in the United States. There are quite a few in Vermont though. You can put corn silage in digester instead of feeding it to the cows; they were doing it in Germany and getting 20 cents for the power. Continental Europe has higher energy costs than we do, and Denmark is another example of a country using green energy. We have to look at other alternatives. We have complaints about the smell—it's natural—but we get a lot of complaints when we spread manure. I visited a farm in New York that put a digester in, and they are happy now because the neighbors wave at them with five fingers instead of one. It makes a more pleasing agriculture to neighbors when you take methane out of manure. They also use methane in India to power kitchen stoves. You just need to be able to harvest it.
- Shelley Oechsler: On a large scale, what's the hold back?

- Paul Miller: Even if we got grant money to build the digester, operating costs are more than 5 cents a kw. Farmers put the old ones in and thought that they were wonderful, but you need to be able to operate it and run it. I compare the digester to the four compartments of a cow's stomach, you need to do certain things to keep each part moving. You put manure in there, add glycerin (a byproduct of diesel which increases production), heat it to a certain degree and get the bugs to grow. A digester for my farm would be between \$5-10 million. If I got 12 cents a kw, then it would be more worthwhile. I have people interested in investing if I can do that.
- Dean Weidemann: If they used a digester at Wholesome Wave, they could heat off-season greenhouses and keep going year round.
- Paul Miller: Primarily Northeast Utilities and their ability to lobby effectively is keeping digesters from getting off the ground.
- Henry Talmage: The transmission language dates back to 1905 and is fiercely defended. The risk of diversified, non-centralized power is a threat to their business model. At 20 cents a kw in Europe, there is a limited threat. The reality is anaerobic digestion has a relatively small threat to power companies. It's not going to put them out of business, but the bigger issue goes beyond anaerobic digestion. We can't make the greenhouse season longer with the current energy profile. Unless we change the economics of on-farm energy, we won't be able to lengthen growing season. We need to create a model where the energy costs are reduced significantly and that will change the profile of whether or not a farm can exist. In Europe they have gone beyond anaerobic digestion; Netherlands has 20% of their power produced on-farm from all different sources. Its part of the economic networking and viability of agriculture. If we can get to that point here we might have some of the political will to change the barriers. We need to force the issue and make it happen—agriculture is important enough to get this done.

**Discussion Question 3: What specific recommendations would you like to see included in the plan to *Grow Connecticut Farms*?**

- Paul Miller: All of these things—labor, input costs, etc.—are a challenge for us. There are things we need to weigh, like the cover crops we should be putting on our land to prevent soil erosion. We need to use certified seed in Connecticut, but it pushes the cost three times higher. But are we doing the land good by not putting the cover crop on because the seed is so expensive? We're doing exciting things with our cover crops; we're growing Triticale, which can double as a feed and cover crop. We're growing radishes this year too, and will kill them and leave the tube so we get drainage in the soil. We need to look at input costs though and how they affect everything else. I'm concerned about some farms not putting cover crops on because of the cost. We already have a tremendous amount of invasive species, so is the seed rule making that much of a difference? I spend some time spraying the invasive species like multi-flora rose and the Japanese plants. One little plant will go fifty feet in every direction, a lot of these species are already here, but I don't think we will be bringing a lot more foreign species in with cover crops. Most of these things were brought in by the state highway, and planted in medians and then they overtake the fields. The Commissioner and Governor came up with land project that will keep the hedgerows back and that will be good. Some towns have regulatory things about taking stonewalls down now too, but that is a challenge—we can't work around them like we used to.

Food security has been one of my pet peeves too and homeland security was looking at that issue recently too. I spoke at conference in Mystic a couple of years ago with border patrol and all sorts of other people that wanted to look at food security. A lot of our food comes over two or three bridges over Hudson River, so we are vulnerable. In a survey a few years ago, it was reported that consumers are willing to support local agriculture, but they wanted the money to go to farmer. We need to look at the marketplace too, if we put a fee on the milk because of where it originated, the fee needs to go back to state the milk originated in. Our dairy program in Connecticut is the envy of many other states though, so we do appreciate that.

Part of the community regulatory process is education; we need agriculture committees in local towns; that is a positive note. Ag committees need to be involved and active and weigh in on regulations for subdivisions, wetlands, and health departments. All health departments should be under one umbrella too, so that you can go to any farmers' market and not need a different permit for every single town you go to. I'm not a big raw milk fan, and insurance is concerned about that too, but I think the regulations need to be uniform so you're not dealing with ten different people with ten different perspectives.

On infrastructure, the Department of Agriculture needs to be fully staffed to do the enforcement necessary. They used to go around to the fairs, but don't even have the employees they need to do that anymore. A real challenge is to get enough people to support the programs the Department of Agriculture has at the present time. We really need to look at that to keep the Department of Agriculture viable. If they aren't there, whom are we going to go to? DEEP, who wants us set back from streams, or Consumer Protection? We need to keep the Department of Agriculture and keep them funded so that we have the right people to help us put programs in place and guide us.

- Julia Pon: Wholesome Wave's latest work has really been focused on business development and help for processing and distribution facilities. We're working with a lot of small food hubs in the Northeast and have seen the value and real need in how to take those businesses to a place where they are investment ready. Wholesome Wave helps them write business plans, connects them to investors and helps with capital. We are focused on opening markets for small and mid-size farms and rebuilding the infrastructure that has been lost.
- Paul Miller: There is a tremendous amount of land that is too small for us to use and I would love to see smaller growers using these fields for vegetables and other projects. The Last Green Valley is doing this and has 12-14 farms selected to use these fields and will help the businesses get to the next step.
- Commissioner Reviczky: On the food hubs, under the umbrella of the Department of Agriculture, the agency owns and operates the regional market in Hartford that covers 32 acres. Through Department of Construction Services, we put out an RFP to develop the future plan of that market, which is really exciting, and moving the market to next level. Governor Malloy is also developing a food hub in Bridgeport. It incorporates resources of the deep-water port and takes advantage of the transportation system that exists in lower Fairfield County too. It incorporates what happens all over the state.
- Julia Pon: Wholesome Wave just did its own analysis of Connecticut for ideal locations for hubs and its really looking like a number of significantly sized hubs are in Hartford and New Haven and other metro areas. These will serve as feeders to create a larger network. We want to reach into rural areas as well.

*Submitted by Stacey Stearns*

**Governor's Council for Agricultural Development  
Listening Session held September 27, 2012  
Common Ground High School, New Haven**

**Council Members and Staff in Attendance**

Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, chairman  
Henry Talmage, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, vice chairman  
Dean Weidemann, UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, vice chairman  
Jamie Jones, Jones Family Farms, member  
Jason Hoagland, Connecticut Agricultural Education Council, Farm Credit East, member  
Diane Hirsch, UConn Cooperative Extension, facilitator  
Stacey Stearns, UConn Cooperative Extension, recorder  
George Krivda, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff  
Jiff Martin, UConn Cooperative Extension, staff  
Linda Piotrowicz, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff

**Other Stakeholders in Attendance**

Brad Armstrong, New Haven  
Rachel Berg, Hamden  
Nicole Berube, New Haven  
Keith Bishop, Guilford  
Catherine Bradshaw, New Haven  
Joe Cesiak, Hamden  
Kala Cuerington, New Haven  
Tim Dutcher, New Haven  
Robin Golden, New Haven  
Amy Kleinman, Bridgeport  
Ashley Kremser, New Haven  
Leah Mayor, New Haven  
Susan Mitchell, East Lyme  
Steve Munno, Woodbridge  
Darryl Newman, Newtown  
Shannon Raider, New Haven  
Melissa Spear, New Haven  
Jonathan Strieff, East Haven  
Maria Tupper, New Haven  
Christina Wakefield, New Haven

**The following notes are intended to capture the essence of the discussion.  
They are not presented as a transcript of the session.**

**Discussion Question 1: What are the opportunities for strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

- Darryl Newman: We have several opportunities, including increasing profitability, increasing demand, and reducing our costs. Reducing energy costs is a big opportunity; we need cooperation between UConn and the Agricultural Experiment Station to develop strategies to reduce input costs. Both have good research and good science; they need to collaborate more to help us. I'm from Planter's Choice and Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association (CNLA).
- Shannon Raider: I'm the Common Ground Farm Manager. One opportunity that we have listed is geography. We have a high population density in Connecticut, especially New Haven county, and access to markets is easier for us. There is a lot of growth of community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, small farms, and farmers' markets. Most of these are the 1- to 50-acre farms. I have seen that we have a lot of apprenticeship programs, with young people coming to the state for the summer to work on one of these farms. They get really excited about agriculture and then leave the state for better opportunities. Access to land and credit/financing are the number one opportunities in for

growth in Connecticut agriculture as far as this constituency is concerned. On the handout, it says the average age of Connecticut farmers is 57. I think that is young; I would have guessed our average age is older than that. But the 25- to 40-year-old age range is going to leave Connecticut and go to Massachusetts, Maine, or the Midwest. Connecticut is poised to capture the audience of new farmers, and needs to develop the opportunities available to them. A lot of educational programs and financing opportunities are for established farmers, whether they are from UConn, the Department of Agriculture, or federal funding. If I needed a high tunnel and a deer fence I would go to the EQIP and it is going away. We need a solution for that, too.

- Susan Mitchell: I am the farm manager at White Gate farm in East Lyme. We have a 2.25-acre organic vegetable farm with turkeys and laying hens. As far as marketing; there is a demand for my product, but the number of people in the state who are CSA members or go to farmers' markets is minute. If these farmers like me want to move up with income and profitability, we will need to be able to sell more of our product. We need consumers to recognize our farms and their value, or we need to put our products in the larger retail settings. We are very limited with whom we are selling to—we're selling to the 1% of people who are in the know about local food, but we are missing 99% of the population that buys at major stores. Because I am a small farmer, I can't provide produce to a large retailer. I would like it if the Department of Agriculture can look at how we can harness the power of all of the small farms and cooperatively manage production so that we can sell products while maintaining the high dollar value that farmers get for their products. I want to maintain that profitability because my inputs are very high on the labor side.
- Melissa Spear: I'm from Common Ground. The opportunities and challenges go hand in hand. We are an environmental education facility. The farm here is for food for the school and is also an extension of our classroom. In addition, we bring 3,000 New Haven public school students here for tours every year. We tie the lessons learned in the farm setting to the state STEM standards. There is a long-term opportunity here and in other educational institutions to expose people to the sources of their food and the impacts of their food choices. We want them to grow up to be knowledgeable consumers. There is a tremendous opportunity for agriculture in the educational standards because Connecticut is rolling out the Common Core educational standards, which are less specific. These will be more conducive to using gardens in classrooms to teach students academic skills. We are also starting the Connecticut School Garden Resource Center to support schools that are interested in putting gardens into their schools. However, this is all happening at the grassroots level right now. School gardens are an important way, especially in the cities, to educate students about their food. We are going to need more coordination with the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education.
- Brad Armstrong: I'm from the New Haven Land Trust and work with New Haven farms. I'm also starting an indoor farm. I see a lot of opportunity in technology with agriculture, especially in hydro-agriculture and rooftop farming. We have a lot of empty warehouses and other unutilized space in Connecticut that we could be utilizing for technology-based agriculture. We also have the university base to support more agricultural-education-based programs so that more farmers can do this.
- Nicole Berube: I'm from City Seed. I see the opportunity for us to cooperatively aggregate produce; it is a paramount opportunity for the year-round provision of food for the winter. In Connecticut the growing season is short and we need light processing to continue our harvest throughout the year, so that Connecticut Grown can last all year long. To extend Connecticut Grown and our local harvest, we will require light processing. This should be available in the state in state in Long Wharf and Hartford.
- Darryl Newman: As far as technology is concerned, the best model for year-round production is indoor greenhouses. The same technology could be used in warehouses and other wastelands and would make this land/space usable for production agriculture. It is a great opportunity for Connecticut to be the center of technology for the country. As a country, we are behind everyone else in greenhouse technology. The majority of poinsettias are imported from Canada. Even though they have a colder climate, they have the right technology and this really frustrates me.

- Shannon Raider: I think that's an interesting point for year-round production for Connecticut and something to research. One other thing we will need is the research required for 5- to 50-acre farms. It is different than a conventional plot. IPM and organics are becoming part of the market demand, and there is a short supply of education and research in these areas. Oregon and California are doing a lot of that research and I call Extension in Oregon when I have a question. There is a lot of potential in Connecticut to develop this education system. Climate change and global markets will also continue to change the education we need. I think greenhouses are problematic because of sustainable energy production. There are a lot of questions to be answered. Can we use solar to grow more food in the winter? Why are red bell peppers in January from Holland cheaper? How do we get people to buy more food? I bought tomatoes the other day that were more expensive than chicken. Pricing is a mess and no one understands it. Consumers at farmers' markets wonder why kale is \$3 a bundle. But people don't understand that it's a deal, when you consider everything that went into that bundle. Market demand ties into pricing and it's confusing, and our agriculture system is a mess, and that puts consumers off. The consumer's perception of local food is also a huge issue.
- Catherine Bradshaw: I work in New Haven and think there is a big opportunity with the institutions to create more market demand. It's a complex picture, but there is a lot of purchasing and market demand that could take place with schools, hospitals, senior-related institutions, and others. There's a complexity about price points and sourcing them, and the need for bulk product, but it's a huge opportunity if we figure it out.
- Jonathan Strieff: I have a farm in East Haven, and driving around New Haven County, I see a lot of acreage in field corn and large commodities. There are a lot of opportunities to incentivize large growers to diversify and grow diversified vegetables and produce—nutrient dense produce instead of other commodities.
- Steve Munno: I'm from Massaro Community Farm. We're certified organic and there is a strong market demand for our products. Consumers look for Connecticut NOFA and the farmer's pledge; they want to see that. Consumers want to know how their produce is grown, so we should be looking at that track for big farms as well. There is also the opportunity for institutional demand. I think the Farmer's Cow is a great initiative and we could do that with small farms to serve institutions and meet their demands. My local schools want produce but I'm growing on five acres. If we had cooperatives, we could meet their demand together. New Haven County is also a challenging place to meet my infrastructure needs for agriculture; I either order online or travel quite far to make purchases. That's an opportunity for growth, too. If we are going to have agriculture growth, the attached industries need to grow too.
- Keith Bishop: My family owns Bishop's Orchards. As far as wineries, we need more grape production to supply the existing wineries, and this requires an availability of land—ideally the type of soil and climate grapes like. There is a \$20,000-40,000 investment an acre to get a payback, and it takes years to get that payback. Another issue is with the farm winery program: It was established in the late 1970s to help farms transition from other commodities like dairy. There are some wineries with a lot of land in grape production. There are also other wineries starting with very little land base, but they are producing a small amount of grapes to meet the rule of 25% production for Connecticut Grown wines. However, there is a difference between these two types of wineries. I would like to see a better differentiation between those two types of wineries—and more distinction for those that are a high level of Connecticut Grown products. Consumers should be aware of the distinction. It takes a fifteen year lease to make things pay off, and aiding in the distinction would be beneficial for farmers investing so much into their production.

There are also opportunities for labor and jobs. Bishop's Orchards employs over 100 people. I'm looking for more people in middle-management areas like farm production, IPM programs, etc., and it's hard to find those people. Living expenses are higher in Connecticut, but it's still hard to find people to stay with us for the long term. We've had a lot of good employees go start their own farms.

- Susan Mitchell: Land availability is an opportunity, especially if we need to increase production. We are going to need land to increase production and will need a finite and fixed amount. Some of the

land is being farmed already; some is not. Farm families find that they own hundreds of acres and no one in the family wants it. We have a responsibility to manage and maintain that land in agriculture viability, even if we parcel it up so other people can farm it, or something like that. We also need to connect those that have land with those that are seeking land. The Connecticut Farm Link program is relatively unsuccessful. There is also state and municipal land that has prime soils, and the state could do a lot to open up the land for farmers and take down the barriers that you have to jump over to get access to that land. Agriculture is growing and farming is in vogue, but we need to make it easier for people to stay in Connecticut. The land needs to be affordable and accessible.

## **Discussion Question 2: What are the obstacles to strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

- Darryl Newman: Input costs are a huge obstacle. We need affordable farm labor, and this means we need an affordable immigrant source. There is not a surplus of people willing to work for minimum wage and put in the effort required for agriculture. We need a migrant program that works, and this might be a national issue, so we need to advocate for it constantly. If more than three people are needed to work on a farm, that farm will need immigrant labor.
- Melissa Spear: We feed 200 people a day and try to source food locally and do our own food production. We also partner with other institutions about bringing more local food in. Yale has had to go out of state to find the infrastructure they need, to find the quality they require, and processing that they need. Freezer space and processing space aren't available here. We can't find it, so we can't increase production here at Common Ground.
- Susan Mitchell: One thing that comes to mind as an obstacle to me is for livestock producers—the availability and accessibility of slaughterhouses for large animals specifically, is a problem. I know there is effort to bring a mobile processing unit to Connecticut. I would like to find a place to take my animals that doesn't require driving two hours each way. I sent pigs to Massachusetts last year because they would come pick them up. Producers in Litchfield County go to Hilltown Pork in the Hudson Valley; we should keep the money in our state instead of sending it elsewhere.

With chicken regulations, we need to keep making it easier for farmers to sell chickens processed on their farm to consumers. The small-scale diverse livestock operations need a lot of help with processing facilities. There have been significant improvements but there is more room to grow.

- Steve Munno: Input costs are a challenge, but the retail prices are also low and the general population doesn't want to pay what it really costs to raise food. We need labor, but we also need to be able to offer our labor reasonable wages to live in Connecticut. What I bring in for profit is only ¼ of minimum wage in my town. I have a phenomenal team of young farmers who all want to have their own farms one day, but we need to support them better so that this will be possible. We need better prices for our product, because even though we are making a profit, it is minimal.
- Nicole Berube: One obstacle is that we are small state; growing agriculture in Connecticut is like growing agriculture in one county in California. Regionally there are more resources for us to leverage; we should look for more regional opportunities and make a regional plan to lift up everyone's agriculture at once. We can't do everything on our own because we are a small state.
- Darryl Newman – Energy costs are brutal. I would like to see the fuel bill for a farmer driving to a processing plant carrying livestock—it can't be good. Everything on farms should be mechanized because of the labor challenges, but then we will need the energy costs to be regulated even more so that we can afford it.
- Keith Bishop: Regulations are #2 on the list shown, and it's true. The time spent dealing with regulations is enormous; they are cumbersome to understand. There are informational websites; for instance DECD has one, and these help you get through and focus, but that understanding of what you need to do, especially for start-up people, needs to be improved. But again, it has gotten better. We jumped from being a small employer to large employer, and things like the Medical Leave Act, health insurance, etc., are all complex. Once you go beyond three employees, everything has more

rules and paperwork. We all have shock stories from spending hours going through regulations, and then you think you can wait...too late, and then potentially get in trouble.

I was driving a farm-plated truck to a farmers' market a couple of weeks ago and was stopped on the way there. The officer said the registration on the truck was not current, but I had the correct one that said it was current. For whatever reason, the police were nice and let me go, and said I could fix it on a weekday. I called the DMV on Tuesday and found out that this vehicle got denied because there was no farm-exempt certificate, but the other three vehicles I registered on the same day and form were fine. It's frustrating. I registered those three vehicles back in March and found out in September.

- Susan Mitchell: I grow sustainably and organically with ecology in mind. We are the fastest growing segment of agriculture right now. I find it difficult as a farmer to find service providers that have experience and knowledge in sustainable production. There is an enormous gap that needs to be fixed; we have one educator who can help us with this. The New England Vegetable Guide is very conventionally based. I call UMass and Cornell for help. It's hard to find good resources for those practices in this state. There are more people using this methodology. It's time for us to look at sustainable vegetable/fruit and diverse livestock and elevate them to the same level as dairy farms. I feel like a minority and know I'm not. I don't want to see others get stumped because there is very little help. UConn should create a major for students in sustainable agriculture, and look past the traditional majors to where the country is moving to. UC Santa Cruz has a wonderful program and Connecticut could improve on the education we provide.
- Nicole Berube: One obstacle is consumer awareness and education. We need to elevate consumer pride in Connecticut Grown. We have a lack of consistency in the logos and messaging and need to change that. CNLA did videos of how people view the Connecticut Grown logo and few knew about it. If we are going to have healthy corner stores, we need to make them and agriculture sexy and attractive and hit consumers with that at grocery stores and small venues. We need to give people POS materials that are attractive and consistent across the board.
- Darryl Newman: In the videos, next to no one recognized the Connecticut Grown symbol; only 20% of the people recognized the symbol, and we had people from across Fairfield County and Farmington Valley and all types of income levels surveyed. The symbol isn't relevant if only we know and love it. That study was based on CNLA products—we were trying to get a pulse of our consumers.
- Commissioner Reviczky: UConn has done studies that show different results.
- Shannon Raider: People also need to know what the Connecticut Grown symbol means—that it's good for the local economy and environment. We need to educate them and then they will go out of there way to choose it.
- Steve Munno: On consumer education, there is a lot of assumption from consumers that if they go to a farmers' market, they will get Connecticut Grown, but that's not always true and we need to change that. Farms are bringing in other produce to supplement their sales and I understand that. But, consumers think they are getting great Connecticut Grown products, but it's not really from here. All products should be well labeled, and at all places, farmers' markets, farm stands, etc.
- Shannon Raider: It's the chicken and egg question – if there is market demand, will challenges be alleviated? If there are more farmers and increased profitability, will the problems be solved? It really needs to happen at same time and education will be what backs all of that. Farming needs to be a career for people. It's a really long and confusing problem. What are we going to do this year, in five years, and in fifty years? Kids that are in elementary school now are making the decisions in 50 years; we need to think about the big picture. It's a huge obstacle.
- Jon Strieff: The property taxes that were already high on the land that I'm farming tripled in the middle of the season this year, seemingly arbitrarily. We already have a high tax average in the state. What can we do about this?

**Discussion Question 3: What specific recommendations would you like to see included in the plan to *Grow Connecticut Farms*?**

- Steve Munno: We need technical service providers at the UConn level and elsewhere. In the high school vo-ag programs we need to increase education, too. A student from Nonnewaug who had no experience with vegetable production came to do an internship with me that they don't offer that in their vo-ag program. There is a demand and we need to improve the education. We should also support farmers with health insurance. Farm Bureau offers some of it, but we could do more with collective health insurance.
- Nicole Berube: We need to offer incentives for cooperative growing.
- Robin Golden: My daughter is a farmer. We need more interaction between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education. I think there is probably a lot of room for collaboration and the payoff will be worth it.
- Kala Cuerington: I work at Common Ground, and would like to jump in on the possible collaboration between the Agriculture and Education departments. There needs to be an incentive for distributors to purchase Connecticut Grown. We need to give them incentives so they will purchase more. As far as the Connecticut Grown symbol as a label, I had a conversation with the food service director at UConn and he said that interests people now is the story. We need to re-brand the logo and have people recognize it for more than the product was grown in Connecticut. We need to promote the farmer and what they are doing and why they are doing it. People don't see farms all the time—they are removed from agriculture—so we need to show it to them and build energy around Connecticut Grown.
- Darryl Newman: We need to treat agriculture as more of a business. We live in capitalistic society. Farms that are profitable can get more grants. Taking on pretty agriculture isn't okay—farms need to produce and we need to keep that in mind when choosing grant recipients. The majority of farms still require an off-farm income to survive. We need to have enough profit on our farms to sustain a family of four. The money needs to go to appropriate means and increase demand for agriculture, too.
- Susan Mitchell: I echo the statement that farmers are business people. In order for farmers to keep farming, we need to make enough money for everything—health insurance, etc. To that end, I would like to see a good price for products that covers the cost of production, and for people to be able to pay off their student loans, if that is their situation. In sustainable agriculture, a lot of people have graduated from elite four-year institutions and decide to make farming their livelihood. Agriculture attracts bright young people and we want to keep them in agriculture. We need affordable land available in Connecticut for these people to farm on. This is a huge thing for me, having land available.
- Shannon Raider: The long view of education is that we need to reinstitute nutrition education in schools. People have no idea how to eat anymore. We need to change the attitudes of consumers and add nutrition and home economics back into the schools. Cooking is the initiator of our livelihood and we need to work with the Department of Education to change the attitudes of people.

There are a lot of education opportunities for people farming, but there needs to be apprenticeship and journeyman programs for agriculture. When you graduate from a journeyman program, you should also be able to apply for debt forgiveness, and for programs that are only for new young farmers so that you have a lot of assistance. Right now you have to do it on own or learn from family, but times change and land owners and everyone else has no idea what's involved. Other states are doing it, but because Connecticut is small, it won't take a lot of time or money to make a big impact. We need qualified people, but some of the Farm Credit options are also unrealistic for young farmers.

A journeyman program would answer a lot of questions. Also, they would be good labor for the current farms.

- Nicole Berube: One recommendation is for any institution that receives tax money from the state to have local preference rider on bidding for food and landscape products.
- Steve Munno: I would love to see research and training in season extension and winter growing, and storage crops, and other areas like this. It's a great opportunity.
- Susan Mitchell: Farms I've worked for and benefitted from agriculture viability grants, and the farmland restoration program is fantastic, and I hope it will also be beneficial to many farmers. I think in order to grow, farmers will need financial help to clear the land and put things in production.
- Keith Bishop: On my earlier winery comments, for us, the winery is a small segment of the total on our farm. Re-categorizing the wineries in Connecticut Grown and changing the regulations to revalue the amount of Connecticut Grown fruit in the product is something that really needs to be done. They changed the regulations so we can sell wine at farmers markets, but there is a technicality problem still, and people can't sample wine at the farmers' markets. You can only go to three farmers' markets per year, so we rotate through with the other wineries. At City Seed we can't sell wine at all because of New Haven's regulations but would like to be able to sell wine there too. We need to change regulations and allow exemptions.
- Nicole Berube: I would love to have wine at our farmers' markets. On the Ag Viability Grant, the Department of Agriculture has been wonderful. It would be interesting to see what rises to the top in these recommendations also rise to the top in the grant selection process. I also want the non-profit sector to rally funders and follow suit. Funders are looking at food-specific grant and we need to relay this information to them.
- Darryl Newman: On the grants, there should be a measurement on return on investment. Tax payers should feel good if a place is given a grant and can show that the investment has been returned in kind. I'm not sure the taxpayers care, but I feel good about it because we saved money because of our grant.
- Melissa Spear: Be careful about the double-edged sword. The Ag Viability Grant we got was one of the best we received. Because so many other grants require so much paperwork and compliance, it's almost not worth it to get the grant. Don't take it too far!
- Shannon Raider: I think about all these things you want to spend money on, mandating in state and local policy that these small percentages. The more the percentages are put into legislation, the better it is for agriculture. Can we tax non-local food to fund locally grown programs?
- Commissioner Reviczky: The legislature does want results based accountability. Where we spend funds, we need to have a good result. We have to have measures or we won't continue to get funding, so we need to think about how we will measure our successes.

*Submitted by Stacey Stearns*

**Governor's Council for Agricultural Development  
Listening Session held October 4, 2012  
Litchfield County Extension Center, Torrington**

**Council Members and Staff in Attendance**

Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, chairman  
Dean Weidemann, UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, vice chairman  
Michael Keilty, Maple Spring Farms, member  
Laura Marek, UConn Cooperative Extension, facilitator  
Stacey Stearns, UConn Cooperative Extension, recorder  
George Krivda, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff  
Linda Piotrowicz, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, staff

**Other Stakeholders in Attendance**

Margaret Miner, Roxbury  
Rich Meinert, Torrington  
Leanne Pundt, Torrington  
State Representative Roberta Willis, Lakeville

**The following notes are intended to capture the essence of the discussion.  
They are not presented as a transcript of the session.**

Representative Willis and Commissioner Reviczky reviewed the structure and work of the Governor's Council for Agricultural Development, including its strategic planning process.

**Discussion Question 1: What are the opportunities for strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

Representative Willis: I came as a listener to hear from my constituents. I have had a lot of feedback on farm markets and support for farm markets. Some farm markets are better developed than others, and have gotten resources to do this. The smaller ones, like Norfolk, have a lot of signs, but didn't get grants, and I'm not sure if they were using WIC, etc. Developing and promoting the farm markets more is important to me. They are popular and wonderful to see in our communities.

People ask me a lot about the farm viability grants. They are seeking information about the possible resources that are out there and how to use them.

I've met with the Litchfield Farmers' Market and they are doing an amazing job. The farm market subject comes up a lot.

Leanne Pundt: Litchfield Farmers' Market has a nice winter farm market too.

Dean Weidemann: Are the farm markets you've spoken with concerned about different town policies being a constraint—for instance, health departments?

Representative Willis: I have heard from people that complying with regulations has been a struggle. Norfolk mentioned they didn't want to deal with some regulations so wouldn't expand in that direction, and will focus on other areas of growth instead. Litchfield has a good relationship with Torrington Area Health.

Laura Marek: I have heard from my Farm Bureau contacts, and they are meeting other area health officials at farmers' markets and don't like the inconsistency of the various towns. There is concern between the two departments as well.

Commissioner Reviczky: Progress has been made.

Laura Marek: The population we have is one of our greatest opportunities because we are where the people are, and these people can purchase at value added prices.

Margaret Miner: In my town, the relationship between land trusts and farming is an opportunity to strengthen good farming practices and try some things, like niche farming. Small farms are the fastest growing sector. As far as state lands, the state owns some prime land and it is sometimes saved and sometimes not saved. We should focus on saving this farmland. We also need to maintain or increase farming that is consistent with good environmental practices and water protection. We should strengthen these programs and study farmland availability and then put it to good use.

Commissioner Reviczky: The Farm Link program in the Department of Agriculture matches farmland with seekers.

Margaret Miner: When there is a considerable amount of land owned by the state or a non-profit and it has farming potential, we need to identify the land and keep it in production. The other issue is that farmers and other policy people should speak to land trusts about managing their land. We need to help the land trusts improve their management and be consistent.

I don't know what the relationship is with the organic movement but there was a bill three or four years ago to provide classes for IPM. When I asked if some of the money could go to organic farming I was told no. I don't know the relationship between organic and traditional IPM farmers, but wonder if there is a working relationship or not.

Leanne Pundt: IPM training includes organic growers in vegetables and greenhouses.

Margaret Miner: Working Lands Alliance has a new executive director who was surprised to discover the hostility between the agriculture and environmental communities. It's a problem that could and should be addressed as agriculture is stimulated. We advocate for money for farmers in the farm bill. If it's going to cost money to subsidize, there is money that would ease the way towards a better relationship between these two groups.

Representative Willis: I've heard from people—a couple of young couples—who are interested in going into farming. We are doing so much to encourage entrepreneurship in Connecticut in so many different sectors. Is there anything out there to help these people, or where we can send them?

Leanne Pundt: Jiff Martin has a new grant, "Scaling Up," which will have some opportunity to work with these people. Information is going out in the Department of Agriculture's *Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report* soon.

Dean Weidemann: We have had a Farm Risk Management program at UConn for years, funded through USDA, where educators work with farmers on developing a business plan. You can send people to Extension first.

Representative Willis: Several of the young couples are in Goshen; do they come to Litchfield Extension Center?

Rich Meinert: I've talked to several from Goshen and a couple others, too.

Dean Weidemann: People associated with agriculture are used to working with Extension, but people coming from elsewhere don't know the resources that are available.

Commissioner Reviczky: They can also call Ron Olsen in the Department of Agriculture's Marketing Department.

Representative Willis: Thank you for coming out here. Whatever I can do to help, I would like to.

**Discussion Question 2: What are the obstacles to strengthening Connecticut agriculture?**

Margaret Miner: I was talking about the land availability, and, looking to land trusts, land availability can be an obstacle. I've heard about challenges with the infrastructure gaps. I've also heard about problems with the health and environmental regulations. Another obstacle is that sometimes farmers feel that local land use regulations aren't followed accurately.

Laura Marek: Personally I find the interpretation for agriculture use from one town to another is very locally run and not consistent all the time.

Margaret Miner: Another obstacle is that people have a vision of a farm that doesn't include the smell. We had a field that an organic farmer wanted to farm but he couldn't get there often so I let it go for a while and the grass just grew up. People were used to seeing corn there and wanted to see that crop. In some communities people think they want a farm but don't know what farming entails.

Commissioner Reviczky: The infrastructure gaps are aggregation, light processing, and distribution. A real issue is getting crops from smaller farmers together in a meaningful way. We do have 128 certified farmers' markets, which is great.

Margaret Miner: Does infrastructure include slaughtering?

Commissioner Reviczky: It is part of the conversation and is a challenge for people. We have some facilities in Connecticut, but most animals go out of state.

Margaret Miner: I'm usually thinking about water issues, but there are farmers in my town going to New Jersey and other places to slaughter animals. Many decades ago, every farm used to slaughter on the farm.

Laura Marek: That comes back to those regulations

Commissioner Reviczky: We have to find what the right solution is. If somebody could build a slaughterhouse and make money, they would be doing it.

Dean Weidemann: It's a chicken and egg issue. There is not a large enough animal industry in the state to justify a slaughter facility. Slaughterhouses have to run 24/7 to make money.

Laura Marek: It's a year-round issue too. They are full now.

Dean Weidemann: It's a problem too because animals from the Midwest are coming in because of the drought.

Margaret Miner: On the infrastructure and slaughterhouses, the humane treatment of animals can be tied to this. Some of the bills that have come up in the state deal with this; one called for a chicken to have 18 square inches of room and it was called unrealistic. I've been eating less chicken since that hearing. Is there flexibility when dealing with the animal rights people? I was thinking of infrastructure, or a slaughtering facility—the more humane it is, the less opposition there is.

### **Discussion Question 3: What specific recommendations would you like to see included in the plan to *Grow Connecticut Farms*?**

Margaret Miner: I would advocate for farm to institution. I've talked to farmers that have left this region, and they have referred to the horrible expense of everything. The cost of doing business is so high that they couldn't stay here. Is there anything that addresses the general cost of doing business? Does the Department of Agriculture interact with the Department of Economic Development? Are there ways the cost of doing business could be decreased?

Commissioner Reviczky: It's still bad and is why input costs emerged as one of the top issues. PA 490 helps, but energy and labor costs are a huge problem, too. The Governor is announcing an energy plan tomorrow (October 5<sup>th</sup>), and we'll see what that does for farmers and agriculture.

Rich Meinert: One issue I hear a lot is that farmers say they can't get a loan from a bank because the banks don't understand agriculture, so Farm Credit is the only bank in town. We need another bank to step up and talk agriculture. Competition is good.

Commissioner Reviczky: In terms of credit, most farmers do go through Farm Credit East because they understand the cycles of agriculture. Other folks have relationships with their local bank, but it depends on who you are and what you have for collateral. It is a struggle.

Rich Meinert: For young kids starting out, there is no place for them to go because Farm Credit won't touch them in these cases.

Margaret Miner: We are finding more people who are well to do and have land they want to put into conservation and want it going to high quality, environmentally friendly farming. Looking to individuals like this who have land might be a way to get land into farming and get young people started.

*Submitted by Stacey Stearns*

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