



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Erica Andrews, Hurricane Farm, Scotland
Date: 06/25/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Erica operates at micro-scale for her agriculture enterprise; she has reached the goals she set for herself 3 years ago, uncertain what to do next.
2. Erica’s farm business (organically raised meat and vegetables) illustrates how costs of production are so high in CT, particularly for such a small farm.
3. Food safety and animal welfare and CT Grown are all extremely important to her customers. Hurricane Farm and Erica herself is the brand that customers are responding to; it is her food safety and animal welfare assurance. “I am the face of the farm.”
4. Coventry Farmers Market played a key role in helping Hurricane Farm to grow. Erica is a vendor in Scotland Farmers Market because it is important to her to connect and be a presence in her own community.
5. Erica feels the food safety regulators (at DPH, DCP, DoAg) are all helpful and responsive to her questions. She wonders if there could be a threshold for tracking data so operators with less than 25 animals could have a lighter burden of paperwork.
6. Erica is limited in her business growth by the need for affordable commercial kitchen space.
7. Erica sees a need for more USDA slaughter/processing facilities that can handle beef, pork, and lamb nearby, although she enjoys a strong business relationship with the operators of Adams facility in MA and feels their handling of animals is humane.
8. Erica feels a mobile poultry processing unit would be especially helpful since transporting birds is so difficult.
9. Erica views big food companies and cheap food as the biggest threat to CT agriculture.
10. Erica sees grocery stores and the main opportunity for selling more locally grown produce, because large percentage of people will never stop at a farmers market.
11. Erica shared that she is unclear about available resources – such as Extension programs (are they free?), or grant programs (is there a list somewhere?) or FFA/Vo-Ag programs (can we help each other?).
12. Erica would like to see more people growing their own food, in their backyards and is personally committed to helping children learn how to grow food in her local school.
13. Idea: local section in grocery stores
14. Idea: publicly operated and organized processing facility in five or six key locations that can receive produce and then send to institutions for use.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – energy, labor – the cost of growing
2. Infrastructure gap – processing, transporting, storage, freezers – for me that is the three giant freezers that I have. It's a lot of money before bringing it to my customer.
3. Market competition – extremely problematic because big companies can grow food for so cheap. Think about food in the grocery store, and how cheap food is in the stores. The competition of the price of cheap food compared to what good food costs to grow and process. Example of \$120 to process in a USDA facility in MA, versus to process in CT in a non-USDA facility is almost double that.
4. Land availability – I am fortunate that I like to talk to people and have found some parcels. Other people see this as hard to find and difficult to afford.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps - I think we have a lot of opportunity for the infrastructure gaps we have, but I think if we have a little more of a system, like Farm Fresh Express, that would be brilliant. Not sure how we can attack this in a better way for our state. Mobile poultry processing unit could be a great opportunity there.
2. Regulations – some regulations probably could be relaxed a little bit for smaller processing. Some are geared toward big farms. Example of the amount of tracking that is required for # of animals born on our property. Under 25 lambs, should I have to track? Some great things like under \$5,000 of retail for organic labeling – still have to follow organic practices but don't have to be legally certified, or under 5000 birds I don't have to have certified processing.
3. Consumer knowledge – a lot of work we can do here. Helping people understand what grows where, and what time of year.
4. Market demand – it is getting more competitive. It's not just Coventry Farmers Market. There are other small but decent markets that work, e.g. Scotland. Bozrah and Ashford both have big ones.

Section III – Quotes

People have no concept of what it costs to grow good food.

I grow meat for the vegetarian.

Coventry Market enabled my farm to grow and to be where I am now.

I am not a business person. I live this way, because I want to eat what I grow, but the only way I can do this is by being more business-like.



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INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Allyn Brown, Maple Lane Farm
Date: 05/18/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Larger scale producers are dealing with prime business concerns or issues that have to be addressed, including availability of skilled labor, certifications required in the wholesale market (e.g. GAP), and infrastructure needs for larger scale operations.
2. There are a specific set of skills that go along with selling to larger retail buyers, and there are not many farmers who are interested or very good at this. Allyn is an exception. He has developed his market and supply (including sourcing some product from outside of CT) and this has helped him succeed.
3. Branding opportunities need to be better identified and understood for different markets – whether general consumer in grocery store, in CT, in New England, outside our region (e.g. Florida). Branding options include individual farm branding or product branding (e.g. Maple Lane Farm, Currant Affair), as well as using the brands of CT Grown and Harvest New England
4. Function of regulators is less than pressure he is handling from customers (as translated by requirements of retail buyers and distributors). Customers are more demanding than the government.
5. Meeting food safety expectations is a reality of doing this sort of business, and a cost of doing business for large growers, but it also represents an important opportunity for even the smaller growers who can do it in order to reach more customers.
6. Idea: Job opening section in Ag Bulletin and/or DoAg website

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles:

1. Labor – about to lose manager, hoping for someone trained in agriculture, need to keep pressure on UConn for good candidates.
2. Inputs –fertilizer, energy, packaging costs keep going up, and hard to pass along to consumers
3. Consumer knowledge – we need to improve on CT Grown local, combination of people not knowing brand or where to find it. People pay more for my lettuce because it is local, but I’m not giving them

enough and demand is still there. Need to train consumers to seek this out. Most of my experience is on large retail scale, so want more people seeking it in the grocery store. Need to do a better job in the consumer market in grocery stores. Of course supply is also important.

4. Infrastructure – I am in market for cold storage. Did a tour at Hartford Regional Market recently. So outdated, and in disrepair. Long outlived its life. A shame it can't be new and improved. Processing kitchen would be a real plus (not for self but for others).

Notes regarding top four opportunities:

1. Market Demand – Huge demand for locally grown. Quick story – when I first produced I went to Big Y, Stewarts, Whole Foods – all of them said they would think about it. I showed it to S&S, they said they would take it on the spot. At NE produce expo recently –every retailer (Market Basket, Hannaford, etc) they all want more of my product.
2. Market Competition – I don't see any local competition. I don't see any other local products in big box store on year round basis.
3. Geography – we are in middle of largest pop in North America, good proximity to our market. This is huge advantage.
4. Access to credit and financing – through Farm Credit, very good at supporting agriculture. Not as big as a hurdle as some might think.

Section III – Quotes

I don't know, but it seems odd to me, we are buying flowers to decorate the capitol; shouldn't that be purchased from a CT businesses?



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Paul Bucciaglia, Fort Hill Farm, New Milford

Date: 06/13/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Fort Hill Farm is a 22-acre organic farm, rented from Sunny Valley Preserve. Paul exemplifies one successful model of agriculture business that relies on a mix of stable, lower margin CSA income with higher margin farmers market income, and a few direct to wholesale market accounts. This diversified portfolio helps offset risk from crop losses or weather events.
2. Paul described his perception of the 'sweet spot in farming', describing the scale at which a grower can be profitable depending on land available. In his view, there are sweet spots for a farmer with one acre and a rototiller, or a farmer with 5-10 acres with some machinery and a little labor, and then larger scale almost year-round operation.
3. Paul sees pent up opportunity for newer growers that want to get started – that there are plenty of folks ready to get started and just need a few acres. New farmers have trouble finding farmland or access to credit and have limited grasp of what they have to do to start a business (such as how to handle payroll taxes).
4. Grants from NRCS and DoAg have been enormously helpful to Paul's business success (helping Paul to purchase a greenhouse, solar panels, equipment); important to note those programs worked for him in a farmland-leasing situation, not farmland ownership.
5. Although he has seen some improvement, Paul feels the rise in organic farming presents a new challenge for Cooperative Extension, where experts are not accustomed to responding to organic farming needs. He sees a need for research and guidance on how to raise healthy plants, not just how to manage pests or increase yields.
6. Paul put a major emphasis on the importance of farmland protection.
7. Paul sees an opportunity for growers to apply better standards in their quality control in the CSAs.
8. Paul worries that 'local' labeling is diluting the organic label. Organic represents a distinct production method. Paul sees customers learning what 'organic' means. At first customers assumed this meant product was never sprayed; now he thinks they understand it was never sprayed with synthetic pesticides, and customers are showing an interest in how their food is grown, such as soil and compost management.
9. In Paul's view, being labeled 'CT Grown' has a good connotation because Connecticut is still perceived as somewhat rural and possibly better quality. Paul urged that we should not apologize if CT Grown products are more expensive, so long as it is a better product.
10. Paul's organic products are not really competing with organic products in the grocery stores, but they are tethered to the store prices somewhat.
11. Idea: "Connecticut Interval" as an incubator program.
12. Idea: Need a place/person that pools all the information about labor, payroll, licenses, and taxes needed for new farmers to get started.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – true for my own operation
2. Natural forces – due to last season which was so challenging
3. Geography – only so much we can do about our soil fertility
4. Market supply – we are not able to supply the market demand.

NOTE: Access to credit and financing – this is actually a very big problem for new farmers, but not a problem for us.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – if we could do something about this, this is how we're going to grow more organic product.
2. Access to credit and financing – could get a lot more growers on the ground to meet this demand, wouldn't take much, \$5,000 is a lot to a 22-year old farmer that wants to start with one acre.
3. Market supply – increasing supply is important. Marketing strategies get ahead of the supply; customers get frustrated because they can't find it.

Section III – Quotes

The NRCS and CT Ag Viability grants have been crucial for us to develop our farm. We lease land and cannot own the improvements that were needed to allow us grow intensive horticultural crops, such as wells, permanent irrigation systems, and deer fencing. The grants filled in this funding gap and have allowed us to develop a stable business; which produces healthy food and creates jobs that many young people find very rewarding.

Our CSA is very popular and has a 3-4 year waiting list. Most of our publicity has been from word of mouth referrals. We do struggle to strike a balance between keeping the CSA affordable to people of average means, and increasing the profitability of our business.

Food safety issues can best be addressed by eliminating the source of virulent microbes, which overwhelming come from confinement livestock farms. We need to move away from this kind of agriculture, which produces artificially cheap food with enormous hidden human and environmental health costs. GAP and other food safety programs completely ignore the primary source of food contamination.

What if instead of focusing primarily on individual pests and diseases, we focused more on how to raise healthy crops on more diverse farms? How about a Department of Plant Wellness?

We try to grow high quality crops. There is strong demand for local, and especially local and organic products. We can grow varieties, like heirloom tomatoes and hardneck garlic that large conventional food systems cannot deliver. People seek out local food because it is special, and there is a slight premium that you can charge which helps offset the added costs of growing food with extra attention.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

**Interviewee: Winter Caplanson, Executive Director, for Bridges Healthy Cooking School
(includes Coventry Regional Farmers Market**

Date: 07/06/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Winter sees a very big threat from any tarnishing of the CT Grown brand; extremely important to maintain its integrity.
2. Coventry Market is more than a sales venue; it is also a marketing venue for producers to connect with consumers. It has also become a platform for extensive co-marketing among the vendors.
3. Coventry Market model is built around connecting producers with consumers. Vendor sales staff in the market have to be in some way connected with production on the farm. "We are a linchpin in terms of connecting consumer to the grower, and we create opportunities for intense direct marketing and sales." "If you ask us why our market is there, it is to create sales to vendors. That is the entire goal of our market. It's not about a food dessert or access to food or other social missions. Everything that happens at the market is designed to exceed attendee expectations. The joy and love and ownership and support they feel for the market will result in support for a vendor that they feel are a good fit.
4. Coventry Market is also committed to promoting agriculture. Through their photo project they have developed an exciting album of professional photos of farms and farmers that participate in Coventry Market. They have also developed the Farmers Market Trail to guide consumers to ten other exciting destination farmers markets in the state.
5. Coventry Market is piloting a CSA model that selects and packs product from the market and delivers to 3 Hartford restaurants. The demand is very high for this service but they are currently limited by transportation.
6. Winter feels there is a problem of uncertainty for farmers markets in regards to their location. Is there a long-term lease option to add security for the operation?
7. Winter feels it is inappropriate that a farmers market fall under the same degree of scrutiny as a new business such as a Walgreens. Can local and state regulations recognize the difference (e.g. traffic impact study requirements)?
8. Winter expressed that there are not enough peers doing the social media in CT; this makes it difficult to maximize the effective use of social media, since it works best when entities are bouncing posts and news off each other.
9. Winter has found that younger farmers are extremely nimble, able to grow what customers are looking for, tap into social media effectively, use computer effectively, read Food Trends, etc.
10. Coventry Market is leveraged as a hub for all the work of their 501(c)3 which is based on education about local foods and healthy eating. High attendance allows CM to deliver workshops and cooking classes to many people. CM's relationship with a large number of farms helps increase public awareness through social media channels on how food is being produced. CM collaboration with chefs and food professionals results in opportunities for sharing ideas on food preparation at and outside of the market.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – small amount of land, especially for young farmers
2. Access to credit/financing – also an issue for young farmers
3. Regulations – example of egg grading and inspection
4. Natural forces – extreme unpredictable weather, affects not just producers, also affected restaurants for example when power goes out, can be bad weather for farmers markets too

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – creating a farmers market trail. There is so much business opportunity related to farmers markets. There is demand on a Sunday than we cannot handle.
2. Consumer knowledge – people are aware of CT Grown, aware of local, primed for local buying
3. Geography piece – we draw from some pretty isolated areas in CT, but even for those guys it is not that far, Thompson and Oneco. Definitely have the geography to access populations. Great potential for year-round growing in CT. We have good soil here too.
4. Natural forces – good soils and weather for year round production

Section III – Quotes

You will love local more, the more you are involved in local.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Dave Carey, Bureau of Aquaculture, CT Dept. of Agriculture
Date: 06/25/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. CT Bureau of Aquaculture provides a number of key services to the industry, including water testing (800 sample stations in the Long Island Sound), shoreline surveys, facility inspections, licensing, and input on recommended food safety guidelines for FDA.
2. CT's Bureau of Aquaculture has staffing needs in the lab (microbiologist); staff shortage means the turnaround time on water testing can be delayed, leading to shellfish beds remaining closed following rain pollutants and hurting the commercial industry and town recreational shellfishing.
3. Oysters from CT truly have geographical advantage because of the cooler waters in Long Island Sound compared to southern competitors (Maryland); cooler water yields a firmer oyster. But the industry is not capitalizing on that advantage by producing highest quality product (getting value added through cleaning, sorting, packaging, presentation, reduced losses from chipping and quality control).
4. Dave feels there is a need to change statutory law around leasing for oyster production. Current law requires that the lease goes to the highest bidder. New people can't enter the market because they must compete for the leases against established operations and can't get access to the oyster beds without large capital investment in land lease before ever planting an oyster. The creation of an incubator area for smaller new oyster operations would be beneficial.
5. Commercial hatchery would be helpful – would allow new businesses to get started.
6. Dave sees an opportunity to develop a value-added Connecticut specialty product in the shellfish industry; that will augment what is already going on in terms of demand for local. This would require a certain production volume in order to support the investments needed (including labor, cooling capacity, packaging, branding, sales, and distribution).
7. Dave sees an opportunity for a distribution type of business – pick up shellfish, cheese, wine and deliver to restaurants.
8. Recent change in licensing requires that someone selling seafood in a farmers market has to have a refrigerated truck; coolers are not enough. This limitation of jobbers without refrigeration in the farmers market is necessary to protect public health.
9. Labor is a problem for this industry. There is an old Maritime Law that says 75% of crew has to be U.S. citizens. This is very problematic if you have only three people aboard.
10. Dave shared that there is a large Army Corps of Engineer project (\$25m) for Long Island shellfish and finfish habitat restoration, would likely help siltation problem, but right now the project is waiting for a master plan that will cost \$200k - \$300k. ACOE expecting Plan funding this year.
11. Although there are well coordinated food safety regulations in the industry, CT residents will buy products out of area because of the perception that Long Island Sound product is polluted.
12. Idea: build commercial public docks for commercial shellfish to unload product and keep their boats.
13. Idea: Catch of the Day – online information system for marketing purposes.
14. Idea: Develop a new brand – such as “Colonial” ‘Eastern Oyster’ – to replace the ‘Blue Point Oyster’ brand which has lost its regional specificity.

15. Idea: public fish market that would include private commercial businesses selling.

Section II – Core Questions

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Natural forces – seems like our storms are stronger in intensity and in a shorter period of time we get more rainfall, which can overwhelm sewage treatment plants. Shoreline communities are mostly seweraged in western part of the state. And if indeed sea levels do rise, it may affect sewage treatment plants located in lower areas. You see the frequency of the number of those storms changing, we have a lot more 1-2 inch rain events, but it's a quicker heavier downpour. Rain is one problem, sewage bypass is another problem. Temperature is a problem in the Long Island Sound too in regards to climate change. It is going to continue for the next 10 years. Hopefully as a result of emission reductions it will reverse the trend. Intensity of diseases will go up if temp of water goes up. Cold winter suppresses the diseases, knocks it back. This was a warm winter which is not a good thing.
2. Land availability – we have a real problem. We need to revise our statutes – lease goes to the highest bidder. A designation line exists from headland to headland in each town. Towns lease north of designation line and the state leases south of the line. We are getting competitive bids that are extremely high. Limiting new entry. Quite a bit of investment already required for someone that wants to get into the business in terms of buying a shellfish rig and equipment. Would like to see a change in this, toward an incubator incentive. State lease could require that whoever gets the bid that they have to use it, and would prohibit transfer of the lot. State could develop lease opportunities for smaller entities of 50-acre lots.
3. Input costs – diesel fuel, as it continues to rise is a real problem. Most of our companies lease where they have their boats, so there is concern where they can keep their boats and land their product. Hard to do this on a recreational dock. Need to be a fixed dock. Some talk about doing this in a few locations. Usually they are unloading right into wholesale trucks.
4. Market competition – always a problem. Down south an awful lot of oyster and clam cultivation, hatchery reared being planted, cheaper labor, not sure about prices of land. Fortunate that we have a better quality product with a longer shelf life because our water is colder (leads to a plumper firmer texture for the oysters). The Native oyster does better than other oysters, outperforms. You want to develop local strains. Prohibited from coming from other places. Has to come from Long Island Sound.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Other – Legislative overhaul – hoping for reforms in leasing policy. This will create opportunity.
2. Geography – Long Island Sound, colder waters, advantage in terms of disease management, but also have largest population, if you can't market in this area there is not a lot of point going elsewhere.
3. Consumer knowledge – we need to broaden that more, need some branding. Can't use 'blue point oyster' anymore, because it is everywhere. So if we can educate consumers they are pretty smart and can find it.
4. Market supply – clam production has been phenomenal, don't have hypoxia events that we used to, disease events is lower, better water quality, positive changes in the effluent coming out of sewage treatment plants.

5. Other - There is no commercial hatchery. State invested \$500k in Noank hatchery, owned by Town of Groton. Didn't have much luck. They have had some hatcheries but they failed. The availability of oyster seed is limited. Franklin Flowers in LI is a source. Steve Millinowski from Fisher's Island. Source of local seed is missing. You can grow them anywhere in the western sound, but in many areas you cannot get some recruitment on the ground. Need to make sure a commercial hatchery is developed to strengthen new producers. You wouldn't sell that much seed to new people to start, but it is a piece of the puzzle that is missing. The demand for seed grown locally would rise quickly. We do have one private hatchery, but they don't sell to people.
6. Other – Refrigeration needs – if the industry could add value to product, they would need onsite refrigeration. Maybe onsite, hub warehouse. This would help raise value in order to bring it to restaurants, including little wholesalers that are making deliveries. Refrigerated trucks often can't get product to the temperature we want if the product is warm. To bring inside, wash it inside, if it is in bag, it dries out a little, then wash again, good for a higher end customer. Mostly for oysters. Clams wash up well. Some companies use very nice detailed boxes to ship oysters.

Section III – Quotes

Agriculture has historically brought people who like to work and are innovative. No matter what problems are there, people will get through it and figure it out. Most modern agriculture has been developed by guys working in Extension, thrived on innovation, and innovation gets you through problems.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Robin Chesmer, Graywall Farms, Lebanon

Date: 07/05/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Robin feels strongly that dairy farms should be able to survive on their own without adding other ventures. He feels optimistic this is possible since Connecticut has a lot of excellent dairy farmers. Dairy support payments from State of CT is a critical program that helps significantly when milk prices fall below the cost of production. The program works as we have not lost many dairy farms relative to other states.
2. Robin feels we really need to ramp up marketing of CT agriculture. Creating a sense of place and telling the farmer's story is fundamentally important to any marketing approach.
3. Robin recommends focusing our marketing on consumers within CT, and let this create the pressure to flow outward, across border into other states.
4. The Farmer's Cow sales in grocery stores depend in part on store pricing, placement on the shelf, and quality of dairy case service (e.g. rotating milk). Retail pricing varies widely from store to store, even when the store pays the same wholesale price.
5. Robin explained that getting into the grocery store is not enough – there are some very real challenges once you do get the product into the store. The Farmer's Cow needs to provide quality service to each retail account and make sure the shelves are well stocked, signage is in place, product is rotated and looks presentable. Robin finds it is a real challenge to get the people in retail who have a daily impact on your sales to engage in the values of 'local' agriculture. Farmer's Cow has staff on the road every day to work with dairy managers. They host Tours and picnics at the farm for store managers and dairy staff to educate them on local agriculture and introduce them to the farmers that produce The Farmer's Cow milk.. This costs money, but helps build a relationship with dairy managers, encouraging them support local agriculture and The Farmer's Cow by keeping dates fresh in the dairy case provide good shelf placement, rotate product, and to maintain good inventory levels.
6. Robin feels it is important to get the retail stores really get behind selling local agriculture – not just lip service. The Farmer's Cow delivers each store 'feel good messaging' about its products and local agriculture, so the store can show they are supporting local, but stores don't always get behind local agriculture in a serious way by providing good shelf space, product rotation and competitive pricing.
7. The Farmer's Cow creates additional opportunities for other local businesses through its other product lines, such as working with a local apple orchard for its cider, a local bottler for its summer beverages and cider, a local ice cream maker and using a local roaster for their coffee.
8. Robin feels the biggest threat to the future of agriculture in CT is the real estate market and loss of farmland. "That's the thing that scares me the most, not being able to get the land."
9. DoAg Farmland Preservation Program played key role in allowing Robin to get into agriculture and subsequently expand their business and land base over time.
10. Consumer knowledge and demand differ across the state for The Farmer's Cow. For example, they see very strong sales in New Haven, Mystic, Lyme; weaker sales in Enfield, Waterbury. A lot of potential exists in Fairfield County but this area presents a unique challenge to draw support and recognition for local agriculture.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – transportation, storage, aggregation etc. – state is very limited in the dairy business in processing facilities, and very limited in distribution options. This goes for a lot of products where the infrastructure isn't there that will focus on local products. One of the huge challenges is being able to be competitive from a price point of view. Infrastructure needs to be developed so you can be efficient in producing and distributing a product. And with distribution, a huge aspect of that is service. Needs to be a high quality product and need to back it up with service. You need to be able stand behind it, service the accounts, get product where it needs to go when customers needs it. You need to be customer-centric.
2. Consumer knowledge – There is a huge growth in appreciation for CT Grown products, but it still needs to be grown even more.
3. Market demand – retailer challenges – getting them to really engage in and take agriculture serious as a business and see that we have viable products. Gets down to pricing appropriately.
4. Input costs – we are a high input cost state

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – proximity to marketplace, not only CT, but MA and NY too.
2. Consumer knowledge – if we can continue to educate them, this can be a huge opportunity
3. Labor – the labor is here, there are a lot of qualified people looking for work. At least with the Farmers Cow we have a lot of good people.

Section III – Quotes

Is it competition? Or are we just scrapping to get recognition? It's really developing the marketing effort so you can get recognized. When you are at 1% of the market, I wouldn't call it competition. We have to create a product that has value and a story that makes people want to buy it.

Getting consumers to reach out for your product is an every day job.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Stacia Clinton and John Stoddard, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH)
Date: 06/21/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. HCWH regards local food as an element of their efforts to promote sustainable practices in the health care industry, which is intended to motivate change within communities and the environment as a whole. Local and sustainable food procurement is promoted for its positive outcomes for human health, community health, and environmental benefits. The health care industry culture shift toward preventative health has helped HCWH efforts in this regard.
2. HCWH helps food service directors understand the value of procuring locally and from sources utilizing sustainable practices, and help them find flexibility in their menus in order to balance the costs of buying local with procuring through national contracts in place with group purchasing organizations (GPO) or contract management companies (CMC).
3. HCWH views infrastructure – in particular aggregation and light processing capacity is a huge obstacle to meeting demand from health care facilities, more so in CT than other New England states.
4. Contract Management Companies (e.g. Sodexo), who work with the majority of health care facilities in CT, insist on liability insurance and food safety protocols for all of their food sources. This requirement functions as an obstacle for more local procurement. Large national purchasing contracts on behalf of these same companies are also a barrier to working with local producers.
5. For health care facilities that rely on a Contract Management Company, the most reasonable pathway for local farmers is to aggregate and work with a distributor that the Contract Management Company is already using
6. There might be a way to have an aggregator working with a CMC who offers their own food safety program (e.g. Red Tomato).
7. For independently operated health care facilities, there is an easier opportunity for direct relationships between farmers and food service directors through pre-season purchasing contracts (e.g. Fletcher Allen Health Care, Burlington, VT).
8. Food safety certifications – large CMC are requiring it, however food service directors in institutions seem to express a lot of state pride and preference for local product, although the scale of operations often requires a regional supply. HCWH recommends 250 miles as a guideline for procurement of local.
9. Advice to GCAD – one thing I've really seen in the other states, has been the focus around infrastructure development. In VT their success with local, sustainable food purchasing stems from the existence of this. In ME they have begun to focus on this with funding. . An essential step to move forward. In Boston they've been circling about the need and how to utilize. That fact that GCAD exists is a big step, and the next step would be the opportunity to aggregate product to meet demand.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

Stacia Clinton:

1	2	3	4	5
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John Stoddard:

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

(I don't have a lot of knowledge, but I do have an understanding of some of these issues being land and labor availability.)

1. Infrastructure gaps – one thing we recognized in particular in CT was the inability to aggregate food or to lightly process. And the ability for any aggregation unit to hold a liability for larger institutions to purchase from them.
2. Market supply – this goes with demand. Demand is there, but without ability to aggregate we can't meet supply.
3. Regulation – in regards to food safety, maybe local GAP would help. It is beneficial for health care institutions in order to ensure food safety to have something like this in place.
4. Consumer knowledge – interest is growing, but there is a need for more information about benefits of why to purchase CT Grown products or why to cook seasonally. We try to use hospitals to serve as an education place; we try to help them find flexibility in the ways they prepare food for patients. There are more constraints in health care – specialized diets, large food service. We are helping to educate the food service directors and executives of the value of preparing local, seasonal food. Hospitals are also educating consumers so patients understand the true cost of food with regards to the rising cost of health care. Hospitals have more leeway than schools in terms of their budgets for food, but it is still constrained.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – huge opportunity there (see earlier answer above).
2. Market demand – we just need to aggregate the demand for the health care sector and other institutions. Contract buying from institutions is a great opportunity – we have been doing this successfully with independently operated facilities and helping them contract a season ahead with growers planting for them. You need a food service director willing to work out kinks and be a strong advocate.
3. Natural forces – climate change will likely be an opportunity for CT to focus more locally verses globally on food supply
4. Regulations – doing a state food safety program. In Rhode Island certification is a standardized program that has been working well.

Section III – Quotes

We are in a good space now for what is happening for local agriculture in general, in all sectors. We're seeing interest across the country in all sectors – knowledge growing and interest in growing food increasing, so there is good opportunity for growth. Positive change ahead and happening. It's a great time to have local and regional food systems developed.

The initial perception among food service directors that organic is expensive is so strong that they won't even look at it. They won't go there. Even around local or sustainable – the connotation is that the cost is higher.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: J. Dippel, Farmland Preservation Program Director, CT Dept. of Agriculture
Date: 05/24/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. At CT Dept. of Agriculture, there are limitations in terms of staff and resources. There are restraints on staff time due to:
 - management of multiple programs
 - lack of business office
 - expectation of contributing to state mandated agency programs (e.g. State Siting Council, State Plan of Conservation and Development). For a small agency this is challenging, whereas other agencies might have a dedicated unit for these tasks.
 - need to respond to requests for assistance from growers on agriculture land use issues
 - need to respond to misinformation and lack of understanding about agriculture from towns
2. Because of the cooperative nature internally within DoAg and in some cases externally with entities like NRCS, the agency can offer a set of complimentary programs that meet a variety of needs and can help a producer strengthen their business and strengthen/benefit other farm businesses in the vicinity (referring to Farmland Preservation, Agric Viability grants, Farmland Restoration Program, etc).
3. In Jay’s view, there is a critical need to address the fact that less than half of all growers have done any estate planning, and there may be a strong justification to invest resources in creating a program that provides one-on-one assistance at the farm in this regard, as done in the past by UConn Cooperative Extension.
4. Resources have diminished over time while needs have increased for state assistance. Specialized services, such as for estate planning, are missing; this in turn has implications for the Farmland Preservation Program.
5. Idea: DoAg needs a way to tell the story of program successes more frequently and effectively through media.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles:

1. Access to credit/financing – for people starting out in farming the land costs are very high compared to most other regions. If you look at established farms looking to expand or refinance, land costs is one of their major components and it is typically done through a financial institutions.
2. Regulations – on local/state/federal level – be it access to water. On federal level everything is looked at in a macro perspective. Environmental laws and regulations from all levels (federal, state, local) are a challenge.
3. Labor availability – in my discussions with farmers throughout the state this is something they are always talking about it; there are some regulations that affect that, such as immigration issues, housing regulations, minimum wage.
4. Land availability – this issue ties into financing and input costs

Notes regarding top four opportunities:

1. Access to credit/financing – (talking about capital versus operating loans) feel a lot more could be done through state programs. I know there are some young farmer financing programs but funding has been removed. On a state or federal level there is a lot of opportunity to do something here; could go back and look at older state CT Development Authority and DECD (where this agency's programs could be made available to farmers, and could be done in a friendly manner).
2. Market demand – opportunity to expand this for ct agriculture amongst general populace, through CT Grown, farmers markets, we've seen progress in this recently but there is still opportunity for more growth.
3. Infrastructure gaps – primarily farmers are looking to do more processing and value-added. If we could help them expand their infrastructure through access to credit that would be good. Look at success of Ag Viability grant program. A lot of opportunity for growth in that manner. Regional market has a lot of opportunity to growth on a cooperative or regional level. Very impressed with Fresh Cut – bringing in lettuce, celery, onions, vacuum packing, providing cabbage for Cole Slaw up at Shady Glen, and backup for products for Domino pizza. The operator might be employing 20 people, but says he could easily employ maybe 100 people there.
4. Consumer knowledge – in last few years we have seen consumer knowledge of locally grown and fresh products grow; people are willing to pay a premium for this.

Section III – Quotes

As a small agency, we wear many hats, however the limitations are the hours in a day and the number of staff we have.

The agency does the best with what we have.

It seems Every day there is an interesting agricultural story that could be told about a Connecticut farm(er).



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Linda Drake, Chair of CT Food Policy Council, and UConn Dept. of Nutritional Services

Date: 06/08/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. CFPC has six state agencies represented at the table. It provides a forum for people meeting around the table, talking and learning together about agriculture and food security issues in CT, and has led to new opportunities for those folks to work together more (e.g. Dept of Transportation & Dept. of Agriculture developing the CT Farm Map).
2. CFPC is limited by lack of money, a dedicated staff person. Linda feels the people at CFPC are doing a good job given that state agency appointments only have a certain amount of power to bring recommendations back to their commissioners—“we are all just cogs in the wheel.”
3. CFPC did achieve a lot of things in the past in terms of conferences and reports. 1999 Save the Land Conference, 2002 Food Safety Conference, 2004 Agriculture Viability Conference, 2005 Nutrition Education Conference, 2006 Home Plate Conference (institutional use of local food), 2007 National Conference of State Legislatures – food policy council convening. CFPC hasn’t been doing as much work of this sort lately.
4. A lot of local community groups are taking shape around food and agriculture issues – “stuff is happening all over the place.” An opportunity exists for all these local organization to work more collaboratively with each other and the CFPC.
5. Linda feels it’s important to gather baseline data on local consumption, production, and land use. This would be helpful to GCAD’s planning project, and to some extent helpful to CFPC.
6. Linda feels that in order to increase access to CT Grown products for all households, there is a need to focus on the grocery stores as any easy place for consumers to find and buy local product. Sees a real need to explore working with supermarkets (need to understand this from point of view of growers, wholesalers, and retailers).
7. Linda highlighted regulatory obstacles in food service, such as inconsistency between schools on serving school garden food in the cafeteria and serving local food in the federally funded Summer Feeding Programs.
8. In order to grow the agriculture sector, Linda sees opportunities through: 1) increasing consumer knowledge about locally available crops, 2) addressing infrastructure gaps for processing fruit and vegetables (possibly via public-private ownership or cooperative models); and 3) helping producers compete regionally on some higher value crops – possibly green beans, asparagus, and tree fruit.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – thinking of transportation, processing, storage...also marketing. And depending on what commodity you are talking about there are gaps within each of those. Processing is one of the major gaps, particularly vegetables. This is a need to get product into institutions. Also think of this in the framework of getting product to other venues.
2. Labor skills/availability – everything I hear reinforces this. Hard to get the labor farmers need. Age of farmer is high.
3. Market supply – this issue goes to access. I feel the demand is there, and can be built through a lot of other variables.
4. Regulations – not so much that everyone should have free reign, but some of the federal, state, and local regulations impede access to food. Example of GAP – for fruit and vegetable growers. There are some monetary issues for growers to be able to put the GAP program into place. There is a niche market for organic, but to be USDA certified organic requires lots of paperwork and costs; most smaller organic farmers aren't willing to do it. Some of the local health dept regulations are so variable. Example of school with a garden. Some schools allow kids to eat those foods from the school garden, some do not. Also some inconsistency with summer feeding sites and use of locally grown food.

Notes regarding top four opportunities for the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – granted we have a short season, but we have opportunities for season extension. We are in a perfect market because there are a lot of people. Great soils, some of the best in the world. There is land available, just a matter of using the way we would like it to be.
2. Market demand – probably greater demand than knowledge. One of the issues is affordability. Story about Highland Park and higher price local strawberries on display next to less expensive Driscoll strawberries.
3. Consumer knowledge – people still have a hard time finding local. Farm map has been helpful, brochures are good. But could use more media coverage.
4. Market competition – we cannot be competitive in many things, we are too small, but there are areas where we can be. We can compete on some products that we can grow locally – such as asparagus, green beans, tree fruit. I don't think we export much of that. Could see CT grown asparagus on restaurants in NYC. I suspect we should have the lion share of the local market served by local producers – such as apples. Why do we have to have apples from NY or WA? I would guess we might be competitive in the green industry for certain things. The issue is we are in a global society and we can get everything from anywhere around the world.
5. Availability of land

Section III – Quotes

[Regarding CT Food Policy Council] We don't DO a lot as an official entity. But we facilitate the doing by members of the Council and agencies represented, or supporting other initiatives.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Bill Duesing, CT NOFA, Executive Director
Date: 05/31/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. CT NOFA really looks at the issues from a broad point of view (i.e. sustainability of our future on the planet). CT NOFA’s work and their connection to consumers goes beyond a customer discussion, but rather connecting to their members’ broader values about biodiversity, sustainability, health, and our future.
2. Bill stressed that all of agriculture, including conventional producers, could benefit from knowledge of organic methods and agro-ecological solutions (e.g. such as in regards to soil management). This is particularly true in the context of climate change. Bill cited the CT Climate Change Preparedness Plan which contains recommendations to implement organic land management methods.
3. CT NOFA is committed to finding ways to foster agriculture everywhere – including community gardens, community farms, urban agriculture, backyard gardens, school gardens etc.
4. Engaging consumers with stories about agriculture and local food is extremely important in order to empower people to make decisions in order to meet their own needs.
5. The non-economic values of producing food locally are hard to measure but very important. The economic value of community farms, for example, needs to be understood and captured.
6. Regulations are mistakenly structures as one size fits all; this becomes a barrier for people who are endeavoring to produce more food for themselves and others.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Mindset – Ag community is not seeing the value in agro-ecological solutions, close to but not strictly organic, integrating food production with daily life. It's the way we are going to solve food problems in the future. The local, ecological model which minimizes impacts is not possible to weave with traditional commodity agriculture. 1000 acres of corn versus 100 acre of vegetables in CT.
2. Market competition – referring to the industrial food system, and the associated costs to society and health. This industrial food is what is advertised (double bacon cheese burgers); if you follow that back to what that looks like, it is disaster environmentally and consuming enormous amounts of energy, but it is what the larger system supports and we haven't factored in the cost. Very expensive. Study by accounting firm that shows for every dollar of profit in food system there is 2 dollars in cost. Same study showed \$1.50 in health care cost.
3. Regulations – of a variety of sorts. One size fits all approach. Hegemony of USDA in slaughterhouse control. Drive by closed slaughterhouses all the time. Regulations determine a certain scale and then it doesn't work anymore for smaller operations.
4. Natural forces – DEEP report on adaptation to climate change. The results came out pretty worrisome for CT agriculture. A lot of recommendations relate to organic management. Organic methods are really critical to building up soil resources and maybe de-toxifying what we've done through agriculture. Organic is not just an option. We need to have an open discussion about this.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Other – Agriculture everywhere – Incorporating agriculture into our communities, e.g. school garden movement. Garden in every school. So important as an educational tool, yet not really considered in school. I really believe in hands-on education. Community farms, city farms (New Haven, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Hartford) – if a group of citizens are coming together to create something...great, that ought to have as much value as taking it down to put something else in its place.
2. Geography – great soils, great water, and distribution is here.
3. Market demand – of course relates to cost, and there is a issue there but my sense is reasonably priced organic or local food is in demand and is nowhere near being satisfied. But we still need to build demand and build supply.
4. Labor availability/skills – may relate some to regulations. They are not often enforced, but the laws on the books would frown on many common practices on large or small farms. If people really want to work on a farm and farms are willing to have them, that should be workable.

Section III – Quotes

A lot of this is driven by people saying we want to have agriculture in our community. Not driven by the economic arguments that are typically used when we talk about agriculture. It is driven by the need people feel to be more connected. What we really need to focus on as we move into the future is how are we going to feed ourselves; and how are we going to do this without destroying the planet's health and our health.

If I weren't that optimistic I wouldn't have been doing this for 40 years.

Organic methods are really critical to building up soil resources and maybe de-toxifying what we've done through agriculture. Organic is not just an option. We need to have an open discussion about this.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Commissioner Daniel C. Esty, Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection
Date: 08/02/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. DEEP's conservation agenda offers a platform for potential collaboration with DoAg. First, DEEP has an interest in protecting certain parcels as working lands. Second, one of DEEP's initiatives for this year will be developing a land tracking system that identifies parcels that could be put in a conservation category, which include working lands.
2. DEEP's efforts to develop and explore a diverse portfolio of cheaper and more reliable energy sources could be tied to agriculture (thinking of potential wind power, hydropower, solar power, anaerobic digesters, etc). The agency wants to move toward a model that helps finance these energy projects (rather than subsidize). In his view, the future of farm business income should move to diversified revenue that includes energy production.
3. Commissioner Esty is interested in seeing a pilot model for conservation payments to growers in compensation for stewarding the lands.
4. Commissioner Esty is interested in seeing the state play a role in helping producers produce at scale, and supportive of seeing more land in production. He recognizes the challenge of scale for growers in CT and their need to produce enough in order to be competitive.
5. Commissioner Esty sees climate change as a major threat to agriculture, and expressed interest and concern for agriculture sectors that will face transition as a result, such as maple sugar industry. He feels it is the role of the state to help these sectors with identifying and using sustainable methods of production that will help during the transition.
6. Commissioner Esty acknowledged some tension between goals of pollution control and needs of agriculture. Commissioner Esty pointed out that DEEP welcomes opportunity for discussion of this with agriculture community. While DEEP needs to continue evaluating approach to regulation, agriculture community also needs to look at changes required as a result of improved scientific understanding and heightened concerns about public health. He pointed out that just because an approach or activity has been in place for many years doesn't mean it will be acceptable today (example of smoking in the office - environmental standards have changed).
7. Commissioner Esty sees a need for some clarification about inter-agency jurisdiction in issues such as managing plant invasive species and wood-burning. On the issue of wood-burning, Commissioner Esty said the best practice for addressing trees damaged by invasive species is often to take them down, chip and burn.
8. As Commissioner of outdoor recreation, he is personally very concerned about obesity and healthy diets for low income residents and would like to see a more concerted effort by the government to address these issues – potentially through the GCAD strategic planning process.
9. Commissioner Esty sees an opportunity for strong branding of locally grown and what it means to the consumer – conveying some assurance of freshness and quality, and building on consumer desire to connect to farmer. Related to this, he also sees an expanding consumer interest in artisanal products.
10. Commissioner Esty said during his tenure at DEEP in past 18 months he has promoted a new approach to enforcement of environmental regulations. The focus is to devote more resources to high

risk and/or repeat violators and to work with others who are making a good faith effort to be in compliance. He asked if the agriculture community has noticed this change in DEEP's approach.

11. Idea: Commissioner Esty sees an opportunity to harvest more timber off state-owned forests.
12. Idea: Commissioner Esty expressed a willingness to meet on a regular basis with a group of producers, just as he does with hunters, conservationists, fisherman, to help flag issues where the agency might be lagging.
13. Idea: Commissioner Esty expressed interest in creating a LEAN process to eliminate bureaucracy on agriculture-related concerns with DEEP. [From DEEP website: What is LEAN? LEAN is a process improvement approach that identifies and minimizes wasted time and effort. Through a week-long exercise, cross functional staff teams identify needed improvements and develop a one-year plan to implement the improvements.]

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market competition – can it compete with products that are produced at a bigger scale, and therefore cost less. If we can't compete on price, can we compete on quality? People will pay a premium, but not too much of a premium.
2. Market uncertainty – pitching on freshness, but there is no guarantee. Maybe we need to develop this.
3. Other – attracting new farmers. Farming is hard work – are we really getting a good flow of new, young people doing this. Not that many people really want to do this. Support for new farmers is important. How to do you get started, get financing, etc.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Marketing and Branding – see above
2. Customer to farmer relationships, so people feel a personal guarantee of quality of freshness.
3. Market supply – referring to scale – helping farmers produce at scale, to keep costs down and hit the right price point.
4. Other – modulation of market fluctuation - Conversation about corn. Putting corn into ethanol was a big mistake. Food-fuel trade off. Maybe we need to do a better job modulating prices so they aren't so susceptible to price spikes. Information flows to producers about how to manage these market fluctuations could be important.

Section III – Quotes

[Regarding buying local food] - I think people want to do the right thing, but only if it is equally convenient as the next best option.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Theresa Freund, Freund’s Farm Market and Bakery, LLC
Date: 06/27/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Freund’s Farm Market and Bakery is an intensive farm stand retail operation with its own commercial kitchen, open 10 months in the year. Theresa sells baked goods, garden center products, seasonal fruit and vegetables (she is known for her tomatoes), and preserves. Theresa also runs a catering operation. Her customers include locals as well as weekenders to the region.
2. Theresa shared that the best value for her farm’s produce is in catering. Retail value is less than catering, but it is much easier to present and sell product this way instead of wholesale; in wholesale Theresa sees an additional cost of packaging and produce appearance must be extremely good and uniform.
3. Theresa finds the state regulations on processed foods to be extremely unclear, even though she carefully reads the text of the regulations. Regulations pertaining to animal products (such as milk for cheese) or poultry products for retail are especially unclear.
4. Theresa has not found success purchasing produce for her farm stand at the Regional Market in Hartford. She tried picking up produce directly from farms in Hudson Valley, but then started going to Menands Market north of Albany where they have a clear system of conducting business starting when a bell rings at 5:30 a.m. There used to be 50-60 farmers selling at Menands; now there are about 35.
5. Theresa sees an opportunity in a light processing facility, possibly owned by farmers, where she could take excess harvest for processing into something she can sell in the farm stand as well as in her catering. Right now she is not allowed to use her own processed foods in her catering business.
6. Theresa describes her competition as the consumer who is short on time. Grocery stores afford quick, comfortable (air conditioned) and convenient shopping. Her farm stand is still more of a ‘treat’ for consumers.
7. CT Grown label can sometimes be misunderstood by her customers as suggesting the product is coming from somewhere else,...i.e. ‘oh, these aren’t yours?’. She is careful to label her own products as ‘home grown’. On the other hand, Theresa sees CT Grown as a wonderful tool for online seekers of products, along with the CT Farm Map.
8. Theresa is interested in training that helps build workplace skills. She feels the Vo-Ag program has the right infrastructure to help kids identify skills they need to improve, but in general young adults seem to lack critical skills related to teamwork.
9. Idea: statewide open house for Farm Stands – something big that brings in people, building on model of passport and wine trail, and recipe book by E. Brooks.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Labor availability/skills - My biggest challenge is inefficient labor. My labor force is so lacking in skills. In the CowPot factory, we wanted more American based employees. You can say you need 10 foreign labor positions, and you get 15. He puts out the labor notice and gets a lot of spots filled. It's a pretty diverse crowd out there among the American workers. Backgrounds are varied. They just want a job. No one is really that interested in what we are doing. I had one girl work for me for less than 11 hours, because I was talking about my produce and the presentation of the product and its display. She just didn't get it. My biggest challenge on labor is that I'm putting so much into it and the skill is so low. Example of giving a young man from family with resources; I am supposed to help him develop character! I am the only interaction he will have with a farmer; poor harvesting skills etc. I feel like I'm just not getting a return on my investment when I give him his paycheck. I have one foreign worker, he is excellent, takes such pride in his work, here to support his family, his attention to detail is methodical. Constantly trying to teach people to be efficient with their space. I've watched employees carry things one at a time 100', instead of using two hands or making use of wagons to carry a large quantity.
2. Other – Restrictions on how you can use the land because of proximity to neighbors. We do liquid irrigation and forcing liquid manure into the soil, so it's not obnoxious. We have the methane digester because it's easier to manage the manure. We've put a lot of energy into producing the methane gas, separate the liquid from the solids, liquid goes straight through pipe into field (DOT permission to have pipe and eliminate tractor crossing), solid goes into the CowPots.
3. Natural forces –mostly has to do with large animals as pests. Sure there are worms and things that come in, you can deal with these because they change with the season. But the things like deer, woodchucks, turkeys, robins. I just put up fencing to keep out woodchucks – wiping out crop in high tunnel. Here we are productive and ahead of schedule, but how do we get rid of the woodchuck? We are in such close proximity to neighbors, so our choices are limited.
4. Regulations – talking about DCP. If I was to sit down and write down all the fees that I pay to the state so that I can function as a retail establishment – dairy license, license on my scales. Permit for the scale (weights and measures says it is accepted for retail). When I bought a new scale, am I supposed to call them up and invite them in? So I continue to pay for the permit on the old scale instead of calling in for the new scale. I haven't seen a DCP person in 6 or 7 years for weights and measures. Sometimes the regulations are there, but I have no idea what they are. I am pretty small potatoes compared to the rest of the world. I also deal with area health inspection – they find something that could have been a certain way for 20 years, they always find something. DCP inspector on labeling things – she gives me a place to go and look, but it is 800 pages. She once told me I am not a canning facility so I can't process my tomatoes into sauce; she suggested that I bring them to a canning processing facility. I understand from CFBA meeting that you have to test the lot and get the recipe approved. So it's easier for me not to make tomato sauce. I've been canning tomatoes since I was a kid, haven't killed anyone yet, of course they don't like that answer. Of course I'm going to do it right. Cross contamination is a big issue in my environment, and I spend an enormous amount of time teaching this to my employees. Regulation people come in to find what you are doing wrong, not what we are doing right. Everything seems to be up for interpretation in the regulations. I try to be as good as I can. Even labeling –if every brownie, cake and pie is behind glass it doesn't need labeling, but by wrapping it up and putting it on a shelf it needs a label, even though it has only traveled two feet. We've worked hard to get our labels correct.

Input costs – so the cost of oil and gas is a little higher, so we just shift things a little, we start plants one week later (January and February is a killer), you just have to think a little smarter.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Other - We are in direct contact with the consumer. So when people ask us about how we grow, I talk passionately about how we grow the tomatoes, and then they buy it. When you see we are on somebody's shopping list, then that's a thrill, I am now part of their routines. If I can I try to educate consumers, why we do what we do, how we take care of the cows.
2. Geographic – proximity to the population. They are right here. Trick is getting the look right so they will stop by – picket fence, flowers, signs – e.g. “Jack gives our plums a thumbs up”, “It's raining and we're jamming”. We tend not to say ‘tomatoes!’ Instead we say, “What's for dinner?” If you look at McDonald's and Dunkin Donuts, they don't say their product is healthy, they try to move toward ‘why drink our coffee?’ We are trying to do the same thing. “Loosen your belt!”
3. Access to credit – no problem with this. We have proven ourselves, we are not high risk. We typically work 15 hour days and are so committed to getting done what we want to get done – we have good credit. Whenever we have done something risky, like CowPots, we have secured funding even though it is on the edge. I know my business. From one year to the next my sales are pretty consistent. I know I can pick 1200# of tomatoes, and I can sell them, I don't lay awake worrying about what I am going to do with my tomatoes. Whereas CowPot factory is not really there yet, still figuring out how are we going to sell and market.
4. Our children have looked at what we have done, and they want to follow. We are trying to make this seem like it is a wonderful place to be. Rachel, daughter, definitely wants to do this. Isaac who is mechanical wants to do this. I think all four children see the value of what we created, now just a question of them getting comfortable and mature enough to take over.

Section III – Quotes

What's interesting about what we are doing is I am growing and processing food and presenting it for sell, and I am also processing for consumers [e.g. wedding catering].

We're very optimistic because our consumers are right in front of us. When I was at Purdue University we talked about 'where are the customers?' If you want lamb, customers are on the east and west coast, but production is in the Midwest. Here we have great proximity to consumers.

Regulation people come in to find what you are doing wrong, not what we are doing right.

When you see we are on somebody's shopping list, then that's a thrill, I am now part of their routine!



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Jim Guida, Executive Vice President, Guida’s Dairy
Date: 06/13/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Guida’s is a dairy processor and distributor in New Britain, with about 80% milk from CT dairy farmers, and about 70% sales in CT. In addition to bottling and distribution for private labels, Guida’s offers specialized custom manufacturing (value-added), producing soups, yogurt, ice cream, etc. for many food retail businesses. According to Jim, Guida’s biggest competition is Hood and Dean
2. Majority of sales to consumer are price driven; there is a small segment of consumers that will pay a premium for a locally grown product.
3. Jim feels there is real need to focus more resources on marketing Connecticut agriculture to consumers. ‘Why do we see advertising for California farm products instead of Connecticut products on TV?’
4. State procurement is entirely price drive through competitive bids; there is no support or advantage given to local products or local processors.
5. Jim sees an opportunity for more sales of local milk and agriculture products to schools, but currently almost no school districts are applying a local preference to their purchasing contracts, and many of these contracts are extremely old.
6. The truck weight limit in CT is set at 80,000#. Surrounding state truck weight limits are set at 100,000#. This creates a significant increase in transportation costs for Guida to conduct business in the state. Jim says: ‘milk prices are set by federal government – we in zone 1 - so the only costs we can control are the transportation costs.’
7. Jim is pleased with cooperative model as it applies to Guida’s Dairy and its membership in Dairy Farmers of America; DFA is providing members with services including insurance programs, field representation, profit sharing, and buying power.
8. Jim sees big opportunity to growing agriculture sales in the retail stores and big box stores (e.g. WalMart and Target) where volume is high and operation costs are low. This is especially effective when the farmer goes out and tells his own story; think of Stew Leonard, or Farmers Cow (who stand by the milk case and tell their story).
9. From Guida’s perspective, the need for regulations in regards to food safety and water management is just part of conducting business.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market competition – We are the only processor in the state of CT. Although we've been acquired by a farmer owned co-op (Dairy Farmers of America) – but we do business as we have done it before and our competition is still the multi-million dollar corporations such as the Dean Foods etc. We sell commodities and so our prices change every month. People buy on price. We have competition from MA, NY (our surrounding states that have bigger companies).
2. Regulation – referring to state and federal weight restrictions on trucks. When milk comes into the state, we have to off-load milk in Springfield to get it down to 80,000 # before entering the state. Very big cost for us to do this. Also, there are state taxes on fuel – one of the highest price places to do business in the country.
3. Input costs
4. Infrastructure gaps – thinking of transportation and the cost of doing transportation. This is the highest price item, aside from the raw cost of the products.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – in advertising and getting a message out to people; could do more.
2. Market competition
3. Input costs – if we could do things better in terms of savings on energy costs, that could help.
4. Regulations – any type of incentives or change in taxes could become an opportunity for agriculture.

Section III – Quotes

I see trucks come into CT that say 'local' on it, but plates are from Indiana. Local means anything that is near them.

Everything is price driven. It is difficult to command a premium for milk from CT just because it is from CT. It does have a place. There is always going to be a certain amount of people that will support this. But there is a saturation point. Not going to take over the majority of purchases in the store.

I get milk bids every year from the schools - some are so archaic they still have Governor Weicker on them!



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Stuart Hall, Executive Director of Central Connecticut Coop Farmers Association
Date: 06/01/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Regulations regarding sale of CT-Grown farm products at CCC farm stand (raw products and value-added products), are too overwhelming and discourage farmers from conducting more business. Stuart hears similar complaints from farmers in their CCC farmers market.
2. Stuart has found the state regulatory environment very confusing for conducting business; regulatory agencies don't seem to talk to each other, and recommendations are contradictory.
3. Truck weight regulations in CT and transportation costs (e.g. rail fees) and higher labor costs effectively raise the cost of doing business (for CCC as an agriculture supplier) and make them less competitive with regional competitors who can get around these costs (e.g. Phoenix Feeds in VT).
4. Stuart observes strong demand for local agriculture products in the store, but farmers need help being able to increase supply of raw products and value-added products (by changing regulatory environment and finding ways to reduce input costs).
5. Idea: Clearinghouse person on state regulations – would like to have one person to call.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Regulations – Relates to issue at CCC, and three regulatory agencies. [DoAg, DCP, Manchester Dept. of Health]. Now that we are dealing with the farmers markets with smaller growers, we hear that this issue is affecting them. Challenge of selling CT Grown products – eggs, jams jellies, value added – because of the regulatory environment. It's a huge issue that GCAD can really help with. Needs to be a clearinghouse – one person that someone can call. Regulatory agencies not necessarily talking to each other. These are not large corporations, but neighbors with chickens in the backyard. Needs to be simple.
2. Labor availability/skills – For larger commercial agriculture, we have illegal worker issue. At the co-op, we have a union (teamsters) that represent our mill workers and drivers. CT is an expensive place to live and have people that work for you.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – relates to large population of local buyers, huge opportunity
2. Market supply – allowing there to be an easily available supply (need to address regulation that is preventing this)
3. Consumer knowledge of CT Grown Products
4. Input Costs – It's more expensive to operate in CT, there is an opportunity if we can help address this.

Section III – Quotes

I've seen there is a lot of interest in CT agriculture. People are coming to the co-op every day, interested in a certain part of agriculture, llamas, alpacas, etc. People just enjoy their animals or working the ground.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Jay Healy, USDA Rural Development, State Director for CT/MA/RI
Date: 06/21/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Jay sees an opportunity for future of agriculture in terms of production of on-farm energy, not only as a cost-saving device but also potentially driving a significant portion of farm revenue in the future.
2. Jays sees an opportunity via the promotion of policies that encourage farm energy as a platform for working together with environmental regulatory authorities (DEEP, EPA). Food waste recycling could be a win-win for environmentalists and farmers.
3. Current energy policy in CT makes agriculture less competitive compared to MA (where they have net metering and other incentives). USDA Rural Development is sending money back to DC as a result of inability of farmers in CT to use grants for energy projects.
4. Jay feels there is an opportunity for at least a few big farms that might be able to move in the direction of value-added products for buyers in the hospitals, universities, etc. Example of Bob Spear in Maine who grows and processes butternut squash very successfully for hospitals and schools.
5. For mid-level farms, there is an opportunity for cooperatively owned HAACP facilities to create value-added products that will tap into that profit potential from selling to hospitals, universities, etc.
6. Jay's sense of the biggest threat ahead is the conversion of farmland because the value of land for non-agricultural use will always be a temptation.
7. Jay emphasized importance of not cutting back any further the resources and staff at DoAg or Extension. Farmers have to respond so quickly to market, and they can't move where they need to fast enough without these supporting entities.
8. There are certain products that may fail to meet standards of a premium product, but can still be sold (possibly via processing); this is another opportunity, finding a market for products that had no market previously (e.g. salsa).
9. Jay highlighted the need for ongoing collaboration through regularly scheduled communication between Rural Development, FSA, NRCS, Extension, and state agency of agriculture – there are Farmland Advisory Committees which attempt to do this, but this does not seem to be working very well.
10. Jay highlighted the work of FINE (Farm to Institution New England), as an example of a regional cooperative project, but could use better communication.
11. Idea: Swat Teams or Task Forces to help farmers put together projects with several business stakeholders that pool waste in order to produce on-farm energy.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Access to credit. - I do sometimes see a gap in access to credit and financing. Many small loans are out there, and bigger ones over \$500k are out there too. But in my experience the cost to a farmer for \$50k or \$500k is the same. If they are in the middle there is a hole in financing.
2. Infrastructure - If you are someone that wants to process a few hundred chickens or a five or six beefers, how do you process those and can you get together to market those to restaurants. As producers we can't afford to put this up on our own farm, we need to look at this cooperatively. Establishing the networks, aggregation and storage, and getting them to an Elm City or a spot that will treat you fairly are all important issues in CT.
3. Labor – probably an issue with H2A, I don't know much about it in CT but I can imagine
4. Land – perhaps is an obstacle.

In terms of energy, it kills me we send grant money back to DC every year because we can't find enough farmers to use these grants to put up solar or wind energy. Part of it is governmental incentives. Part of it is partnerships with organizations. In CT we revert money. RI we revert all the money. In MA we use all of it. Need ways to cross-market and cross-inform what is out there to help people go where they need to go.

Regulation – not sure about this, but think there is a real bunch of support for agriculture, it can be an issue on a particular kind of farm with a particular issue.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input cost – In terms of energy. About four years ago I put up photovoltaic and they have already paid for themselves and now I'm getting durable competitive advantage to have free power for next 20 years. Now I'm looking to use another spot to lease 3-4 acres for solar use – farmers all over southern new England with proper siting and proper environmental controls, could maybe generate 30-40% of their income from farm energy. Methane, solar, wind....it's a pretty great untapped area that smart CT farmers should be looking at.
2. Market demand, market supply, consumer knowledge – those are coming along really nicely and growing in leaps and bounds. At a basic level almost anyone looks at tremendous growth in farmers markets and the Farmers Cow and CT Grown – it's a great opportunity that is already being utilized. The really great news is the markets are there and the customers are there. How do you nudge farmers to think of themselves as agriculture businesses now that will not make it in the long run doing more than wholesale, and do more value-added, including dairy farmers. Farmers control their own destiny. As a subset to that, the organizations like FB are a good thing.
3. Other – Farmland Advisory Committees - We have farmland advisory committee (FAC) meetings with NRCS and FSA, sometimes we get participation from Extension, almost never have representation from DoAg, but I do think what we need to do (maybe reshape) is set up more collaborative opportunities or discussion that works for people that are already too busy. How do you do an ongoing discussion to move things forward. It would be a shame if what is happening here [GCAD strategic planning] doesn't turn into an ongoing collaborative process that just ends

with a list of recommendations. As a farmer you really like to see how the rubber meets the road. For example, we just funded a CT mobile poultry processing unit. But I think we need to have a conversation ongoing to understand bugs, keep an eye on how things are working. We sometimes have an institutional problem of following through to help farmers be successful. In the Senate Farm Bill there is a provision that would wipe out Rural Development's ability to provide water and waste programs in 60-70% of CT – Joe Courtney has been great trying to help. Has a direct impact on guys in Long Island Sound with oyster beds. In my opinion I wish we could do quarterly meetings so that we can continue to pump \$25m into the little Putnam, Danielson's, etc. – little tendrils, all get done by wire or bubble gum, could be more effective if we could do that. RBEG grants, REAP grants – if you can come up with \$100k for mobile poultry unit, we can talk about this additional opportunity. We could use a little communication to cover each other a little bit and leverage these grant opportunities. I didn't know what FB was trying to do with net metering, and Dept. didn't know what I was doing to get more energy grants out. FAC committees are sort of 'blown opportunities'. Usually Extension is on an ad-hoc basis, and DoAgs don't always send representatives. Not sure we should beef it up if it doesn't work. But if part of this process is to come up with a different collaboration process that is more centrally focused on CT agriculture, could create cross section reinforcement in a way that helps politically. Example of farm to school, \$600-\$700k we raised for this. This kind of collaboration if it was quarterly and we could have few minutes to say what we are going on could be very helpful.

Section III – Quotes

The outlook is bright, but we have holes we'd like to fill for Connecticut farmers.

Average age of farmer is a huge threat. We need to get younger people involved with an entrepreneurial bent; if we do this I think the sky is the limit for being able to grow and make a reasonable living.

There is no question that food safety issues are here to stay because there is always going to be some product in CA that is going to kill someone.

The days of wholesale agriculture in CT are pretty well over.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Bob Heffernan, Executive Director, CT Green Industries Council

Date: 07/05/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Representing half of the agriculture sector, the green industry has a labor force of 48,000 with a heavy reliance on foreign labor. 40-50% of nursery product is exported outside of the state.
2. There is a lot of risk in the green industry because products have a long lead time getting to market (3 - 7 years) and anything could happen - including a comment from Martha Stewart to not buy a certain plant.
3. Green industry in CT operates at a significant cost of production disadvantage.
4. No matter what size of operation, green industry is 100% marketing dependent. Growers must create demand because no one really has to buy a plant.
5. The primary competitive environment for the CT green industry is the surrounding northeast states.
6. The primary regulatory obstacle for the CT green industry is DEEP.
7. Bob believes the biggest obstacle to growing the agriculture sector is that the public feels agriculture is dying. This has an impact on resources that are devoted to agriculture – research, training, marketing, economic development, agency support, etc.
8. Bob feels the state's farmland preservation program has fueled the perception that agriculture is dying by buying up farms that are dying. He feels it would have been better to have invested the approximate \$140 million that has been spent on farmland preservation on enhancing and developing the industry instead.
9. Bob feels the farmland preservation program is a major barrier to developing a common vision for the future of agriculture which includes the green industry.
10. Bob feels there is a bias against the green industry from the public and from within the agriculture community.
11. Bob shared focus group research shows that consumers might choose to purchase plants grown in Connecticut because of perceptions of freshness, hardiness, better acclimation, and possibly loyalty to the state. Residents believe CT plants are in better shape because they didn't have to travel far. There is also a desire to have a garden that does not look like a 'home depot garden.' Preliminary results regarding price perception are mixed.
12. Bob sees a need for better interagency communication in regards to their interaction with agriculture (e.g. if one agency is planning to take an action against an agriculture operation there should be an effort to brief each other in advance).
13. Bob feels the name of the Agriculture Viability grants sends a message that agriculture needs to be saved.
14. Bob feels CT does little to build demand for its products. He would like to see something more assertive like Jersey Fresh, or how the brand of VT attached to anything helps a product to sell.
15. Bob described a marketing opportunity focused on New York City because consumers there are tourists in CT. He believes the CT Grown brand is seen as 'cool' in NYC, but not in other neighboring markets.
16. Bob sees it as a 'no-brainer' for DoAg to market our producers at certain events like supermarket shows or buyer shows.

- 17. Some CT growers are responding to market trends and demand for urban landscaping – including rooftop gardens and wall installations.
- 18. Idea: Create different versions of CT Grown logo with one that features nursery crops.
- 19. Idea: Rename the Agriculture Viability grants; maybe call these Enhancement Grants or Growing Grants.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

- 1. Other – public misperception that agriculture is dying. The focus of the state’s programs for agriculture is the farmland preservation program which is focused on agriculture that is failing.
- 2. Other – leadership issue of Commissioner of Agriculture. I see either people with mindset of state employee or the mindset of the gentleman farmer. Commissioner Greczyk was the only commissioner with the hands in the dirt. My idea of a Commissioner is someone who pounds the pavement, doesn’t go home at 5 every night, speaks in front of economic development commissions, etc. The other problem is that no one wants to challenge the Governor’s appointment. This is ver different from how people react to who the President chooses for Secretary of USDA; if people don’t like the appointment then people really make some noise. We can learn from other sectors where there is some promotion of certain individuals prior to their election.
- 3. Input costs – including high energy, labor costs, high farmland prices.
- 4. Lack of labor – we have 48,000 people in green industry – some may be undocumented. Pride’s Corner event lost 140 (30% workforce) in one day, but nobody from Dept of Labor and Dept of Agriculture were there to help. I helped Mark Sellw be prepared for possibility of media showing up on his doorstep.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

- 1. Consumer knowledge
- 2. Access to credit/financing
- 3. Geography – our trucks in the green industry can reach 28% of nation’s population within a day’s drive. Proximity to market is a huge plus to us, especially for nursery. The next problem is how to compete with nurseries in other states.
- 4. Land availability – just got an email over the weekend from a farmer that wants to access preserved farmland, and I told him he’s not going to get it. We’ve spent \$130 or \$140 million protecting all this farmland and the most successful part of agriculture cannot access it.

Section III – Quotes

The deck is stacked against us as it is, just by living in one of the highest cost states in the nation.

If you were to create a love for agriculture in any state, you could do it here, because people have the resources and income to pay more for products



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Rick Hermonot, Ekonk Hill Turkey Farm, Moosup

Date: 06/22/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Rick sees ‘boundless’ opportunity for CT agriculture through niche farming (direct retail, value-added), as opposed to commodity production. Commodity production can see better margins but in order to grow to scale CT doesn’t have the land base to support it. Niche farming, however, can serve a customer base right here that is only growing.
2. Ekonk Hill Turkey Farm takes advantage of as much free or low cost advertising as possible, including creative partnering with local radio station as a partner on their corn maze.
3. Rick finds regulations altogether extremely burdensome, even if some of it is necessary. Certain regulations seem to be inefficient (such as redundancy of agencies who inspect temperature of his milk cooler).
4. Rick is eager to buy a small parcel from his neighbor that has been permanently protected by his neighbor through CT DoAg Farmland Preservation Program, but he can’t do this since the parcel is part of a larger easement preserving 400+ acres total.
5. Rick is pleased with new poultry inspection program at CT DoAg.
6. Rick identified two specific regulations that are limiting the growth of his business: 1) the poultry processing regulations allow up to 20,000 poultry, but only 5,000 can be turkey – this is inconsistent with federal limits; 2) the poultry processing regulations prohibit sales to stores – this means Ekonk Hill cannot sell processed chicken to other farm stands in the state.
7. Rick sees a need for a distribution service that would help him maintain a wide selection of CT Grown products in his store.
8. Rick reported that his customers are very interested in animal welfare, but not GAP certification.
9. Rick finds that labor is not a problem, that if you can attract the help you can find the help. ‘If you have a business that is friendly to employees you will have employees.’
10. Idea: Develop a policy that will allow a landowner to subdivide large parcels of farmland that have been protected through the CT Farmland Preservation Program into smaller profitable agriculture units.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – true for my farm and other farms. Even my farm as a small niche business I'm having a hard time finding the land I need. Every acre – especially with corn prices so high – is being aggressively sought out by farms. Can't find even 5 acres to lease for our turkeys. We only own 6 acres. We lease another 30 acres from our neighbor. I want to buy land in the worst way and just can't find it in our area. Our neighbor will potentially have land to buy at some point and I hope to buy from him. Even affects small farms. Every bit of open land – even fields that are fallow or too wet – the high corn prices are driving these parcels back into use.
2. Regulations – pleased with new legislation allowing for poultry inspection and retailing to restaurants, but very frustrated that it doesn't allow us to tap into the biggest opportunity of retailing to stores. State of CT removed permission to sell to stores. Maybe once people feel that the licensing program is going well they will let us sell to stores. We don't want to sell to Whole Foods; we can't afford to sell at their price. But we could sell to farm stores or niche grocery stores and receive a good premium for our chickens as wholesale. As a business owner in CT, I find it overwhelming to deal with the licensing and filings – to keep up with it, to keep track with the fees, it's almost a disincentive to stay in business. Our little business, I could spend a quarter of my time dealing with red tape. Federal and state payroll, town tax issues and exemptions, licenses – I just hung up a second 3x4 foot frame on our store wall to display all the licenses. People are afraid to start because they haven't dotted every i and crossed every t. Trying to have that up front is really hard. We used to have three agencies coming to check the temp in our dairy cooler.
3. Infrastructure – transportation, processing USDA capacity for red meat, for poultry was impossible (one in VT), we might like to become USDA inspected. We have an inspector coming while we process and I intend to talk to him at length about what it would take to become USDA inspected. I think our facility will pass. We don't have an office and bathroom for the inspector. There is USDA inspection in New Milford. For red meat, you have to go out of state, some in state is fractured, you have to go to one place to slaughter and go to another for processing. Adams is exceeding capacity in MA. Transportation and distribution. We have a truck – thought about doing a wholesale route, picking up products and drop off at other farm stands. He and his son work full time. We need a way to move product between locations. We have refrigerator truck. We used to sell Trinity Farm product, but it took too much effort to get it to the farm stand.
4. Consumer knowledge – we do a good job, but a lot of people that don't understand this and there is only room for growth.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – the more we can tell people that we have local foods, the more we can grow that market. DoAg does that already, but you always have to do more.
2. Regulations – opening door for us to sell to stores. Simplifying regulations makes it possible for people to spend more time on strategizing and managing the business – but the part that isn't fun is the regulations. Everything needs to be filed online, have to remember all the passwords. The regulatory stuff is not fun and it takes an awful lot of time. Very frustrating. Every minute you spend doing that is time you do not have time making decisions about your business.
3. Market supply – we have tons and could only have more
4. Farmland availability – farmland preservation program is very important and we need to continue to fund it, maybe we will live to see the day we bulldoze subdivisions and put it back into

agriculture. A lot of the development rights farms are 200-300 acre farms, a lot of the farms in the future will be smaller units. Farmers are left buying 20 acres of unrestricted farmland, which is harder to do and has more risk. I see an opportunity to split parcels that are currently preserved. The state needs to be open minded to this. Smaller affordable units that need can be farmed viably. Hugely important to smaller niche farms that will be the dominant force to CT agriculture going forward.

Section III – Quotes

The regulatory stuff is not fun and it takes an awful lot of time. Very frustrating. Every minute you spend doing that is time you do not have time making decisions about your business.

Transparency is the best certification.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: George Hindinger, Hindinger Farm, Hamden

Date: 06/20/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. George is a production-minded farmer yet he’s engaged in direct marketing and doing it on his own terms. Hindinger Farm has recently added a CSA, reduced its farmers markets from 3 to 1, and sells to a few restaurants but chefs must pick up product themselves and price is a set discount off retail price.
2. George feels the H2A program is extremely unaccommodating yet he has to use it.
3. George spoke of liability and crop insurance as an important factor when considering growth of his business. George feels FSA’s NAP insurance is in disarray and there is a need for producer training on how to be compliant with the program.
4. George appreciates it when a regulatory agency will work with him to be compliant. In this regard, he had a good experience working with DEEP on removing an in-ground fuel tank. George called for ‘workability.’ “I want to be compliant, but please work with me.”
5. George spoke of farmland availability as the main factor limiting his growth.
6. George feels like state needs to do a better job marketing CT agriculture and educating consumers about the seasonality of CT produce. He is envious of FL strawberry in-state promotion: ‘Strawberries are Here Now!’
7. George wants help understanding more about his customer base and what they want; he is eager to do this and would be willing to invest in a service to do this.
8. George relies a lot on plant and pest expertise at CAES and UConn Extension.
9. Food safety for Hindinger Farm customers is all about pesticide use and residues. He feels customers have a lot of misinformation and have been told that organics are the only safe option.
10. George has seen his sales dropping at farmers market. He thinks there may be too many farmers markets or they don’t offer enough diversity to farmers markets visitors. George feels an ideal farmers market would have around 10 produce growers, plus another 5-10 other vendors, plus entertainment, etc.
11. Although George is not interested in agri-tainment, he was interested in doing more farm dinners although these take a lot of work.
12. George hopes the next owner of Hindinger Farm does not have to work as hard as he does.
13. Idea for GCAD: need more input from producers and the strategic plan needs to be producer driven.
14. Idea: agriculture could use something like a grand opening every year at the start of the season.
15. Idea: producer training and education on how to be compliant with a variety of regulations, including labor, food safety, environmental, etc..., especially in areas associated with areas of high penalty. “We don’t just need reminders, we need updates on changes to the rules, and the fines are huge.”

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – as a producer it goes beyond energy, I can guarantee you labor is going to be a producer for everyone you talk to. Not so much availability, but what is involved to get what I want, and how the H2A program is run. This is a federal problem and been this way for decades. Keep putting band aids on the program but nothing gets fixed. There are aspects that I abhor, and I have to do it and I don't have to worry that I go down to my labor housing and no one is there. Really under microscope when it comes to DoL and immigration, federal audits. It's a real nightmare, very time consuming paperwork. Energy costs not that bad on my place. Have looked into solar, but not interested until we get net metering that allows for our type of operation can benefit from having multiple parcels. Hourly wages on labor is the killer. Glad we didn't raise minimum wage. I already pay my H2A workers well above minimum wage. Cost of fuel has a direct effect on us, and on cost of fertilizers or pesticides because many are petroleum based. Definitely something that CT can do something about. Way too high. Insurance – maybe just because we just went through an insurance audit. We're doing a lot more direct marketing, trying to make it more. We are between shack on side of road and a large food store – we had to take out an additional business policy for this, in addition to special farm package, and any special event costs me another \$300 for every event. Just goes on and on and on. Regarding insurance - The more you try to grow it, the more roadblocks there are. Part of the things that make us stop and think before we go and do anything to grow the business.
2. Consumer knowledge – CT consumer has no clue on seasonality, what's even grown here, the problems associated with growing a crop in CT. It can be difficult.
3. Land availability – Some parts of CT there is plenty of land available, but not here (in Hamden). No parcels close enough to me with a water source that is affordable. Really grow the crop out of 120 acres. I really want to grow and I need some land somewhere. [Some state owned land nearby and workable, but no water source]
4. Natural forces – wish GCAD could do something about this! It really is an issue. It's an issue every year. I like to be diversified to spread the risk, but when you are so diversified some things are not so terrific. 4/29 and 4/29 and 4/30 – huge killer due to frosts. Certainly an issue.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – we do adequate marketing, I can guarantee 50,000 people don't know who we are (of 58,000 in town of Hamden). It's irritating because it's not like we just opened. I know I'm part of this problem. I really believe that of all the great thing DoAg does, I don't think they market CT agriculture good enough. When I was in FL in March, just the beginning of strawberry season, I know I was in biggest strawberry growing county, but we couldn't go anywhere without seeing it advertised billboards, tv, etc. – "Strawberries are Here". I know we aren't crop specific, but we could do a better job marketing statewide.
2. Geography - People in this area just don't know much about agriculture and we need to advertise this to help consumers find agriculture.
3. Farmland availability – I could use help finding more land to grow and expand.
4. Market demand – it all ties in to the same thing, marketing of CT agriculture businesses.

Section III – Quotes

I want folks to think of us first for where they are going to get their food this week to buy.

Local seems more homey too me, right around the corner feel.

The more you try to grow the farm, the more roadblocks there are.

[Regarding federal labor policy on guest workers] Federal problem and has been this way for decades. Keep putting band aids on the program but nothing gets fixed.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Diane Hirsch, UConn Cooperative Extension
Date: 06/25/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. CT is one of only two New England states without an Extension food scientist/researcher – we really need to have this capacity if we intend to focus more on the information and education needs of the food industry (production and processing) and the associated food safety requirements.
2. Diane feels there is inconsistent advice provided to producers by state (DCP, DoAg, DPH) and local agencies(health departments) about processing food (including all types – jams, jellies acidified foods, meat, sausage, soups, pies, etc.).
3. Diane feels GAP and food safety regulations are not going away anytime soon, although the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) has the potential to change the focus of some elements in GAP (such as more emphasis on water or packing houses).
4. Diane described how certain products have higher risk for food-borne illness, including leafy greens, herbs, melons, tomatoes, berries. She highlighted that diversified farms that produce/raise animals and vegetables are higher risk for cross contamination.
5. Diane sees a reluctance of farmers to make the transition to GAP. People come in resistant. After they go through training many see it’s not as bad as they thought. She feels other states are seeing more willingness among farmers to get GAP training (NY, PA, not necessarily New England).
6. Diane shared there is a national effort to develop standardized GAP guidelines for produce in which she is participating – called the Produce Safety Alliance.
7. Diane sees a need for more production agriculture training and feels UConn has favored more high tech forms of agriculture while losing critical mass to support teaching basic production skills.
8. Diane sees an opportunity to develop more training resources and tools using online technology and possibly smart phone applications.
9. Diane feels that both a lack of critical mass and limited resources has limited UConn’s ability to be competitive in the AFRI multi-state, integrated food safety grant programs.
10. Diane sees labor as a key obstacle and barrier to growth of CT agriculture. She sees an opportunity in terms of strong guest worker program and also training for new workforce in middle management. If UConn can’t do middle management training then it should be developed through a two year college program.
11. Diane feels the real significant opportunity to increasing sale of locally grown products is through grocery stores, because this is where most people shop.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – I think while among certain population groups there is a lot of interest in buying local, I also see a lot of citizens that can't afford to go down that road. So in order to have sustainable agriculture we have to widen the market. One of my biggest concerns. The majority of people buying their produce in Stop & Shop don't look at where it comes from – it's less expensive, don't have the commitment that some people have to local agriculture, it's convenient.
2. Input costs – energy obviously in CT
3. Labor availability/skills – cost is a huge problem and availability is also a big problem
4. Infrastructure gaps – transportation, processing, aggregation and storage. Interesting article in NYT by Tufts professor – speaking of missing pieces of infrastructure, like where to buy agriculture equipment. Supermarkets, grocery stores, distributors that are looking for GAP inspected farms are running up against farmers being less willing or ready to make that transition. Some are very motivated, and some are not. I think some farmers think the requirement for GAP will change when folks will realize that it may limit the supply of local produce (because small farmers do not want to/or cannot participate in GAP audit programs). Maybe Food Safety and Modernization Act will have some impact on this direction, but unlikely. For all food industry, whether bakery or peanut butter maker, there are all going to have to develop food safety plans by regulation.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Labor availability/skills – In terms of farm management in particular, I think we could do things in terms of education from high school to college /community college. Maybe all of those interested in agriculture careers do not need four year degrees. Maybe two year is fine. If UConn is not going to step up to the plate, then maybe this needs to be developed elsewhere and it wouldn't be difficult to do this. We need to work on an immigration policy that supports the industries that use foreign labor. I have a daughter in the horse business and it is a real issue. I cannot understand why there is not a policy for workers to come here and work in agriculture. Industry needs to get out there and make that big push.
2. Geography - a lot of work being done in season extension, you don't really think of a lot of these crops being grown here. Small farms benefit from proximity to population that is looking for local, willing to pay the price, among the wealthiest. We have a more stable weather situation here – we have events but they are not as devastating (not including Irene!).
3. Infrastructure gaps – I think people are paying attention to these areas, concern about making transportation to get product to more people, and processing as well.

Section III – Quotes

Hard for some farmers to make transition into thinking of themselves as food processors, not farmers.

We need more local product in the supermarkets! That's where people shop. We need to get the product into places where people are buying.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Jason Hoagland, CT Agriculture Education Foundation & First Pioneer Farm Credit
Date: 05/24/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Based on Jason’s work with CAEF, he sees an opportunity to have better coordination among non-profits and organizations working on local agriculture and agriculture education.
2. Based on Jason’s work at Farm Credit, he feels strongly that in order to be successful and viable in agriculture today, a grower today needs to have strong business management skills.
3. Costs of doing business are higher for CT agriculture producers than others in the region, so this has a significant impact on the competitiveness of producers operating within the region, and for individual growers this places greater importance on the choices they make about their business growth and business model.
4. Perspective on government support programs:
 - a. Government programs (grants) should be delivered in such a way that have maximum impact and clearly improve a producer’s bottom line; some grants have been accessed by entities that could have paid for those costs themselves.
 - b. Some producers are reliant on government support programs (e.g. subsidies, crop insurance) which may not continue at the same levels in the future
5. Jason feels direct to consumer marketing is an important business opportunity for CT producers; it is important to differentiate from big box venues for sales by bringing customers to the farm and garden center (via CSAs, agri-tainment, better customer service). From a lending perspective, CSAs are a great approach to benefiting from this opportunity because the farmer gets paid upfront and risk is better managed.
6. Access to labor (both skilled and unskilled) is a critical threat to the industry.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles:

1. Input costs – we [Farm Credit] do a lot of benchmarking comparing producer costs across our area, for example we have analyzed dairy farm producer costs, consistently I always see input costs for CT farmers are higher than the avg in region.
2. Labor availability and skills – seems to be number one issue with my customers. Labor is one of the most expensive input costs, huge issue for tobacco and nursery, a lot of concerns with workability of H2A program.
3. Infrastructure gaps – the lack of processing facilities and lack of agriculture support businesses means there is less availability to purchase the inputs which drive up the costs.
4. Natural forces – weather has a huge impact, especially with unpredictability we've seen recently creating huge crop losses. This factor really restricted opportunities for businesses to grow or has put a number of farms out of business.

Notes regarding top four opportunities:

1. Geography – with CT population there is a significant opportunity there, high income population of people who want to support ct grown products, great proximity to customer base, and soils and length of season are favorable.
2. Consumer knowledge – represents a huge opportunity, we have financed a lot of CSA businesses which are all about supporting local agriculture, (but sometimes it is an issue too because you have to be the neighbor; issue with dairy farms and their neighbors especially)
3. Access to credit/financing – I think Farm Credit does a good job at this. We have 75% concentration of all agriculture credit in the state. We don't just arbitrarily lend; we lend to borrowers when it makes sense. State of CT does a good job providing additional funding via grants.
4. Market demand – this ties in with supporting local agriculture. Continued opportunity for growth. Tobacco is very tough, but what is driving my optimism is the retail fruit and vegetable sales through farm stands, on farm sales, agri-tainment, and farmers markets.

Section III – Quotes

Consistently I always see input costs for CT farmers are higher than the average in region.

10-15 years ago you could get by on being a good farmer and running a good business. Nowadays you can't just be a good producer; you need to manage a good business – need to manage your costs and financial aspect of your business.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Herb Holden, Broad Brook Beef
Date: 06/01/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Herb feels strongly that the CT Grown program represents a tremendous opportunity, however the branding program needs to do a better job of strategically focusing on average consumer with a message of why it’s important to buy CT Grown; it seems CT Grown program currently has an impact more on producer community than broader public.
2. Broad Brook Beef relies on Herb’s specific set of skills that go along with selling a specialized, value-added agriculture product through direct retail, including maintaining certain standards and values of production, strong marketing, customer handling, brand development, and business planning.
3. At his farm stand, Herb has found that it is easier to sell products from other farmers under his own brand as opposed to under their own brand.
4. Scaling up a small farm business is a critical yet difficult transition for growers to navigate. Herb expressed a possible need for training to help farmers do this successfully (such as training on cash flow management).
5. We need to have a better understanding of the quality and condition of processing infrastructure that exists in the state and have an understanding of the likelihood that these facilities will or won’t be in use in the next 10 years.
6. Herb sees an opportunity if VoAg and FFA programs could introduce kids to the many career opportunities in food service that are promising and needed in the state.
7. Herb is disappointed in UConn and would like to see it at the forefront of the local food movement and functioning as a teaching facility (example of Meat Lab at Kansas State); in terms of beef UConn Extension could be researching pasture management, benefits of grass-fed beef, etc.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – One of key problems in my situation is that DEEP bought all farms around my farm, so I have zero ability to grow. Land is valuable, doesn't matter if it is a swamp or pristine rolling hills. It's just expensive, and hard to afford a mortgage on a piece of property. Perhaps we could have some synergy or cooperation with state departments – lands DEEP bought are now forested. Maybe they would be interested in agriculture rights. We currently have an agreement to raise grain on one 20-acre parcel owned by DEEP. Our own farm is pasture and corn. Everyone wants \$10k/acre for land, and a farmer can only be so far away from the farm. Very expensive to buy a big tract of land.
2. Infrastructure gaps – a recent meat study says we have plenty of room in our slaughterhouses, but those facilities are old and tired and likely don't have succession plans. In 20 years, things will look different. Will there be people to buy those facilities to process if it doesn't stay in the family?
3. Input costs – labor, energy costs all keep going up.
4. Regulations – something needs to get towns to open their eyes that we really need to allow processing facilities to be built in the municipalities

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – CT is turning into a very trendy bustling city; food is incredibly trendy – people drive two to three hours to my farm stand. I have restaurants calling from all over the state, but still trying to figure out distribution system in order grow small business into a big business
2. Geography – soil is fantastic, tons of people to sell to, plenty of people to market to in Connecticut; such a dense customer base. I pass up customers on the short, but I don't have to have them right now and I want to be able to sell within 25 mile radius.
3. Labor availability/skills – plenty of people in the state. I put out ads when I look for labor and find people pretty easily. Looking down the road of having a small processing facility (chop-shop).

Section III – Quotes

CT is turning into a very trendy bustling city and food is incredibly trendy.

We have to start looking at our farms as businesses. It's not hard to get off track even though I spend a lot of time with spreadsheets.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Peter House, President of CT Nursery and Landscape Association & Owner of East Haven Landscape Products

Date: 05/31/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. CNLA feels the regulatory environment should be more supportive of their businesses; instead of being industry-friendly, agencies such as DEEP are friendly to organizations or individuals. This regulatory environment is discouraging business expansion in the green industry and forcing some to consider relocating.
2. CNLA has found that state agencies are all working independently, and there is no inter-agency communication or coordination.
3. The green industry really needs and deserves their own advertising program that is wrapped around a different set of messages/values than have been working for marketing local food. Peter would like to see something like the *Got Milk* campaign that promotes a certain product instead of farm specific; need to highlight what landscaping can do for your home value.
4. There doesn't seem to be a big consumer demand for local nursery product. Ongoing research by CNLA shows no perceived advantage of CT Grown brand for consumers (and possibly a disadvantage as consumers may see it as more expensive for all businesses in CT).
5. Changes in the credit market have had a major impact on ability of green industry businesses to expand.
6. Although costs of production are high, addressing these costs and increasing efficiencies through the adoption of technology is an approach that warrants more exploration for the green industry.
7. Growth opportunities for green industry are both inside and outside Connecticut. What will increase nursery sales here is also what will make nursery competitive outside the state, bringing new money into the state.
8. Idea: Engage school children early in an appreciation of the value of plants.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – nothing else matters unless consumer is shopping for what you are selling
2. Access to credit and financing – every person knows what this has meant in past few years
3. Regulation – CNLA probably spends more than half of its effort on regulatory related topics, lobbying for or against a topic. Tremendous resources and time just trying to stay alive.
4. Labor availability/skills – Less related to economic climate, it's a long-term ongoing problem from industry point of view it's the immigration topic. Higher skill set needs are also a big problem – someone to oversee the nursery yard.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – CT and New England, incredible population here with incredible opportunities, referring to income levels and numbers of people
2. Access to credit and financing – more reflective of current economic climate that clamping down so much that for many businesses trying to expand that limits growth.
3. Market competition – really regional, surrounding states have excelled at pushing product into CT, namely NJ.
4. Regulation – improve this climate could create so much more harmony, folks working in the same direction. Agencies may not be rowing in same direction.

Section III – Quotes

It's a big miss that we're not advertising CT Grown nursery products better.

If we don't succeed individually as businesses, we don't succeed as an industry.

If agriculture does not flourish, there is no staying on par. We either flourish or diminish in my mind.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Joe Jeremiah, Jeremiah Greenhouse, Wallingford
Date: 06/22/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Joe feels strongly that the future of agriculture in Connecticut is indoor production.
2. Joe believes imported produce in the grocery stores (e.g. from Chile, Mexico, Canada, etc.) is overpriced, and the price of fresh produce will only rise in the future. He sees indoor production here in CT as a way to provide healthy food at a more affordable produce to families year round.
3. Joe observes we are decades behind other countries (Europe especially) in technological innovation to produce food here indoors. We can do this, but it will take a ‘concentrated decision’ to get there (like deciding to go to the moon). Canada only started their indoor production 20 years ago.
4. Joe sees an infrastructure gap in terms of our need for a commercial size facility where research scientists and farmers work together, showcasing new techniques, engineering, and systems for indoor production. Not just high tunnels – ‘I want to see a violent shove forward in technology.’
5. Joe feels we need to move toward using energy production as a revenue source for CT agriculture operations. This means having generation capacity at the farm and the ability to sell back excess to the grid (co-generation).
6. Joe feels lending institutions fail to recognize the potential of indoor production of food; they are more comfortable providing credit for dairy or grain operations.
7. Joe sees an enormous opportunity because the market for CT agricultural products is right here; farmers can sell as much as they can grow right here.
8. Joe believes that for every offshore job in agriculture, particularly in indoor greenhouse production of food, there are many more American jobs that can be created.
9. Joe sees the labor shortage as a missed opportunity for expanding his own business. He sees jobs that have gone unfilled, right through this recession, due to the lack of workforce. He feels farms are smaller than they could be because of the lack of adequate workforce in CT.
10. Joe believes that indoor production can be so productive (‘10x crop yield of a field’) that land devoted to this use will have a higher value than if it were used for development.
11. Idea: Build a Center of Excellence that will teach farmers – existing and new – about technology to do indoor production of food crops.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Labor – definitely, labor may be the top 4! We have a terrible labor shortage. Jobs that have gone unfilled, right through this recession, lack of workforce. We have farms smaller than they could be because of the lack of workforce. Some may have trouble with their documentation. I see in other countries they will do job fairs (in France, etc.), but here we have H2A and it gets scrutinized. Apple guys are downsizing, which is awful, apple is a good crop to do here. I would probably be double the size now if I wasn't worried about where the labor coming from. 15% of our staff is from offshore, but we have about 35 Americans working. 7-9 people offshore, an important foundation that you need. If you have the labor for food production here, you also have tractor drivers, office managers, etc.
2. Regulations – a little nervous, we've put biomass burners, good relationship with DEEP, but still nervous because of what I see, when I study abroad everyone is working together, but here there is more of a disconnect. Here we burn woodchips instead of oil, but in back of my mind, someday we'll wake up to news that we are not allowed to do that. Uneasy feeling about the possibility of over-regulation.
3. Market competition – it is definitely global, but you get a tremendous amount of stuff from Europe, Mexico, and Canada. Seems like a never ending supply. At times when we are at our peak, they will bring the price down, seems calculated. Other countries take their exports seriously. We need to watch ourselves there.
4. Infrastructure gaps – my background is in food, that's where I want my kids to be, our infrastructure is disappearing and is mostly controlled by other countries (even the stores). In old days people would grow tomatoes, and sell at grocery markets. Today, it is not possible to sell to stores this way. Now it is all about warehouses, big ones, who buy from big farmer. That should happen here. We are very good with grains and things we can do on a tractor, because of labor. If you need labor to pick your food, then it is a challenge.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Access to Credit – Banks don't recognize opportunity for produce farming, indoor, year-round. This is basically how we are being fed our fresh vegetables year round from other countries. Banks understand grains, dairy. They don't understand the future for produce.
2. Infrastructure - Opportunity to rebuild what we gave away. Warehouse and shipping, processing. You need so many people to make this happen – the electricians, etc. The go-to location, where farmers will go to sell and where the stores will go to buy. There's so much to it.

Section III – Quotes

Foreign hands are going to pick your food whether here or in their own country.

What we don't have is a training facility for the future of Connecticut agriculture, which is indoor farming without a doubt.

It hit me when we had kids that this is all we should be focusing on. We have to be thinking about where our food is being produced. So much money these people are making on food...that is the exciting part for me.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Jamie Jones, Jones Family Farms & Winery, Shelton

Date: 06/20/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Jamie feels maintaining the integrity of CT agriculture products is a huge issue and should be a high priority. There is an obligation that goes with labeling something as CT Grown.
2. There are very specific issues facing wine segment that need some review in terms of strengthening this sector. The review might require some analysis not just from wine producers. Important elements of this analysis would include a review of CT Farm Winery licensing requirements and avenues to retail CT wine through supermarket sales.
3. Connecticut wineries are producing less than 1% of wine that is consumed in the state of CT. Jamie feels this should increase. Some other states that are not big wine producing states (e.g. MD 3% and MO 5%) are doing better than us.
4. CT Wine Council is interested in developing a quality assurance program to help customers understand and recognize when a CT wine is a good product (since wine labels are so unclear to consumers).
5. Jamie feels that preserving farmland as a resource is critical for the future of agriculture in CT; we should preserve as much possible while the market is down and land prices are lower.
6. Jamie has been especially frustrated working with Dept. of Consumer Protection – story of trying to get a permit approved for selling wine in a farmers market demonstrated how the actions of a single individual in an agency can create delays and lost revenue over relatively minor matters.
7. Customers in the tasting room at Jones Winery are looking for an experience. Families that come during pick-your-own season are also looking for an experience, so Jamie sees his competition as movie theaters and amusement parks.
8. Jamie relies heavily on CAES and UConn Extension for help in regards to pests, disease, grape varieties. Jamie expressed frustration that there is no extension specialist for grape producers ('lack of Jude Boucher for wine industry'). Jamie pointed to the challenge of new exotic pests, esp. Spotted Wing Drosopholia and Boxwood blight and the need for research support on how to deal with these.
9. Jamie pointed out that wildlife damage (deer, turkey, birds) can sometimes put farmers at odds with DEEP.
10. The #1 question Jamie and his staff are asked is whether their products are organic. They routinely train their staff how to respond to this question. Customers think of food safety in terms of pesticide residues. .
11. Jamie feels the GAP guidance has a poor understanding of pick-your-own operations. 'Is it our responsibility to make sure every customer is washing their own hands?'
12. Jamie sees an opportunity through consumer education to make a significant impact on consumption levels of CT Grown; e.g. what if you could get every resident to eat one more piece of ct-grown produce per day.

13. Jamie worries about ‘black eyes’ on the industry – e.g. jobbers in the farmers markets, businesses found to be in violation of the CT Farm Winery Act, misuse of agriculture exemptions or privileges by entities that aren’t really farming much, etc.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – only so much land available, you have to be able to afford to pay for it and run a business growing crops on it (not put a house on it). Not being able to grow any further limits the capacity of expanding our business.
2. Natural forces – coming off a difficult year with some freak weather events last two years. There is a reason a lot of people grow a lot of product in other parts of the world ; although we do have abundant water supply
3. Input costs – referring especially to labor costs, and general cost of living is higher in this state.
4. Regulations – not just blaming gov’t, some exist for a good reason, but sometimes it’s just like banging your head against the wall.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – 3 million people here, many with disposable income and who regard local products as important to spend their money on
2. Geography – generally adequate rainfall. Downside of this is how will gov’t regulate water for agriculture and whether they will let us use water to run our operations.

Section III – Quotes

In terms of growing an industry, if we could potentially get CT wine in the supermarkets, allow wine tasting at farmers markets and allow for more opportunities for off premise wine sales, we could expand our industry tremendously.

We really have to be sure to maintain the integrity of CT Grown. A lot of people want to ride these coattails because they see this as popular. It’s a lot easier to peel the label off rather than grow it yourself.

It’s amazing the power of one over-zealous regulatory person who has the ability to mess up your operation.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Terry Jones & Jean Jones, Jones Family Farms, Shelton

Date: 06/20/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Terry and Jean feel that we are in a unique point and time for agriculture, referring to the current leadership environment ('from the Governor on down,' 'a whole spectrum of people with passion and vigor') as well as positive changes in customer interest and demand at their farm. 'It's our game to lose.'
2. Terry and Jean find labor policy to be very unfriendly to agriculture, especially in regards to immigration policy and unemployment claims (there was some discussion about state policy on chargeback liability).
3. Terry and Jean see a gap in labor availability for mid-level management; they must recruit from outside agriculture field and essentially train these positions.
4. Terry and Jean see a sharp contrast in how agencies interact with agriculture: DoAg, UConn, CAES, NRCS have a culture of teaching and educating farmers; DPH, DCP and DEEP are much less friendly and more adversarial with agriculture, which does not help a farmer's desire to improve and expand their operation. 'I realize it is a fine line because they have to protect public, but you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar.'
5. Terry has found that DEEP regulations regarding wildlife often have a lag time to catch up with needs of agriculture in regards to protecting crops from damage (e.g. deer and turkeys).
6. Terry and Jean feel that we need to build processing capacity to develop emerging agriculture opportunities (especially value-added products). Jean finds the regulations pretty 'murky' for farmers doing value-added processing.
7. Terry and Jean see farm to school as a critical opportunity; parents are so frustrated with school food and should be empowered to bring about change that will solve obesity. 'Change takes a generation.'
8. Terry and Jean are looking to the green industry to help address the opportunity of growing more local food in the region, but this needs to be profitable for the green industry.
9. Terry expressed a need for protocols for land management practices that environmentalists can support (like Jude Boucher's extension work on minimal tillage).
10. Terry and Jean feel the future success of agriculture in CT depends heavily on resources at CAES, DoAg, and UConn – referring to their ability to respond to needs of agriculture, such as scientists responding to boxwood blight.
11. Terry and Jean feel it is critical that the entire region, from PA to ME, needs to work together to counteract the competition our local agriculture faces from companies that make and sell highly processed food. We can provide 80% of our needs in the future within the region; 'we need to ramp up consumption and production in the northeast and by the northeast.'
12. Jean feels that GAP certification is a good direction and way for agriculture to be ahead of the curve; good to be able to say 'we are already doing this' once customers start asking for it.
13. Idea: centralized purchasing system and warehouse for supplying CT grown foods for schools.
14. Idea : processing for schools and branding it – CT applesauce, CT cider, CT fruit juice blend

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

Jean Jones:

1	2	3	4	5
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Terry Jones:

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure – we’ve lost processing abilities. If we wanted to diversify into livestock opportunities, not sure about the opportunities. No easy opportunity to use excess harvest for what I would like to see in institutions. We are fortunate we have an equipment dealer nearby, but we really only have a handful of tractor and implement dealers in CT.
2. Input costs – energy costs of present and future, don’t really know what is going to happen, trying ourselves to become more energy self-sufficient
3. Labor availability and skills – out of our control the costs of labor (minimum wage, unemployment); we have a very anti-immigration policy that is a severe handicap, hard to find mid-level management it is basically non-existent, have to recruit from outside agriculture field, have to train them no matter what. Ben Freund, speaking at a 2008 farm bill info session, held by CT congressional delegation, said “you could take me and lock me up and the farm would continue fine but if you take my immigrant workers then we are done.” At our farm, without our Spanish speaking crew we would be dead in the water and we would have to scale back dramatically. They are skilled and honest and they enjoy doing this, as much as anything they are available all the time. Limited availability of students – clearly they have other school activities. Because we have been in farming for so long, we realize farming has been carried on forever by people who have come to this country to seek opportunity, and don’t understand why the government is not allowing this. Example of Terry’s ancestors. We look at this as not fair.
4. Regulations (especially labor regulations drive me bananas) – we hire students in the summer, if those students go out and get a position with another employer and then laid off, we have to pay part of their unemployment farm as a secondary employer, colors how we hire people. This is a state regulation. Fight every case. Have employees sign off 13 forms so they understand the relationship to our farm. Not that every aspect of DEEP is adversarial, perhaps more so than other agencies, as an example on the wildlife front finally in recent years they are up to where they should be on deer damage, seems to be a lag, example in last decade return of wild turkeys; we have already had to replant one field of pumpkins. The turkeys seem to know exactly where the seeds are! Perhaps in a few years DEEP will finally recognize the turkeys are a problem. We pass regulation but we don’t evaluate old regulations instead of coming up with new regulations. Should not put farmer on a path toward guilt if they are protecting crop from damage. With GAP, there is some concern with quality of farm water for purposes of irrigation. But you have to jump through hoops to destroy Canada geese – yet they are a pollution element. They don’t migrate. They just hang out in CT. Deer almost trump everything. But the new (positive!) attitude at DEEP toward deer took years to achieve.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – we live in a very good agricultural state, in terms of soil, climate, market possibilities
2. Consumer knowledge
3. Market demand – people are aware CT foods are available
4. Other – seems to be a tremendous knowledge from many different entities concerned about issues of obesity – first time seeing public health, education, nutrition, academia aligned – people concerned about better diet and nutrient dense food. At least we now have an issue to bring us together. Always been the challenge of food inequity, talking about obesity is an avenue we can use as opposed to emotional conversation about food access.
5. Natural forces - as the climate gets more erratic, every part of the country is having challenges, but the northeast might be a little better off in terms of water availability

Section III – Quotes

We are not as beautiful as VT or Tuscany....we are as beautiful as CT!

One of the great strengths of our state is the incredible ethnic diversity. Our fields are sometimes like a UN. 19 languages in our schools in Shelton. Many of these other cultures appreciate fresh foods. This is one of our strengths in CT that is not lifted up that often.

Need to keep in mind that land is the tool we use by and large to grow food. Wise public policy in terms of keeping good farmland available is important.

Without our Spanish speaking crew we would be dead in the water and we would have to shrink back dramatically.

[Regarding DoAg, CAES, UConn] - These are the institutions that are going to make or break our success in agriculture, and I think we need to invest more.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Michael Keilty, Maple Spring Farms
Date: 05/18/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Values around sustainability have not filtered up to policy-making, or service programs, or training programs at state level because there hasn’t been engagement with sustainable practitioners in the field/on the farm. There is a need for greater input from farmers on service programs, in terms of design and implementation because the program are at times misguided. Training programs are not up to date with what is farmers are already doing, so the best source of sustainable techniques is other farmers.
2. Uncomfortable with process that has been selected and felt like it should have been conceived more from the Council members. We need to listen to new voices as well as the usual top 60.
3. There is a lot of land protected by private land trusts that is not available for growing.
4. Connecticut producers should be considering cooperative/collaborative entities that are being modeled elsewhere as a means to control more of steps of raw product to value-added product, so they can retain more share of each food dollar.
5. Need more research on sustainable production systems and non-biocide systems.
6. Threat that local consumers will in the future perceive that locally grown food is no safer than food produced in Mexico because local producers fail to respond to food safety and animal humane concerns.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles:

1. Infrastructure issues are important barrier
2. Input costs – most of our systems are not sustainable because of high cost of inputs
3. Market competition – vast amount of products come into the market from outside state
4. Market supply – we need to gear up food production systems to handle existing market for local products

Notes regarding top four opportunities:

1. Infrastructure – if we could ratch this up, address these gaps, then we would have a significant opportunity to compete. If our food systems can become more efficient and sustainable then we could make input costs less, and address supply needs.
2. Input costs
3. Lots of land available – very good for all of agriculture, opportunity to make public lands available

Section III – Quotes

Farmers need to more involved in the steps in the food industry – collaborative, cooperatives – producing, purchasing raw products. If we are going to develop a local sustainable food system, the farmers need to be more involved in the steps on the ladder.

There are models all across the country where farmers are gathering together and forming cooperative entities, but we are very conservative and independent here and that has held us back historically from gaining a greater share of the food dollar and it will hold us back in the future to increase share of CT dollar people spend on food here.

My vision for the future is that each production unit, each farm, understand sustainability with regards to the carrying capacity of that land, and will work to enhance the soil and water for the next generation. If we did this, we would be increasing production.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Bob Kennedy, President of Board Of Regents for Higher Education

Date: 06/08/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Dr. Kennedy grew up on a farm and has an excellent background in agriculture training and leadership (graduated College of Agriculture at U of MN, former Director of Agriculture Experiment Station in MD, former President of UMaine); he could be a real asset and partner to Connecticut agriculture and GCAD. He is primarily interested in economic development and jobs – if there is a connection to agriculture.
2. Dr. Kennedy sees an exciting opportunity if the agriculture sector could use the model of what has recently been done for the manufacturing sector. The Malloy administration and legislature committed \$20 million to renovate 1 and add 3 manufacturing job-training centers. The manufacturing sector is deeply involved in shaping the manufacturing centers through weekly meetings. 200 students enrolled starting in fall 2012.
3. Commissioner Smith and DECD have been critical allies and partners in the effort to augment manufacturing training capacity through higher education.
4. 25% of high school seniors in CT are entering our 17 state universities and community colleges, so they have a tremendous role to play in terms of job training, including job training for the agriculture and food sector. Only 10% of high school seniors go to UConn.
5. Dr. Kennedy sees an opportunity for creating a clear pathway for students moving through the Vo-Ag system, to community colleges, to UConn. Since his arrival in 2011, he has already eased the pathway for students moving from community colleges to UConn through credit alignment.
6. Dr. Kennedy emphasized the importance of marketing the agriculture sector to the public. The average CT resident doesn’t think about agriculture much. Compare this to the marketing effort behind Washington apples. ‘You have to be your own advocates and keep your industry in the forefront of people’s minds. Producers have an important role in this.’ For example, he sees converting forest back into agricultural land as a ‘great story’ (referring to Farmland Restoration Program).
7. Idea for GCAD: A strategic plan needs to be able to be summarized in a tri-fold brochure with three to four points. GCAD members will have a critical role to play in messaging and advocating for the plan; leaders listen more to farmers. Marketing the plan effectively will be essential to compete with other policy priorities. (Dr. Kennedy is in midst of strategic planning for higher education; their approach involves identifying flagship programs and niche roles for state universities and then tie flagships together with all community colleges).
8. Idea: Food Service in the 17 institutions could participate in a CT Grown week to help plant the idea of supporting local agriculture with students.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs - cost of doing business - Everyone says CT is a small state, with population pressure and other demands for land, taxes. The cost of maintaining a family or corporate farm would be a big obstacle.
2. Consumer knowledge – people want to buy locally, but marketing and promoting is always an issue. Marketing from Dept. of Agriculture – I haven't seen any ad yet. Thinking about the new state marketing campaign 'Still Revolutionary'.
3. Regulations – not sure how this relates to agriculture in CT, but seems as if CT is more over-regulated than any other state I've been in.
4. Market competition – I would imagine this in terms of lower priced products coming in from other areas.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – people like to buy locally, they love farmers markets, but like me may not appreciate that there is a lot grown here and there is opportunity
2. Geography – would help in terms of the marketing
3. Natural forces – a lot more things grow here than in Maine
4. Other – nutrition and food quality; consumers responding to another food scare in Atlanta

Section III – Quotes

CT has tremendous assets. But we haven't connected the dots.

When I first arrived, I was surprised the community colleges emphasized their liberal arts programs rather than technical programs. The only one that I heard that emphasized their agriculture program was the Naugatuck Valley Community College horticulture program. If agriculture is a growing concern, why aren't more schools doing more?

Since its founding in 1861, UConn has graduated about 260,000 students. Our 17 institutions (CT state colleges and universities) have graduated the same number in 102 fewer years!



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Kip Kolesinskas, former State Soil Scientist, NRCS and consultant for American Farmland Trust

Date: 06/08/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Kip is deeply concerned about the lack of real smart growth planning in Connecticut and the continuous fragmentation of agriculture as a result of residential patterns, lack of mass transit, and sprawl development.
2. The technical expertise at NRCS is limited to producers that participate in NRCS cost-share programs; sometimes farmers want the expertise more than the financial assistance from NRCS.
3. Kip expressed a need for research to demonstrate the benefits of different kinds of conservation practices at different scales. A lot of the USDA conservation practices don't recognize the mixed use or mixed operations that are more common here in CT. Some conservation practices need to be modified so they can be scaled down for smaller, more diversified operations.
4. Kip articulated a need for more training for municipalities about agriculture. Municipal policy has an impact on farms deciding to expand or not. Outdated definitions of agriculture, inconsistent land use planning, and lack of assistance from the state or other service providers has contributed to municipalities making decisions that harm agriculture.
5. Kip recommends creating some sort of accountability for municipalities back to the state, possibly state training requirements as are in place for municipal Wetlands Commissions. In his view, working landscapes provide benefits well beyond town boundaries, so this justifies a state requirement.
6. Kip sees revenue opportunities for producers through managing organic food waste, value added products, and environmental market payments (compensating farms for ecosystem services such as wildlife, water quality, etc).
7. Kip sees an opportunity for government to model good behavior, as it relates to institution buying of locally grown products.
8. Kip sees opportunities to increase consumption of locally grown products – particularly fruits and vegetables - through season extension (greenhouses, high tunnels), institution buying, addressing needs such as storage, and helping consumers understand why it's important to buy local.
9. USDA sometimes has a Mid-western perspective. Decentralization of NRCS allows for implementation and interpretation of federal programs at the local level in a manner that works within the context of Connecticut agriculture (such as helping specialty crops and diversified agriculture in urban/suburban areas).
10. Kip highlighted the threat of Farm Bill cuts to important support programs for growers available through NRCS and universities; in particular, cuts to conservation programs and cuts to new and beginning farmers would be critical at this time when we are seeing such a growth in local agriculture.
11. Idea: government should set goals for local procurement through its institution buying (prisons, schools, universities, colleges, etc); 50% of fresh produce in summer/fall and 25% of processed produce in winter months should be from local sources.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge - including support of CT Grown products. Having consumers really understand why they need to buy locally grown, not only taste, but also as it relates to social, environmental aspect, and keeping dollars local. It's in their best interest in buying local products. Need to find out what really motivates people.
2. Input costs – we are at a significant competitive disadvantage. It's an expensive state to live in and do business in, especially as it relates to energy and taxes and regulations. As gas and diesel become more expensive, that will give us an opportunity to be more competitive, but the costs will always be higher here.
3. Infrastructure gaps – in terms of having to recreate a whole structure of being able to eat locally and regionally. This is part of a regional issue and will have a regional solution. We're not going to solve this on our own. I want CT potatoes, parsnips and carrots. Do we not have enough because we don't have enough cold storage?
4. Land availability – certainly because we are in a downturn now, being stuck between Boston and NY, residential use of land will always be regarded as its highest and best use. Makes it very important to figure out inter-generational transfer, and how farmland will be owned and leased. Having farmland available for new and beginning farmers will be key, and also having the next generation of farmers with the credit and technical assistance they will need to be successful.

Notes regarding top four opportunities for the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge and support is a real opportunity. There is 3.5m population. If we could figure out what it is and why they want local product, we could tap into this. We are in the heart of the market.
2. Geography – not only proximity to the population, but we still have some good soils, long enough growing season, adequate moisture. We have capacity to meet the needs, particularly in fruits and vegetables.
3. Market demand – if we can get consumer knowledge and support, then the demand will be there.
4. Natural forces – with the long term perspective, having served on the climate change and climate adaptation task force, yes the weather will be weird, but we will do better than other parts of the country and we'll have a longer growing season and moisture (maybe not when we need it)
5. Added value – maybe turning waste product into another value-added product (apple pie, wood product). Maybe environmental market payments – e.g. farms may be an important flyway for tropical bird species in the environment. Co-occurrence of all these things – from perspective of habitats, water management, see some opportunities for this.

Section III – Quotes

I only see an upside to agriculture in CT.

You are more likely to be put out of business by your neighbor, than a regulator.

A town is not an island. Its land use decisions have state, national, and global impact.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Bill Leahey, Conn-Mass Tobacco Growers Association & Leahey Farm
Date: 06/21/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. As an agriculture sector, tobacco has several unique aspects and challenges, such as efforts to keep tobacco seed in the valley to avoid competition from other regions, unique conditions of soil/climate that creates this high value defined region crop (like Bourdeaux wine), exposure to FDA requirements in a way that larger sectors would never face.
2. In the tobacco industry, skilled labor is especially important to handle harvest of shade tobacco as well as broadleaf tobacco for wrapper use.
3. Bill finds the H2A program very cumbersome, program puts pressure on grower to fill jobs with local labor which may be less skilled and reliable than off-shore labor.
4. Bill sees a real need and opportunity to explore a way to brand our types of tobacco.
5. Tobacco growers in CT are not happy about the GAP program; it’s new to growers in tobacco and seems to be coming from FDA requirements of tobacco manufacturers who are requiring farm level data collection and reporting (soil ph, pesticide application).
6. Bill has found the PDR program very helpful for estate planning.
7. New England Apple Council is playing a helpful role to tobacco sector by serving as a labor broker for the H2A program, illustrating a nice example of different agriculture sectors collaborating and/or sharing resources.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Labor availability – especially with tobacco which is a labor intensive crop. Many of the growers are going through H2A program for off-shore labor. I have two, primarily Jamaicans, some get Mexicans. For the most part it has worked out very well. They are here to work, and they want to be here. Had some local labor, primarily at harvest time, teenagers. Have had pretty good luck with this. There has been the trend to off-shore labor because they have the work ethic and they are really here to work; local labor comes and goes. Some farmers use labor from Springfield. Years ago, teenagers were the labor force. Off-shore labor started in WWII when farmers needed help. A lot of hoops to jump through with H2A, expensive but worth it, don’t think federal gov’t likes the program because they want

you to hire local labor. The off-shore labor does a good job with harvest – important to do this right. We have to hire in three states for local labor (CT, MA, NY) in newspapers (not cheap) through half of the contract period (ad is made up and sent to federal labor dept in Chicago). All farms that have H2A workers are equally vulnerable to hiring local workers. We join the apple council and pay their dues because they help with the H2A. We pay transportation costs of H2A folks as well. We provide housing for H2A which has to be inspected and approved. There are spot inspections as well. Employees don't always report any repairs needed, but a spot inspection that finds a repair need could trigger a fine if housing is not up to code.

2. Natural forces is a big one for tobacco. Hail is a big concern. Extremely vulnerable, doesn't take much. We have to deal with blue mold. In the south blue mold is not an issue now (they can have up to 25% blue mold and it is accepted for ground up tobacco use). It came in to CT in 1997. It is in PA, comes up here via wind, moisture currents. We can't have blue mold on our tobacco. Target Spot arrived last year, never heard of it before. Always seems like between weather, disease, and insects, everything wants tobacco. Aphids, tobacco horn worm, Japanese beetles, bud worm, cut worms, wire worms. Most of that is controlled pretty well with pesticides. But blue mold requires continual spraying. There is some pesticide residue found in tobacco. The testing is done at a testing facility in the South. Leaf samples are taken at the farm after tobacco is cured. Cooperation Center for Scientific Research Relative to Tobacco sets the pesticide tolerance limits. It is located in Europe.
3. Input costs is a big one. All the time things are tightening up for tobacco, still viable, but not as much as earlier. Had a 15 year run around late 1990s or 2000 – but now it has leveled off and not as much acreage in this. So the price has been holding, but buyers have been getting tougher about quality. But costs keep on increasing, so margins are getting narrower.
4. Regulations – one thing that hurts us is what the government has on smoking restrictions. It started years ago with restricted areas for smoking, and now cannot smoke outside in certain areas in some cities. In the 90s, there used to be cigar dinners hosted by restaurants, with cigar vendors. Government does still like the revenue it gets from sale of tobacco products.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand
2. Market supply – because there is not enough to meet demand
3. Consumer knowledge of CT Grown products – think the state is doing a fantastic job of making the consumer aware of CT Grown.
4. Access to credit and financing for agriculture – Farm Credit does quite a good job at that.

Section III – Quotes

Always seems like between weather, disease, and insects, everything wants tobacco.

If we didn't have the Experiment Station we'd be in trouble.

I see nothing but opportunity for the future of Connecticut agriculture.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Dave LeVasseur, CT Office of Policy and Management Acting Undersecretary and Dan Morley, OPM Policy Development Coordinator
Date: 05/30/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. In terms of the State Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), agriculture has traditionally been treated solely as a conservation feature on the POCD Location Guide Map.
2. A state plan for agriculture could be enormously helpful so that the State POCD can reference it, as it does with other agency plans already. It could also help inter-agency cooperation around agriculture priorities.
3. The tools for supporting economic development at the state-level are not available to farmers because of the way the decisions are being made about those investments and the use of the State POCD. OPM is actively seeking a change to this situation by looking for ways to include agriculture in economic development planning.
4. OPM proposes to shift from the traditional policy-driven map toward an ‘existing conditions’ map as a way to meet new legislative requirements for priority funding areas, with the added intention of changing the perception that the State POCD map is a statewide planning and zoning map. This means agencies will be more accountable to justify their proposed actions based on relevant policies in the State POCD, and to report annually on which actions they fund outside of priority funding areas and the reasons thereto. If this shift occurs, there is an opportunity for agriculture to be treated as economic development by the state based on its own merit - not just where it lands on the map so long - as long as such a policy is included in the state POCD
5. With the statutory emphasis on economic development for priority funding areas in the new State POCD, we could see rural areas get a leg up on access to state funds if intended for agriculture economic development.
6. The mitigation process for loss of prime and important agriculture soils needs to be improved to better manage conflicting priorities, particularly when such loss is attributable to state agency-sponsored actions.
7. Current mapped data of protected farms would be enormously useful to OPM. Although OPM provided funding to DoAg in 2008 to develop a basic GIS capacity, it is not clear whether the data has been updated and maintained since then.
8. A map of economic activity of agriculture would also be very helpful to OPM. The agency may be interested in using an overlay that could accompany a farm business application for economic development funds from the state; this would give towns control and the ability to say no.
9. The state’s historic development patterns and corresponding investments in physical infrastructure (i.e. highways, rail, wastewater treatment, etc.) oftentimes happen to lie where our best soils are located.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market competition – (I have no expertise in this)
2. Land availability – thinking of price
3. Infrastructure gaps – doesn't just impact agriculture, but also all of economic development because of woeful lack of freight in our railroad system
4. Access to credit financing
5. Other – demographics – having next generation of farmers there to take over, having good succession plan

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – seems like DoAg has done a good job on where products can be obtained locally and there is a dramatic increase in farmers markets
2. Geography – being between NY and Boston markets
3. Market demand – increasing costs of energy will impact the cost of non-local foods and narrow the price gaps in imported vs. local products
4. Labor availability and skills – I am thinking of people working in agriculture; seems as though there is a huge base to tap into.

Section III – Quotes

Of all the industries we deal with, agriculture is the one we have the toughest time getting our arms around.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Rigoberto Lopez, Chair of Dept. of Agriculture and Resource Economics, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Connecticut
Date: 06/27/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Rigo feels there is significant global competition to agriculture sector. Global competition has been a problem but the quality of the product imported is pretty good and getting better and better, really competing with local product on price AND quality. However, there is a renaissance of local agriculture that farmers can take advantage of.
2. Rigo pointed out that WalMart is the world’s largest food retailer. In other parts of the country WalMart has a strong hold on food retail environment, but in 10 years the way food is retailed may change dramatically. Retailers – WalMart, Target, etc – will be a different model in the future.
3. Rigo feels the biggest threat is if Connecticut agriculture is not willing to adapt and change to changing retail landscape. On the other hand, developing partnership with retail outlets and their wholesalers will be a critical part of a strategy in order to increase local consumption.
4. Rigo feels there is an important role of emerging technology in connecting farmers and consumers, especially young consumers. Young people don’t even read email anymore. Everything is an app and social media.
5. Rigo feels that making the marketing connection for the consumer to the farmer is critical to success of local agriculture, including branding of individual farmers.
6. Rigo feels that government needs to make the regulatory environment more friendly. It’s not just the expense of regulations but also the enormous cost in time lost dealing with regulations.
7. Rigo feels the university leadership needs help understanding how important extension is to the success of agriculture. The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources does its best to support the industry.
8. Rigo sees an opportunity to partner with private industry who have a lot of money for service learning, where students are placed in real work environments. Private industry is willing to invest in service learning.
9. Rigo sees an opportunity to quantify the cost of obesity and the value of eating healthy. If you can prove the cost of obesity, this could counter the resistance to pay more to eat healthy. Rigo questions whether the assumption that local food costs more has actually been proven through research.
10. In regards to increasing access to local foods, Rigo mentioned veggie trucks in urban centers.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – there are many ways to use more current technology to connect farmers to consumers, but there is a lack of farmers adoption of social media tools.
2. Infrastructure – referring to marketing infrastructure, the marketing channels for CT farmers has not been well developed.
3. Regulations – CT is not business friendly, need to relax some of the regulations to improve the environment.
4. Input costs – costs are high and we need to develop our niche in high value products to offset those costs. Energy, labor and feed costs are high.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – branding is an opportunity, high quality high value food production would be a strategy to offset higher costs of doing business here.
2. Geography – proximity of consumers, between NY and Boston, large market population size.
3. Other – Development of value added products and high quality products. Value added presents opportunities. It's about the quality of product and consumer preference for products with multi-functional qualities.

Section III – Quotes

[Back from trip to Guatemala] All they are talking about is exporting fruits and vegetables to the U.S to foster income of smallholders, and the U.S. is helping them do it through USAID. At some level, it's not very different than the situation in Connecticut.

I think CT can become a leader because the interest is there, but it depends on how leaders and stakeholders react to the challenges involved.

[Regarding investment in Cooperative Extension] It's a labor intensive process. We may need buildings and vehicles, but above all what we need is people. Additional positions through UConn will prove critical in strengthening Extension. Leveraging people and projects through partnerships has never been more necessary.

I strongly believe the potential of social media is untapped for linking producers and consumers.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Dr. Lou Magnarelli, Director of Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES)
Date: 06/08/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. CAES has several core areas of work, including agriculture, forestry, public health, and environmental sciences; agriculture is the ‘backbone’ of CAES.
2. CAES functions collaboratively with federal agencies (FDA, FBI, CT National Guard, USDA (APHIS), EPA, etc), state agencies (DEEP, DCP, etc) and research institutions across the nation (work closely with UMass and Cornell). CAES collaborates with UConn (e.g. UConn veterinarian pathobiology unit, have worked on granulocytic anaplasmosis together), but it could be better. Collaboration of this sort is important to the station’s success as well as its ability to attract funding.
3. Dr. Magnarelli emphasized that imported pathogens represent a huge threat to agriculture as well as forests, water, and public health (e.g. incredible number of ships that leave the Asian Rim daily; story of Asian Longhorn Beetle, Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, Emerald Ash Borer, Sap Beetle, etc). These threats can present a setback to IPM protocols if growers have to shift to spraying preventively.
4. Competition in nursery sector especially from national and foreign entities presents a threat in terms of material that is transported long distances with a lot of mixing of shipments (e.g. rhododendrons from Oregon).
5. The diagnostic labs in plant pathology and entomology at CAES provide a critical service to agriculture in the state because it can detect pathogens or organism early (hopefully). CAES then develops facts sheets and visits farms to do further research, and to respond to the threat.
6. In fulfilling its plant regulation role, CAES tries to work with the needs of farmers and their production issues.
7. In terms of research, Dr. Magnarelli sees an opportunity in niche crops and hopes to build the capacity of CAES in this area, although there is a need for a better understanding of ethnic crop demand in CT and more work on plant breeding.
8. Dr. Magnarelli sees farmland availability as a critical obstacle to farmers hoping to expand their operations today, that the housing market is eventually going to ‘kick in’ again and put incredible pressure on some farmers to sell to developers. Dr. Magnarelli emphasized that farmland preservation is a critical strategy to focus on now in order to counteract the certainty of rising energy costs so that we can continue to grow and sell food here in the long run.
9. CAES has a very good working relationship with green industry and nursery sector.
10. Idea: farmers markets at I-95 stops.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – important here because there are some nursery growers that want to expand, but they can't find land, and they are stuck, and there is a lot of demand for their products. We also have tremendous pressures in regards to housing. At some point this will kick into high gear again. On one hand farmers are not making much money because of pressure on that farm and possibly not having next generation ready to operate. Developer walks in and it is very tempting.
2. Energy costs – these are very high, oil and electricity. Farmers having trouble to get enough income out of their business to pay for these high costs. Puts pressure on for federal subsidies. But hard to come up with these funds.
3. Natural forces – particularly pests, floods, hail. Some of these can absolutely wipe out someone's farm. Example of fruit grower in Glastonbury – wiped out by a hail storm. Couldn't replace the trees. He left the state. Also example of pest imports, with regulations that kick in to prevent sale of infected plants. Climate change – areas that are wet will get wetter, and areas where it is dry it will get dryer. Last year's problem of all that precipitation – no one knows if that is climate change. But we seem to be seeing the extremes here. Are we going to see more severe storms and hurricanes? Prediction is yes. These pest problems and beetles...we're going to see more of these pests. Number of ships that leave Asian Rim is just incredible, and we're going to see more of these things. Story of Asian Longhorn Beetles showing up first in port areas – showed up first in Brooklyn, shipped up to Worcester area by rail (poplar trees grown in Chinese plantations, monoculture, was used to stop machinery from shifting in the shipping holds). Emerald Ash Borer came in on packing material as well. The vinegar fly- Drosophila, Brown Marmorated Stink Bug – both are Asian. More and more product moving around. Late developing fruits are most vulnerable to vinegar fly. Sap beetles on strawberries – some farmers using Brigade spray preventively instead of upon appearance. IPM have been set back by this shift of using pesticides preventively. Brown Marmorated Stink Bug is here but has yet to cause crop damage.
4. Market competition – Regionally, not a big problem. Regionally it is probably synergistic. So many of our crops go to MA and vice-versa. The production in the surrounding states can be helpful to each other. But nationally and internationally the pressure is huge. Example of rose production is illustrative. Bothers me to see the struggling of the Pinchbeck Rose Farm. It was a competition issue with foreign countries. Also, for the nursery industry this is an issue. Example of rhododendrons – easier to send a truck to Oregon and purchase these and bring these back to CT to sell. When you are moving this much material around the risk of moving a pathogen is enormous, such as Sudden Oak Death. Tremendous amount of nursery product moving around, with a lot of mixing of shipments. Nationally this creates a huge potential for moving pathogens.

Notes regarding top four opportunities for the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – people in this state love to buy locally grown. They'll eat ice cream if it is made here. We are in between two big cities (New York and Boston) that need food.
2. Geography – we got this going for us, good proximity to populations. Season seems to be lengthening. Just observations, but this is a plus for us for agriculture. Very rich soils. Enough precipitation, although sometimes too much.
3. Consumer knowledge – I think DoAg has done a good job in this regard, as well as good job promoting farmers markets. People want to buy local.
4. Market supply – fruit and vegetables do pretty well. Wood products industry exports quite a bit.

Section III – Quotes

CAES will always be a problem solving institution, because that is how we were founded.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Jay Mar, State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

Date: 07/06/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. NRCS has, in past year, delivered \$21m in financial and technical assistance to producers on private lands every year.
2. NRCS has five regional offices, 1 state office, and 49 employees, with strong resource expertise capacity.
3. NRCS is undergoing internal review for accountability and procedures, meaning there is increased scrutiny of how NRCS programs are being implemented in the state.
4. Jay would like to implement producer input process (calls this “locally led”) that filters up to his State Tech Committee and helps make recommendations on funding priorities and conservation practices and assistance; Jay recognizes that the needs of agriculture vary in different part of the state.
5. Jay sees a need for service provider collaboration to share information about research conservation assistance and help establish methodologies for sustainable agriculture. Collaborating entities ought to include CAES, CANR, CES, DEEP, NRCS Conservation Districts, RC&D.
6. Jay expressed concern for young and beginning farmers, in regards to their access to credit, access to farmland, ability to provide input for strategic planning and marketing of ct agriculture, need to have support for future of agriculture.
7. Jay feels it is important to keep agriculture very visible, to keep doing more and more marketing.
8. Jay expressed concern over rapidly changing landscape in CT and loss of farmland to development.
9. Idea: Demonstration farms that actually demonstrate newest crops, rotations, cover crops, minimum till, no till, precision agric, field days for producers, etc. Demonstration farms should include including LIS subaqueous farms that demonstrate aquaculture conservation practices and management.
10. Idea: Young leaders’ panel to present ideas on marketing CT agriculture, possibly to the GCAD.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Land availability – we're losing land, our prime farmlands.
2. Market competition – The reason I think producers are leaving is because it is not lucrative enough, so market competition really worries me. It is too easy for consumers to get products that are inexpensive at the stores.
3. Infrastructure gaps – with all the winding roads, rail systems, it must be very expensive to get your agricultural products from one place to the other in CT, so prices are higher.
4. Access to credit and financing – if the banks don't see that farmers can make enough of a profit, they can't get financing. Worry a lot about new farmers and their ability to get financing, can't afford to rent /purchase land.

Additional input from his staff:

- Input costs – this is true. Everything from fertilizers, pesticides, fuel – just getting out there to move the tractor. How can you capture a profit when you are spending so much on the inputs.
- Labor availability/skills – it is true, producers need labor. Either it is not there or it is too expensive to be part of the business.
- Market demand – we need to have demand for our products, our vegetables, our beef, tobacco, and grains.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge of CT Grown products – this generation craves info. Marketing, marketing, marketing. We can never have too much, but it has to be effective marketing. Too many times when we look at marketing, seen this in other states, they pull together the old leaders who seem to know what we need, but what we don't do is really listen to the young people. I've seen a young leaders' task force used, had to sit in a corner, the top two ideas were shot down.
2. Geography – we have this urban and rural interface. We have something a lot of other states don't have. We have markets right around the corner. We have the good soils. We have the good growing season. Great precipitation. All of this is positive to growing crops. But we need to find a way to get this into food desserts, and regional food sheds.
3. Access to credit/financing – have to be something we can do, if we could just prioritize this need.
4. Market demand – any strategies we can put into place to make it more desirable to buy locally grown. I heard there is locally grown and CT grown. What is the difference? Somebody told me that locally grown would be within 100 miles. That would mean across the state borders includes locally grown. Is there really a difference? How do we prioritize CT Grown, but not shut the door and allow our products to be sold across the border in MA, VT, etc.
5. Market supply – I would love to see people in North Dakota expressing demand for our CT products. They are infatuated out there with New England – a 'taste of New England' type of campaign.

Section III – Quotes

We have to look out for obstacle illusions. Maybe illusions are just masking opportunities.

Some of best ideas come from producers working with researchers.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Scott Miller, Max's Oyster Bar
Date: 07/0612

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. At Max Oyster Bar, Scott is up to 25% of his procurement being from local agriculture; his personal goal is that all 9 restaurants in the Max group get over 20%.
2. Scott won't just buy CT Grown just because it is from CT. He is willing to go – on average – up to 20% premium on the price, although there are exceptions where he will go to a 100% premium and make up the difference elsewhere on his menu. Not all chefs understand how to do this.
3. Scott prefers to work directly with farmers, building connection to farmers and turning this into a selling point as opposed to buying it through a distributor. Having a story about the product makes it more valuable in his restaurant.
4. Scott incorporates into his staff training an opportunity to meet the farmers, sometimes taking them out to the farm. This practice translates into a real connection between staff and farmer; staff are confident in the producer and the product, which increases sales on the product, and helps the guests feel confident too.
5. Scott's in-house marketing of CT Grown is on the menus where they list the farmers name or farm. This entices customers to head in that direction when ordering. Sometimes customers will order something on the menu because they identify a farm they know of or it is close to where they live.
6. Scott uses a farm dinner model – called Chef to Farm – as his biggest marketing tool to let people know about their support of local farms.
7. Scott flagged the problem of other restaurants falsely listing local products on their menu. He sees this as a source of competition.
8. Scott perceives the product he can purchase locally as safer than product that arrives 'triple washed'; he can see where the local product came from, not such a big problem if it is 'dirty' and requires additional handling.
9. Scott has found the Farm to Chef program to be an extremely important source of support for what he's doing.
10. Scott feels the health department and regulations have been moving in the right direction. He felt differently five years ago.
11. Scott's optimism is high because four or five years ago he had no way of imagining that restaurants would have gone so far purchasing local product; yet he believes CT Grown and Farm to Chef has much more potential.

12. Scott said that trends often start in the institutions, so the fact that GAP requirements are happening in institutions (cafeterias) could trickle down to restaurants.
13. Scott feels educating the consumer about where their food comes – with more backing of native products – is an important goal for the growth of CT agriculture.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Natural forces – we’re in the middle of a lot of weather change in general, and a lot is up in the air every day of every week. We’ve lost what is normal. The fact that we had come from CT in end of June is an example. Very irregular.
2. Market supply – from what I see it hasn’t been as profitable of a career to be a farmer in this state, at least my friends who are farmers who would like it to be. There are farms that I know that are taking half of their land turning it into golf courses or banquets. Falling out of full time farming and picking up teaching or something else. So their time isn’t being spent on the farm, leading to less product coming to market. Every chef in the state wants it, but it’s not there.
3. Infrastructure gaps – Talking about distribution. Transporting it to a central hub. There should be a CT Grown centralized hub, and then it should be distributed from there. Farmers seem to work well together, acting as resources for each other. Larger companies are buying the product and trying to sell it to the chefs. What’s the best way to get these products from the soil to the plate? Everyone has their theory, but nothing proven. To me the best way is to go to the farmers markets, but don’t always have time for that, so it’s not really ideal. The largest produce company in Denver owned CO Proud brand, which was like Fresh Point. They would have farmers markets from 9-12, have chefs come in to meet the farmers. Opportunity for a wholesale farmers market would be good – it’s about building relationship with farmers. When I say I have organic greens for so and so, there’s a story. Important of knowing the product better than buying it from Cisco, that’s the power. If my goal is to eliminate GMOs in my restaurant, then what better way than going to the farmer, shaking hands, and saying this is the right product me.
4. Market competition – at the end of the day, it’s dollars and cents, I assume the majority of us that look at cost of beans that cost 20% more from CT, most of us would buy the less expensive option. On average I spend 20% over market value, but sometimes I spend 100% over market value like for greens or heirloom tomatoes. I don’t get that back on the item on the menu. Gotta be a story that your guests can get behind. I could go to so-so and get cheddar cheese from VT, why go to Max to get a CT cheese plate? Is it really beneficial to them? Have to explain this to consumers. Our goal is not to have a guest perception of the value change because it says local or CT Grown. If I say I have a commercial mixed green salad, it might be a dollar less. We need to stay competitive in pricing no matter what.
5. Consumer knowledge – purchasing agents and chefs don’t really pay as close attention to seasonality as they should. I think the knowledge is provided to us by DoAg, if you use it. I just think there is this feeling that it is too difficult. But going back to natural forces, seasonality is not there. It’s a lot more challenging from our perspective to stay seasonal. You get trapped into a menu item and all of a sudden it’s not there and you have to go back to outsourcing.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – see earlier answer.
2. Land availability – there is plenty out there but unfortunately not using it as much as they used to from what I see.
3. Market supply
4. Consumer knowledge

Section III – Quotes

I don't know if people are coming into the restaurant because we have CT Grown. But I think they talk about it when they leave.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Dr. Jewel Mullen, Commissioner of CT Dept. of Public Health and Suzanne Blancaflor, Public Health Section Chief

Date: 08/31/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. DPH goal is protect and promote the public health of CT residents. This agency's work intersects with agriculture via policy and systems change to promote food safety and environmental health, prepare for emergencies, provide nutrition education, and address food insecurity.
2. Commissioner. Mullen would like to see the GCAD and its strategic plan find ways to help DPH address the needs of food insecurity; perhaps incorporating all of this into a state-wide commitment to address obesity epidemic. Commissioner Mullen highlighted the fact that there are lots of food deserts in CT – "How are we going to get fresh fruit and vegetables into those neighborhoods?"
3. DPH has an ongoing concern as to whether some state policies that regulate our food supply coming from local sources -- such as raw milk, acidified foods, poultry slaughter, and custom slaughter – They are designed to help the economy of growers but fail to adequately protect the public health and well-being of CT residents.
4. As a general rule, Commissioner Mullen and Ms. Blancaflor believe that state regulations and rules that impact the public health or CT residents should be based on scientific data.
5. Commissioner Mullen and Ms. Blancaflor emphasized potential hazards in how food is handled and the threat of food borne pathogens (such as botulism, salmonella, campylobacter, e-coli, listeria) whenever food items are processed. Approximately *1 in 6 Americans get sick and 3,000 die from foodborne diseases each year.
6. Commissioner Mullen feels that leadership in state agencies can do an even better job creating arriving at policies that protect the public while still taking into consideration the concerns of particular interest groups.
7. Commissioner Mullen and Ms. Blancaflor identified a need for processing training, highlighting how important this training is for food safety. It may be possible to make use of regional training programs.
8. Commissioner Mullen and Ms. Blancaflor identified a need for test kitchens to demonstrate how quickly things spoil, market feasibility. Such facilities would need to be located in-state.
9. Commissioner Mullen sees as opportunity to focus on workforce development; take advantage of the support for higher education and look for opportunities here. Commissioner Mullen pointed out that there may be a perception issue to address in a workforce development strategy; farming is not regarded as a skilled profession.
10. Commissioner. Mullen identified that in the context of a home rule state, local health departments have the direct authority and input on agriculture. This decentralized system sometimes leads to variation in how regulations are applied, however health inspectors are carefully trained by DPH to consistently apply state regulations (state inspectors must receive a certain number of hours every 3 years to remain certified).
12. Commissioner Mullen indicated the local health infrastructure is under resourced as they are responsible for so many things and are pretty over-tapped. In fact the workforce has shrunk. Any additional expectations or burdens on this system will lead to delays in receiving local health inputs.
13. Commissioner Mullen and Ms. Blancaflor are in favor of mandatory GAP (Good Agriculture Practices), perhaps with a GAP program designed for smaller farm operations.

* revised to reflect current data (CDC)

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure – processing gaps. There are huge gaps in processing infrastructure and facilities plus the GAP certification is not mandatory. If GAP were mandatory maybe they (farmers) would have a better chance to sell their food.
2. Workforce development – seems like training a new workforce for a strong industry that is trained to do food handling the way it needs to be. I would be careful to separate ‘labor availability’ and ‘skills’.
3. Climate change

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – we live in a ‘Whole Food’ state, and there is a cache for farmers markets. There are enough people in CT that are going to think about organic and natural as better, with the ability to go to Whole Foods to pay for it. If products in farmers markets and local farms are seen this way, there is good market support for that.
2. The opportunity and need to address food insecurity – with the possibility to help CT growers address food shortages (fresh foods) in urban areas and food deserts.

Section III – Quotes

The Regulations are the floor, not best practice.

When you have any enterprise that is regulated by more than one dept., there is the potential for a number of standoffs between a number of agendas and priorities that leads to a loss of focus on what is most important.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Joan Nichols, President of CT Professional Timber Producers Association & Government Relations Specialist, CT Farm Bureau Association

Date: 05/30/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Timber industry has a relatively short history of advocating for themselves as an sector, and have been under an agency other than DoAg and therefore have not benefitted from promotional work through CT Grown program until very recently. Timber is the only agriculture sector not regulated by DoAg.
2. Seem to be some emerging market forces for local products (native grown) in timber industry, such as flooring, fine furniture, outdoor structure materials. Recently timber producers have demonstrated interest in webinars offered by CT Secretary of State on export markets – might be an opportunity to do more in this arena.
3. Recent innovators in the timber industry are vertically integrating their operations to create value-added retail products for consumers seeking local, ct-grown wood products (e.g. Hull Forest Products).
4. The timber industry is threatened by the potential for pest outbreaks as well as the administration of quarantine regulations.
5. Timber industry association is still young and growing in its engagement and advocacy (referring to CT Professional Timber Producers Association).
6. Joan expressed urgency in regards to preparing for the next development boom. High prices of land plus the lack of next generation willing or able to take over farm is a major threat to anticipate. We must be proactive with succession planning, estate planning, local conservation subdivision zoning, farmland preservation, etc.
7. Joan pointed out that almost every farm in CT own woods. The mindset of most farmers in CT is to look to their timber resource in short term as a source of income, rather than as part of the overall long term management of the farming operation. Managing forest land on a sustainable basis can provide the farmer with income generation over multiple generations while maintaining a healthy forest and ecosystem.
8. Joan has found that it is possible to get key folks in DEEP to work in a positive, helpful direction. She recommends that DEEP should be 'part of the solution, not part of the problem.'
9. Joan highlighted the important role that agriculture non-profits can play in facilitating communication and cooperation with producers, municipal, and state agencies – including CFBA and CT Professional Timber Producers Association. Producers need to see that supporting their trade association is another smart business decision on their part, no different than maintaining the licenses and certifications you need to run your business.
10. Idea: Joan feels forest management plans and sustainable forest practices should required for any permanently protected farm where public dollars are allocated and for the which the land can never be anything else but farmland and in most cases, forest land, because of topography, soils characteristics etc.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Regulations – federal/state/local – there are some obstacles here. I work a lot with producers. Municipal regulations can be a bear. DEEP challenges can be a real problem. All of these are very hard for producers to work around.
2. Other: Failure to recognize agriculture as a business - not so much for green industry, but a lot of misperception out there that agriculture looks like a cottage industry not a real business. Maybe this is partly due to part-time farmers – are they really looking at this as a business? This is a problem among producers too. It doesn't make sense to me that so many people say they do this [farming] but they aren't making money at this. Agriculture has to be a serious business to be considered a serious business. Important to remind regulators that you are regulating my business.
3. Input costs – especially labor; can't speak a lot on this personally, but cost of living in CT is very high and cost of doing business in CT is expensive. We often hear this at CFBA in regards to cost of doing business and staying competitive (not sure about energy costs compared to other states, but wages, transportation, land costs are all very high).
4. Land availability – talking about cost and how this ties into the land base.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Demand – can be huge demand for our products
2. Market supply – in forestry we are strictly demand & supply business....if demand is there we bump up supply
3. Consumer knowledge – good job with CT Grown branding program
4. Geography – has a plus for CT, because of the diversity of our state....if we took full advantage. We have woodlands, access to LI Sound, CT River Valley, etc. Proximity to urban areas. 3 seasons – and we're seeing growers doing things to extend their season.

Section III – Quotes

The timber industry is nearly 100% wholesale with a long chain of middlemen from the standing tree to the finished product, all of whom must make a profit.

Agriculture has to be a serious business to be considered a serious business.

Maybe because I've been through two building booms.....my biggest concern is right now we are in a lull. I am concerned when the next building boom comes around and money raises its ugly head, whether our farmers and commitment to our producers (so many are part-time) whether there is the ability to withstand the next boom.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Michel Nischan, President & CEO of Wholesome Wave and owner of The Dressing Room
Date: 06/22/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Michel feels it is critical that we bring together all of our resources to back a goal or direction - include producers, corporations, policy leaders, philanthropists.
2. Michel expressed frustration that with half billion dollars in federal food assistance dollars that come to the state, very little to none of which is spent on state agricultural products.
3. Michel sees a lot of philanthropist capacity in CT, but many lack the willingness to see CT agriculture as inevitably tied to environment health, human health, fiscal health, and job creation.
4. Wholesome Wave has been deeply involved over the past two years examining financing opportunities for infrastructure development for local food processing, packaging, distribution, etc (aka food hubs). Michel sees financing opportunities taking shape that could foster large capital projects that address infrastructure gaps which producers are talking about.
5. Michel sees an opportunity to re-examine the farmers market business model in CT, perhaps looking for development of more robust, indoor farmers market, single vendor farm stands, and other low-cost, immediate impact business models to improve farm-to-consumer distribution channels.
6. Michel feels that food safety standards have been developed through an inappropriate reaction to something that happened in large scale operations closely exposed to intense environmental conditions such as CAFO contamination of irrigation. Standards need to be scale appropriate, at different point in the food chain.
7. Michel described several regional entities that seem to have a real headstart on CT growers, having 'cracked that code' of doing aggregation and unified product and selling wholesale to retailers and grocers (e.g. Happy Valley Organics, Pioneer Valley Growers Coop).
8. Idea: cross of farm stand/indoor farmers market – multi vendor markets in multi locations, or single/limited vendor markets in multiple locations? Vendors do better in less and smaller markets with higher individual revenue, than in more and larger markets with higher overall market revenue (which often results in lower individual revenue).
9. Idea: farmer adopting a city or fresh farm market franchise in the city and farmer controls management of farm stands in the city – leverages other programs such as WorkPlace to offset start-up expenses while training for business/partnership opportunities for community residents.
10. Idea: States can take the role of finding where the real opportunities to put public at risk. What are the right GAP standards in our state.
11. Idea: training WorkPlace and Job Corps participants into business opportunities at the end of their program by opening up an enterprise similar to Fair Food Philly; training would include experience on farms building relationships and trust with farmers, resulting in the relationships of trust and expertise that mitigate risk and guarantee success.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – so jazzed about being able to build shared services or hubs, where companies like Fresh Point, Sid Wainer and Dairyland become customers of the hubs. We are all very interested in deploying patient capital or grants to turn out value added facilities, co-packing, that can serve, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, etc. We see a CSA coming out of a hub as having so many more items (milk, bread, jam, coffee, green cleaning supplies, goat soap etc) which allows them to get up to 1200 shares. We have a lot of programs in ME. We have four year-round markets in ME – if CT farmers had the interest, resources to understand and accept these solutions, maybe we could this here too. Want to see more food businesses that have access to more types of markets (premium, below market markets-e.g. grade schools, middle of the road markets). Infrastructure creates an opportunity to turn field run seconds into a revenue stream instead of food waste.
2. Labor availability and skills – How do we get enough skilled labor that are excited about this and willing to come into the work below market level in order to get somewhere.
3. Market competition – regional – I go into the Stop&Shop, and I see Happy Valley Organics, they have cracked the code, from Pioneer Valley, MA, raised money themselves and built an aggregation facility, unified their packaging, unified field cooling practices, 65 case of sugar snap peas look like they all came from one farm but they don't. S&S pulls up to one place and gets an entire 18 wheeler loaded. Competition is also a best practice lesson. They looked at the infrastructure, they aggregated together, they made sure they were not competing with each other rather aggregating to achieve greater scale. Learned how to have dialogue with grocers.
4. Other – lack of leadership to successfully aggregate all these resources – whether municipal will, whether more corporate entities, different or more diverse group of farmers, and groups of philanthropists

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – a big one. Restaurants are cracking that well. When you are marketing you need to be reaching out to the Carole Peck's, Dressing Rooms, Le Farm, Schoolhouse, etc. Terrain, The Williams Sonoma of home depots, chef in Westport, can be poster child. They are doing pop-up business, twitter, pop-up dinners. Can be strong allies.
2. Infrastructure (see above)
3. Labor training – what can the state do to attract municipalities to become beginner farmer friendly. Bill Finch, Mayor of Bridgeport, really wants to do urban farming, but doesn't want to commit land for more than a one year lease. What can state do to convince towns to do this – How do land grant colleges help municipalities get disadvantage farmer set asides, community development and jobs \$\$ to offset taking land out of inventory. Everyone is focused on poverty, food access, food desserts, obesity. Would help get CT on the map as a progressive agricultural state. Incredible, untapped opportunity for training program \$\$\$. Workplace – take advantage of it. Federally funded jobs program, taking high school students, paying \$12 per hours for summer and placing kids in jobs to gain skills. They have good kids, they need skills. About 17 or 18 years old. When the summer is over and subsidy is gone, the kids are let go. Likely more of those types of programs that we don't know about. Federal job

training resources might be brought to bear to focus on agriculture and offset start up costs affiliated with moving into broader or additional markets.

4. Market demand – it's not that there isn't market demand. Walmart committed to buy 7% of all fresh food from within 150 miles of their regional redistribution warehouses. They don't have a "yuppie" aisle. They do not niche market. If they think local is important, it's because *all* of their customers think it's important. With Walmart benefitting from over 25% of all SNAP benefits nationally (\$28B annually), people of limited income are even interested in locally grown foods. How do you channel/educate the producers to begin to look at their model, so they can become more improvisational in the way they do food business. Local was forced down Yale's throat through a national celebrity, but it created international change. Bridgeport hospital is really interested in buying local. What can Governor do to convince them (Bport hospital and Yale) that they need to have a great relationship with DoAg? CDC grants, \$4m to \$17m dollars that have gone to numerous other American cities can go to Bridgeport etc. How do we get all these people together, what kind of team do we put together, so everyone is interacting together, aggregating resources, channeling strengths and covering gaps so we can work collectively to create greater economic stimulus and activity. Aggregating the market demand, reaching to the markets that big-box retailers have already reached, working to get them all on the same page can result in keeping a lot more food dollars spent directly into Connecticut's Ag and food production economy.

Section III – Quotes

If it ain't working, have the courage to disassemble it and start from scratch. (referring to an agric association that isn't working well.)

I don't actually think the threat comes from Big Food.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Ricahrd and Avis Norman, Norman’s Sugarhouse, Woodstock
Date: 06/22/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Maple Syrup Producers Association of CT illustrates how producer associations can play an important role in regards to responding to marketing trends, share info about pest threats, closing gaps in expertise, conducting research. Producer associations represent an opportunity for DoAg to work collaboratively on marketing, and supporting their efforts to be cutting edge.
2. Richard feels it is important to continue to do more marketing and promotion of CT Grown, led by DoAg, in order to build consumer knowledge.
3. Richard explained how the latest technology in maple harvesting (e.g. vacuum tubing, evaporators) are important investments for producers to operate at a certain scale. Richard and Avis doubled their yield with a new evaporator, adding several weeks of harvest with new taps.
4. Richard sees an opportunity to use state lands for syrup production, but this would require a streamlined process in regards to using state lands and remove regulatory barriers to leave up tubing for operators that want to be profitable.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Regulation – always going to be an obstacle. Some of it is good, because it is going to lead to better food safety. But it's also going to regulate people out of business.
2. Natural forces – you get a snowstorm, or a hurricane – has a big impact.
3. Consumer knowledge – we do fairs and things like that, and people still are surprised that our syrup came from CT.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand
2. Market supply – maybe, if we could build the supply and we absolutely could do this for maple for sure

Section III – Quotes

The best inspector is your customer. If you give them something they don't like, they aren't gonna come back.

Regulation is always a barrier.

People are spending their money on something they taste, even food, and not on something fancy. Even schools are doing less fundraisers of candy, now we see fundraisers selling jams and jellies.

Advertising is expensive, but a few words out of the mouth of Department of Agriculture at the right time can make a difference.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Shelley Oechsler, Botticello Farm, Manchester
Date: 06/21/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Shelley feels there is an unfortunate trend away from food production and toward agri-tainment.
2. Shelley feels there is an untapped opportunity if a processing facility were available to farmers; an individually owned facility is not readily leased because of the costs and hurdles it takes to get the processing license and the reluctance to allow someone else to use it.
3. Shelley would like to reach buyers in institutions and restaurants, but cannot afford to do the transportation of such small quantities. Shelley feels wholesale is a hard business but this is necessary to reach chefs and institutions. Smaller farms that want to reach these same buyers will need to understand how wholesale costs work.
4. Shelley is reluctantly doing GAP in order to sell to a large distributor, but it is expensive, and seems unfair in that she has to take numerous precautions while others in the supply chain do not have the same burden.
5. Shelley said there is no way to recoup costs of implementing GAP through wholesale markets.
6. Shelley is unhappy with distribution companies that set low prices and convince buyers in grocery stores and institutions that they should not accept a direct delivery from a farm and run the risk of losing their ‘guy’ who provides local product year round.
7. Shelley feels strongly that children need to be educated from an early age in order to understand agriculture and where food comes from.
8. Shelley feels communities need a better understanding of the value that farms bring. Residents have no idea what it means to make the choice of buying something in their community, and how this helps to create jobs and lower taxes.
9. Shelley sees an opportunity to invite people to harvest bumper crops that will otherwise rot in the fields if the regulations would allow this sort of thing without incurring a liability burden on the farmer.
10. Shelley expressed frustration that the only response from the government to a catastrophic event such as the snow pack last January which caused roofs to collapse on barns and greenhouses is a low interest loan; this is not really helpful or timely.
11. Shelley expressed the importance that trainings really are only useful to farmers during a few months of the year, Jan, Feb, maybe Nov. So trainings offered other times of the year really are not helpful.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – not so much as the transportation or processing or storage, it is more in linking those resources.
2. Input costs - which includes labor. Everything is up front for seeds, taxes, labor to prepare land...a lot of outlay of cash.
3. Natural resources – We can't control those natural resources, but with proper equipment, you can probably avert some losses.
4. Consumer knowledge – doesn't limit itself to seasonality or where to purchase, but more along the lines of not understanding what their product comes from, that's why it is turning into an amusement industry.
5. Market demand – high post-harvest losses, everything comes in at the same time, everyone trying to get rid of their product at the same time. \$8 bag of corn, never seen it that low in 3 years, and GAP requirements are creating additional costs that not going to be recouped by such low prices.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure – no coordinated method to link the processing, storage, distribution.
2. Market demand – really driven by supply. If I have an excess of squash, it doesn't matter how much it cost me on the input side, because price has dropped out.
3. Consumer knowledge – not at the high school level, but needs to start in the elementary level because that is where the foundation lies. By the time they are in high school they don't understand the concept.
4. Geography – I mean season lengthening opportunities through grants for tunnels. Proximity to populations, even when there are bumper crops.

Section III – Quotes

Customers don't know what a tomato plant is, or even that a tomato comes from a plant.

People have no idea what it means to a community to make the choice of buying something in their community value-wise, creating jobs, lowering taxes; people don't put those factors together.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Peter Orr, Fort Hill Farms, LLC
Date: 07/05/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Benchmarking programs that Peter participates in shows how high input costs creates a competitive disadvantage for Connecticut dairy within the region.
2. Peter sees a huge opportunity for CT agriculture as well as his own operation being geographically located ‘in the marketplace.’ Marketing should be our main goal.
3. Peter’s farm is located near the borders of MA and RI. He is in close proximity to consumers in Boston, Sturbridge, Worcester, and Providence. This sometimes feels like a barrier in terms of marketing; CT Grown does not help him reach customers in MA and RI.
4. Peter sees the state’s new tourism efforts as a huge opportunity for agriculture. Resources to promote farms as destinations do not necessarily have to come from DoAg. (FYI - Fort Hill Farms was honored as a CT Tourism Ambassador this year).
5. Peter views some companies as a major threat who market themselves as ‘local’ even when they are not using local products.
6. Peter sees ‘Local’ is the power word; it’s “iconic.” CT Grown is a subset of the ‘local’ criteria. It falls short of representing what is local.
7. Peter sees a need to support more educating and training youth in agriculture; his two daughters participate in the CT Agriculture Education programs (Vo-Ag) and Peter has seen how well these programs work.
8. Peter feels the separation of research expertise at CAES from Storrs campus represents a critical weakness to UConn as a land grant institution and makes UConn less competitive than other land grant universities in the region (e.g. Cornell, Penn State).
9. Peter is greatly concerned about the erosion of Cooperative Extension in regards to production agriculture.
10. Food safety for Peter’s customers is primarily expressed as concern over antibiotics and hormones.
11. Idea: Would like to see policy and legislation to allow farms to qualify as preferred businesses in the state of CT and then get the state to do an offset to municipalities.
12. Idea: State should pass legislation creating a blanket waiver for liability for farms that bring the public onto the farm (about 15 states have something similar, including MA). The blanket waiver should include liability if a farm visitor injures another farm visitor.
13. Idea: CT Grown program could evolve to be ‘CT Grown & Destinations’

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – high costs of doing business in CT and Southern New England. It's everything. What do we have as an input cost advantage? Maybe it's a favorable environment (such as good soils, rainfall, and so forth). But in terms of purchasing inputs, everything is off the Richter scale for us. As a dairy farm we go through occasional benchmarking procedure, looking at our numbers versus a pool of numbers for the Northeast, and our costs of production are just way high. Benchmarking is intended to help us identify areas to be more competitive, and it always comes down to some type of structural thing. I go through this with First Pioneer and also use a private dairy consultant who is comparing costs with NY dairy farmers. Our insurance, taxation, fuel costs...all are higher. My pet peeve this particular season is high fertilizer costs. 30% spot increase on fertilizer. We're also dealing with all time highs in feed. Feed is the first order of magnitude for a dairy farm's costs; feed is 30-40% of the costs of operating a dairy.
2. Land availability – because we're not making anymore. Once that acreage grows its final crop of development, it is locked away.
3. Regulations – You are looking at the person that is responsible for all compliance and paperwork on the farm, and I can't keep up with it. There are times that you make the decision to be out there on the tractor or supervising issues on the farm, and you've got that knock on the farm door and you have to deal with this piece of paper or this visit, and it is very distracting. The burden of paperwork and informational flow is very high.
4. Infrastructure – overall operating. To a large scale our infrastructure in CT is going by the wayside. I went to school at Penn State. Look at state of PA for supporting agriculture. So much available there to farmers in terms of sources of materials and equipment. Backbone of food processing is immense in PA. Infrastructure for dairy farms that went away in past five years would include when Cargill feed operation pulled out of Franklin. Feed is now being sourced from further away, adding \$30/ton for additional transportation cost. Feed mills try to rail as far south and east as possible, and then truck it the remainder. Now we are bringing down feed from a mill in Middlebury, VT.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – we are sitting in the marketplace. We are sitting smack dab in the middle of the population, from Boston to NY. At our farm we sit within an hour's drive of downtown Boston. We have great agricultural natural assets – mostly (a few stones, 'New England potatoes there') – and we have good precipitation for field crops, and tend to get what we need in terms of rainfall.
2. Market demand – we should be able to swing our geographic advantage into market demand.
3. Market competition – I look at this as what forces are there to allow for farms to be able to compete in the market. I see that people who are selling food or agriculture products are trying to mimic the farmer – whether or not they really are farmers. Everyone wants to align themselves with the farms or farmers; everyone wants to tell the farmers story.
4. Consumer knowledge - Anything we can do to help promote local products would be great for ct agriculture.

Section III – Quotes

[In regards to optimism question] - I'm a 6. I'm the guy where the milk glass is always filling. No matter how much of a leak there is at the bottom of the glass we have to keep the glass filling. I really think the time has come for CT agriculture. I think the stars are aligning.

In terms of purchasing inputs, everything is off the Richter scale for us.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Ken Pauzé, Director of Operations, Moark LLC (Kofkoff Egg Farm)

Date: 06/13/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Kofkoff is meeting an estimated 20% of CT consumption of eggs; they could more than meet all of CT consumer demand for eggs given the size of their operation (3.5 million layer hens; average American consumes the production of one chicken per year – including baked goods and mayonnaise).
2. Kofkoff purchases about \$1.5m in corn from local farmers for use in feeding their hens, representing 3000 acres, in exchange for being able to use this land base to send chicken manure.
3. Ken sees a need and opportunity for a very robust state-branding program that promotes CT agriculture products and signals to the consumer that these products are local and high in quality. He feels the real brand to promote is 'Connecticut'; the success of 'Farmers Cow', for example, is due to the Connecticut brand.
4. For Ken's operation, an ongoing and working relationship with DEEP has been beneficial, leading to a regulatory environment that is accommodating; however there is uncertainty how this will look in the future if and when staff in the state agency retire. Possibly the scale of the Kofkoff operation (producing 6 million eggs per week, employing 275 people, contributing \$140m to state economy annually) allows it to find the resources needed to meet environmental regulations (e.g. investing \$3.5m in a new water treatment facility).
5. Kofkoff competes in a national market – PA, Ohio, MO, IA, etc. Vertical integration of their operation enables them to do a lot of branding and positioning in the national market, especially in the growing market for specialty eggs (e.g. omega, natural, cage free, organic, etc).
6. Kofkoff's own food safety standards exceed industry standards, and these standards are demanded by their customers (food retailers). Kofkoff has staff solely dedicated to maintaining compliance with food safety protocols. In Ken's view, the size and scale of their operation makes it more efficient to fulfill food safety standards because it is not decentralized onto multiple small farms.
7. Proposed state cage free laws frequently under discussion in the state legislature would put Kofkoff at a competitive disadvantage to producers in other states not having such legislation. The additional challenge of unavailability of land and high cost of operation in CT would be an impediment to expansion in CT and as a result operations and expansions would be in states such as Ohio and PA with product shipped into CT for distribution only.
8. In terms of backyard flocks, although these operations do not compete with his operation for sales, they do present a bio-security threat in the event there is a contamination from one of those flocks that somehow arrives in his facility, and also present a food safety threat for buyers at the roadside stand (salmonella).

9. UConn resources have been very helpful and supportive of his business, including cooperative extension work of Dr. Mike Darre and research at UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources on Salmonella and animal welfare practices (stress vocalization). Ken feels the poultry program at UConn is very good.
10. Idea: licensing entities for use of CT Grown label.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – our energy costs are more than double than our counterparts in MO and IA; labor costs are significantly higher
2. Labor availability – gets more and more difficult to get people to do what we need them to do
3. Regulations – we are regulated by at least 6 agencies
4. Consumer knowledge of CT Grown products – one of our most successful products is Farmers Cow eggs. Wasn't a state initiative – it was Farmers Cow initiative, and their brand that is identified as Connecticut. I always felt we should identify CT as the brand, and build the brand.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – ties back to the CT brand
2. Geography – sitting right in the center of the most populace, most advantageous demographic in the country when you look at the potential for value-added brands. It's just enormous.

Section III – Quotes

We are sitting right in the center of the most populace region. It is the most advantageous demographic in the country when you look at the potential for value-added brands. It's just enormous.

If DoAg could continue to be recognized as the agency that regulates our business, rather than 85 health districts telling us what to do, that would be good.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Bill Rees, President of Green Power Solutions, Inc.

Date: 06/01/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. The role of agriculture in the state’s energy future has the potential to be very important for the growth of agriculture and could provide benefits back to the state in terms of organic waste management (food waste, yard waste), development of diverse power sources, and provision of competitive energy generation.
2. Green Power Solutions feels that the laws and policies of the state are unsupportive of the development of farm energy (e.g. - DEEP requirements regarding composting; implementation of Anaerobic Digester pilot program did not allow excess generation of energy; virtual net metering is not permitted, conjunctive billing is not allowed).
3. It seems important to examine other states in the region, such as MA, VT, Ontario, as well as Europe, to see how they have encouraged farm energy development through policies and regulations.
4. On farm renewable energy products (Anaerobic Digesters) can be less expensive than other renewable energy products (solar).
5. As part of GCAD’s work to increase local consumption of agriculture products, Green Power Solutions recommends creating a CT Grown Energy program, using farm energy as part of a renewable energy option while capturing and fostering support for local agriculture.
6. Green Power Solutions says policy makers fail to recognize that Anaerobic Digesters have negative emissions, so this technology is even better than Z-REC (zero renewable energy credits).
7. Idea: Address DEEP rules on composting - are these out of balance with benefits we could achieve from exporting organic waste to CT? Initial focus with DEEP should be in-state organic waste reduction. Importing waste will be a tough sell. DEEP has done extensive studies on the organic waste generated in the state, but have come up with no real solutions to fix the problem. Bill feels they are happy with the incineration solution that in the end loses the nutrients that could be put back on CT farmland.
8. Idea: AgREC - Agriculture Renewable Energy Credit. This would be a legislative solution to create a line of CT Farm Energy products.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market competition – thinking of the milk industry; farmers don't have economies of scale here that Midwest or Central CA have in growing fruits and vegetables etc.
2. Input costs – according to federal Energy Information Association website which has state rankings on energy costs; CT is third highest behind HI and AL. This is due to Connecticut's Zero Emission Renewable Energy Credit and Low Emission Renewable Energy Credit, Renewable Portfolio Standard – CT created the Z REC and L REC. Labor costs are also quite expensive here as well.
3. Regulations - CT could pass some regulations to create incentives to develop additional producers of energy in the state. There need to be some things that promote energy in the agriculture sector. Maybe there should be ways to help facilitate labor trainings (e.g. costs \$10k to train employee on a farm's process). Can rules change so that guest workers can be here for longer times? GMO legislation would also hurt agriculture.
4. Access to credit/financing – The challenge is showing investors that you will be around in the future. Can food hubs be built to help on this, where energy is on-site? This would really help food manufacturers come to CT. Toronto and Haverill, MA have goal to become food manufacturing hubs, and encouraging investment. Hartford incinerator put out an RFP for an anaerobic digester; maybe they want to take in food waste, but they want to continue to charge \$69 tipping fee. Farmers should be able to do this at a much cheaper tipping fee.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Regulations – if they were adapted for agriculture, this would lead to instant growth
2. Input costs
3. Consumer knowledge of CT Grown products – based on personal experience. Providing more information to consumers about CT Grown would encourage more purchases. Suggests a CT Grown Energy product idea. Example of CL&P list of brokers, would need a deal with Con-Ed, could create a diversified product sold at maybe 14%...CT Grown Power. People would be willing to buy a few cents more.
4. Labor availability and skills – addressing these issues of training and length of visas would make a difference

Section III – Quotes

If [energy] legislation and regulation does not turn around, I don't see how agriculture can grow in my mind.

It has really surprised me that anaerobic digestors have not caught on in CT as it has in other states, especially with its multitude of environmental benefits and more competitive energy pricing. If the farmers of CT would have been allowed to compete in the Z-REC 15 year off-take agreement, you would have seen 10MW from Farm anaerobic digestors at around .16cts a kwh instead of .222cts for solar. [From follow-up email]



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, CT Dept. of Agriculture

Date: 05/18/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members.

1. Extremely important to work on coordination and education with other state agencies to seize opportunities and address threats. There is a lack of understanding about the importance of agriculture (illustrated by threats from other agencies in regards to farmland use and farming practices). Toward this end, we need to generate priorities for agriculture so all state agencies are working together toward common goals.
2. The Department doesn’t have sufficient resources to meet its statutory requirements and obligations, and this hole renders segments of the industry vulnerable to shut downs and also means the agency is missing opportunities that it could propel CT farming and agriculture to higher levels.
3. Commissioner Reviczky sees a big opportunity to create aggregation and processing, and to better use the Regional Market in Hartford to serve the local food system.
4. The Commissioner sees potential opportunity via cooperative models to give farmers more control over the price they receive for their products (and tap into farm-to-institution markets). The sale of Guida’s to Dairy Farmers of America illustrates that segments of the agriculture economy continue to head in a direction that challenges Connecticut’s family farms.
5. The Commissioner sees an opportunity through season extension and year-round production to grow the agriculture sector; at the same time we face threats from rising costs of inputs and should continue to look for ways to limit exposure.
6. In the marketplace for ‘local’, we should continue and expand marketing programs that result in Connecticut farmers capturing as much of the consumer demand for local as possible. We should work with Northeast states in a coordinated way that enhances regional agriculture and reduces the distances that food and other farm products travel.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Other – We need a Department of Agriculture that is adequately staffed and funded. We are way too close to not having the critical mass necessary to function. We don’t have needed redundancy. Chain of

command is flat. We go from managers right down to line staff without supervisors in between. On most days it is pretty scarce in terms of not having enough boots on the ground, and the agency is left to triage, not doing things the agency is statutorily required to do. As a result, the agency is not able to capitalize on opportunities that could significantly advance the agricultural sector.

2. Input costs – talking about energy, labor, land. These are places where we could limit exposure, especially with energy, things we could do better. Agriculture businesses need equal access or improved access to programs to take advantage of alternative sources of energy, to mitigate costs, to implement recommendations of energy audits, to construct anaerobic digesters – programs that are coming online. We have to be on equal footing with other sectors.
3. Regulations – Biggest focus is on state and local. We have an opportunity to make changes. Focus on DEEP as an example. We want to increase availability of local meats, but DEEP classifies slaughterhouse odors from urine and feces as an industrial odor instead of agricultural odors. Or DEEP's misguided approach to burning invasive plants and brush. Their interpretation of wetland statutes where farmers have "as of right" protections and DEEP has defined the hardening of farm roads or placement of culverts as "filling wetlands." Example of Noank processing, taking water from Long Island Sound, putting it in a tank, goes over shellfish, re-depositing water from a saltwater well, without hefty engineering design costs. On local regulations – wetland, planning & zoning, -- all need to be more farm friendly, need to recognize what farmers need to engage in to be viable, and good implementation of PA 490.
4. Infrastructure gaps – referring to aggregation and processing infrastructure. I see a hole there and opportunities.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – there clearly is demand to capture; public is ahead of us. They want local. We can give them local.
2. Regulations – focusing more on local and state regulations. There is an opportunity to change the regulatory culture, and this could help agriculture and the quality of life in Connecticut.
3. Infrastructure gaps –
4. Other – DoAg staffing or funding, any capacity building would mean there is an ability to do more for agriculture. There needs to be greater services available to productions through Extension.

Section III – Quotes

There is a lack of critical mass in staff at DoAg, no needed redundancies; when staff is out, work critical to protecting public health stops.

It could be disastrous if we do not protect the CT Grown label and consumers are misled, paying a premium for product that could be purchased at any supermarket.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: John Rogers, Rogers Orchard, Southington

Date: 05/24/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Labor issue:
 - a. In general, it is extremely hard to find people that are willing to work the kinds of hours that are required on a farm.
 - b. An effective guest-worker program (e.g. H2A) is critical to Rogers Orchards which relies heavily on labor with certain key skills in terms of productivity and quality of work.
2. Farms with enough scale and financial stability, and with an effective marketing/branding approach, can engage in a balance of retail (farm stand) as well as wholesale (managing your own distribution rather than using a middleman/distributor). This business model requires, however, significant investment in building/owning your own infrastructure.
3. Rogers Orchard is competing in a global marketplace. This means competing with out-of-state growers, dealing with federal labor policy (H2A), and responding to large retail food store requirements (GAP certification).
4. Regarding GAP – “Let’s face it they [retailers] want traceability and they want to be assured vendors they work with are doing things the right way and making the right choices in terms of how they grow their fruit and taking care of the land. It’s a smart business decision for them.”
5. There is a difference in the perception of food safety for a wholesale buyer (expressed as GAP requirement) versus a farm stand customer (want to know about IPM and use of chemicals).

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of agriculture in Connecticut:

1. Natural Forces – there are some things you can't control.
2. Labor availability/skills – we need professional pickers to get our crop in, and we have to rely on off shore H2A pickers. Without them we wouldn't be in business. The availability of H2A workers to harvest our crops is very important. Labor is our number one cost.
3. Market competition – it is a world economy. We face competition – all farmers do – from imported commodities, from west coast, even New York.
4. Input costs – energy costs are huge, much higher in our state than in other states. Electric rates, fuel rates, diesel. Labor on the other end, to find people who want to work on our farm who want to work the long hours, not just pick crop, long hours, 6-day work week, picking in the rain....it's hard to find people that want to do this. Our busiest times are on the weekend. When fruit is ready we have to pick it or it will be on the ground.

Notes regarding top four opportunities for the growth of agriculture in Connecticut:

1. Geography – because of proximity to population of consumers.
2. Market demand – with that population we should be able to generate market demand, the buy local/CT Grown program has been hugely helpful, but it has not reached its peak. We've just touched the surface
3. Consumer Knowledge – where DoAg has helped foster this has been good. It's been a great start in past 10 years, and making people pay attention to where their food is grown, helping people pay attention to where to purchase
4. Access to credit/financing – we have available to us a lender that is very flexible and very willing to help farmers borrow money at reasonable rates to improve their businesses and stay afloat in lean years, and has been a real asset to our business. Can get better rates there than at the bank.

Section III – Quotes

My job is to make a smooth transition between my generation and the 8th generation, to pass it along in good financial standing.

The general spirit of farmers are enterprising in New England, Yankee ingenuity is not just a myth but a reality; we tend to roll with the punches and adapt. So that's why I think we are going to survive....survive the forces of nature that we seem to have been thrown recently. We will weather this recession just as we weathered one two generations ago, so I am quite optimistic.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Mark Sellew, Owner of Prides Corner Farm
Date: 06/01/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Mark sees an opportunity to develop outstanding and unique plants that should be branded as CT Grown plants. For example, sterile burning bush should be a CT Grown product; there is a real window to turn that into something that will build business for CT lawn and garden industry.
2. Prides Corner Farm illustrates how agriculture has a full range of labor opportunities, from internships to field/manual labor to middle management to sales. A guestworker program that works well for agriculture can fill in some of those needs (especially production labor) that are not met by local labor.
3. One of the ways Mark has counteracted the high cost of doing business in CT has been being at a size and scale of operation where he can provide customers with more frequent and smaller deliveries. Being able to offer smaller deliveries is critical. Demand for frequent and smaller deliveries is driven by his buyers who need this in order to better manage costs, cash, and inventory. Also their depth of inventory is a key competitive advantage of being large; they don't run out of plants in the peak selling season and their scale allows them to do logistics very well.
4. In Mark's view, in order to succeed the nursery producers in CT have to produce a better quality of product that offsets the higher cost of production; it's not enough that it is just locally grown, although consumers really care about nursery products being grown in the same climate. Challenge is to build loyalty to CT nursery products by somehow blending the ct grown/local message.
5. CT Agriculture Experiment Station has been "extraordinary". In the case of boxwood blight, the station played a critical role and worked with his business to control the contamination, although the cost due to lost product was still significant.
6. DEEP regulations (water diversion permitting) present challenges to the agriculture sector.
7. Mark sees a need to recruit and train farmers in Connecticut through VoAg and a strong program at UConn, because this kind of business is not for everyone and it's unclear who is going to be running these farms in the future.
8. Prides Corner helps their customers which are predominantly Independent Garden Centers sell their products with the widest selections of plants and plant brands like White Flower Farm.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles:

1. Input costs – referring to labor costs (we have an \$11m payroll, and it went up another million dollars through the guestworker program). I definitely have higher labor costs with the guestworker program (H2A) but in actuality the higher energy costs have helped me more than hurt me because growers further away (west coast, midwest, south) have had their freight go up tremendously hence my product looks MORE attractive to our local garden center.
2. Labor – we are 32 years old; started using local and Puerto Rican workers, about 15 years ago we saw addition of Mexicans and Guatemalans. We have 500 total employees. Now have 100 Mexicans through the guestworker program (H2A). The rest are local, all colors. The local workers are paid \$15/hr. Forepersons and managers. Very hard workers. Local workers better than I thought. Local workers good at skilled and semi-skilled labor. But I can't get a local worker to do certain parts of agricultural work.
3. Market competition
4. Regulation – There's a lot of regulations. Thank god I'm able to hire good legal help. [DEEP in particular (e.g. water diversion permits)]. Prevailing wage rate – have to pay this to everyone. No more high school kids work at PCF because of this rule.

Notes regarding top four opportunities:

1. Geography – good to be here in CT.
2. Market demand
3. Market supply – economic downturn has led to lower supply
4. Consumer knowledge – I put locally grown on my tag, but this led to a problem in selling it labeled this way in NH (got a call from NH Dept. of Agriculture saying we had broken the law). Our "branding strategy" as one that adds value to the consumer and is a key distinguishing characteristic for Prides.

Section III – Quotes

I'm a big guy, and big is good. Not that small is bad. Economies of scale are so critical to defray the costs that we have.

We have to give compelling reasons to buy ct grown products.

Of 169 towns in Connecticut, I could have my Prides Corner business in about 3 of them. [...]. Being in Lebanon is a godsend. I picked the perfect town for my business.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Bruce Sherman, Bureau of Regulation & Inspection, CT Dept. of Agriculture
Date: 05/18/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Regulatory functions of DoAg are essential to maintain public health, animal and poultry health and consumer confidence in agricultural products purchased. Current lack of regulatory resources is putting agriculture sector at risk; the lack of resources is due to a gradual loss of staff and funding over the past few years, while, at the same time, there have been increased expectations for services as a result of policy changes, legislative initiatives for new programs, and increased regulatory mandates from the federal level.
2. The risk of animal and poultry disease outbreaks is a very real threat to the industry. Increased ease of animal movements and human foreign travel contribute to that threat. There are emerging disease threats that did not exist 20 years ago. Many animal diseases are now more virulent, present higher mortality rates, and often have higher antibiotic resistance.
3. Although CT agriculture has experienced favorable support for expanded funding and new programs by the legislature, agricultural advocacy groups and organizations and the public, the need to adequately provide funding for DoAg regulatory functions to keep pace with additional responsibilities has not been recognized.
4. The regulatory demands on DoAg with respect to livestock and poultry producers has expanded and will continue to do so due to increasing requirements of state and federal disease control programs.
5. The regulatory work of the agency suffers from a failure of the state to adopt technological tools, especially in the area of data management, that would improve both office and field efficiency.
6. Having regulatory staff that understands agriculture is a benefit for farmers, so having regulatory functions fall within DoAg, as opposed to other state agencies, is important.
7. Important to balance support for large and small farmers. Support needs to be nurtured but in a way that is properly directed. Consumers and legislature should be educated about the economic benefits that many of the larger farms contribute to the state's economy.
8. Idea: Refine definition of CT Grown program with respect to livestock and, specifically, require a minimum amount of time that livestock must be raised and/or kept on a CT farm to be considered “CT Grown”. For example, under current program requirements, a person can purchase livestock at an out of state auction and then sell meat as CT Grown even if it has been on a CT farm for only one or two days.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – from any standpoint this is huge in terms of cost of doing business, including infrastructure. Infrastructure is available, but how far do you have to go for it? Example of dairy farmers who are limited to who can install dairy system or repair, or purchase equipment from supply company. Believe there are opportunities to help farmers reduce these costs of production.
2. Regulations – Mostly referring to environmental regulations.
3. Labor – availability as well as skills, and a producer's ability to get it.
4. Market supply – consistent supply is hard because of weather.
5. Animal rights movement - these efforts are not going to go away, driven by the market.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – this is tied to consumer knowledge (see next)
2. Consumer knowledge – this is tied to demand – we've all seen demand increase. At least as this is tied in with food, not sure about green industry. I don't think there is interest on part of consumers as much for locally grown nursery products as there is for locally grown food products.
3. Land availability – we have a fair amount of farmland that isn't being utilized, depending on what area of state you are in. A lot of dairy gone out of business and a lot of that land isn't being used.
4. Geography – our proximity to population dense areas is good for market demand but farmers in other geographic areas have advantages in terms of growing season and input costs.

Section III – Quotes

From regulatory standpoint, I think we hit a good balance between effectively enforcing statutes and regulations and at same time trying to work with producers in a fair and just way to get compliance, unless it is a really egregious situation (if animal or public health is in jeopardy). We will try to work with people rather than issue a cease & desist. So I think we have a different regulatory philosophy from other state agencies.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Tim Slate, owner, Kahn Tractor & Equipment, No. Franklin
Date: 07/05/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Kahn Tractor & Equipment business model is to have good customer service, building strong relationships and trust with buyers, and maintaining premium expertise – this adds up to a competitive advantage post-recession. “I find people appreciate more and enjoy more dealing with people they trust. We are a face to face business.”
2. Tim’s growing customer base is among the part-time farmers who have a higher need for services and expertise provided by Kahn Tractor & Equipment than larger farm businesses.
3. Tim feels the costs for workmen’s compensation insurance in CT are higher than other states, as well as health insurance. This puts all businesses in CT at a competitive disadvantage.
4. Tim finds certain regulatory agencies exhibit a ‘gotcha’ attitude, particularly at DEEP.
5. Tim has found DMV extremely inefficient; registering trucks takes excessive time, plus requirement of bringing a copy of payment for his fuel taxes. He wonders why DMV has not adopted online services.
6. Tim feels in order to stay competitive he has to invest in latest technology and equipment (such as diagnostic equipment). “Either you are in the game or you are not.”
7. Tim sees a clear need for workforce development for mechanics.
8. Tim feels there should be a priority placed on marketing CT Grown products in a mass push, helping to get it into the restaurants and grocery stores.
9. Idea: CT Grown distribution business
10. Idea: two year training program for agriculture mechanics.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – processing and distribution. I think there should be a master plan for CT Grown distribution. There's a lot to it, but that's one of the biggest drawbacks that producers have because no one does the actual distribution of their products. Because it is a time sensitive product it has to be handled in a time sensitive manner. We need this to get into stores and restaurants.
2. Input costs – energy is the big thing, with the exceptional state taxes on energy we are at a definite disadvantage in operating our businesses in the state of CT. My energy costs are up 15% in the last year. Labor is labor. Labor looks at what they take home at the end of the week. Whatever reduces their pay at the end of the week then we are viewed as the villain. Such as health care etc.
3. Other – cost of health insurance in state of CT, driven by 40+ mandates that have been put on health insurance companies to cover; workman's compensation insurance also went up 8%.
4. Regulations – I don't deal with all that many, but trucking industry regulations hit me pretty hard. We do everything in our power to do things right, but it is pretty hard to do that, even register a heavy duty truck. The IRP unit in Wethersfield is not very user friendly. The weight regulation for trucking affects all freight that comes into the state, whether for food or machinery, although it doesn't affect me much directly. These guys coming through the state means they are operating at sub-par efficiency – 20,000# or 10 tons less than they could – means more trucks as a result on the highways, more drivers, gas, fines, etc.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps
2. Input costs – Governor and legislation has direct impact on taxation of fuel.
3. Other – State Insurance Commissioner has direct impact on workman's compensation insurance. Legislation has direct impact on mandates on health insurance. Health insurance and workman's compensation are stifling creativity in the state. Such a closed club in terms of classifications for employees in workmen's comp. No fraud containment. Why do we have a second injury fund in the state of CT?
4. Regulations

Section III – Quotes

The competition is as close as your fingertips on the laptop.

The circle of business life has to keep going. You need an equipment dealer, a fuel dealer, a fertilizer dealer. If local businesses are controlled by an entity in the middle of the U.S. then I think you have big problems on your hands.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Commissioner Catherine Smith, CT Department of Economic and Community Development

Date: 06/27/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. There are important opportunities for fostering partnership between DoAg and DECD around branding (CT Made and CT Grown), agriculture infrastructure investment (e.g. processing, storage, distribution facilities), and developing a strategy for workforce development for agriculture.
2. DECD is focused on heavy hitters (areas where significant job growth can be expected in the future) – insurance, financial services, manufacturing – and they have limited staff to do more – but will support Agriculture as much as possible.
3. DECD's Small Business Express Grant program is very accessible now for agriculture businesses seeking up to \$350k in matching grants; in past these grants were really only available to C-Corp, but now these are open to LLC, S-Corp, anyone with less than 100 employees.
4. Commissioner Smith expressed a genuine willingness to apply her agency's expertise to help structure financial investments in agriculture-related businesses, including agriculture infrastructure (processing, storage, distribution). DECD is highly capable in this arena (e.g. leveraging new market tax credits) and has a variety of programs to help (e.g. loans, loan forgiveness, grants, etc).
5. Commissioner Smith expressed a willingness to provide staff participation in GCAD's work ahead.
6. Commissioner Smith feels the cost of doing business is not so significant compared to the region (NY, PA, New England), but through scale adjustments she sees a real opportunity to be competitive. Addressing scale can counteract the difficulty of high costs of doing business. She referenced Cabot as a good model of using the small business structure to operate as a large business.
7. Commissioner Smith shared that agriculture will be and should be a key component of their state branding work, including TV advertisements for tourism. DECD has identified tourism target audience are families and adult couples (empty nesters).
8. Commissioner Smith is willing to help promote agriculture sector in surrounding large market opportunities – e.g. trade show or product fair where DECD can provide a booth for agriculture, such as the Big E
9. Commissioner Smith's optimism for agriculture sector is based on her interaction with agriculture stakeholders who she views as articulate and well organized, and her sense that the state has been a leader in farmland preservation.

10. Idea: organize a tour of agriculture businesses for Commissioner Smith.
11. Idea for GCAD: the best strategic planning will come from input from stakeholders and strategic partners; and the result needs to be comprehensive, including all the critical components for any sector's growth, such as education, training, marketing, regulation, business development etc.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market competition
2. Consumer knowledge - We still don't have enough people understanding the value of locally grown or able to access it or find it. Don't always know where to find it, may not be able to pay more for locally grown if available in the grocery store.
3. Input costs - Cost of doing business, hard to change this. What is a local business. Hospitals are pretty local. But even Yale is bringing in people from Saudi Arabia for treatment. Maybe it is a scale issue for CT. We're not that different with PA, NY, MA in terms of labor costs or energy costs.
4. Market competition - While that is an important element, it seems we really just can't compete with the bigger scale operations located far away, especially foreign.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Consumer knowledge – we can work on this. Advertising, public relations.
2. Regulations – may be worth looking there, might be very specific needs on this (e.g. fisherman need help).

Haven't heard much about labor and infrastructure, which is something we can make a change on, but haven't heard much about this so far.

Section III – Quotes

Connecticut is a great escape hatch from NY. People want their children to remember there are birds, trees, etc.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Melissa Spear, Executive Director, Common Ground
Date: 06/25/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Common Ground (also known as New Haven Ecology Project, with an environmental education center, charter high school, and urban farm) has a goal that 50% of produce their students eat will be grown on site. In reality Common Ground has to source produce locally, and this is often regionally sourced outside of CT.
2. Common Ground's work is helping to build demand for healthy food through their educational work with kids.
3. Melissa feels we need to better understand urban agriculture and its contribution to the industry. She feels although a lot of food is grown in the city (there are 50 community gardens in New Haven), there is no quantification of how much food is being produced in New Haven nor have any impacts been measured on community, healthy, economy, etc.
4. Melissa feels food service directors need help understanding the opportunity of meshing seasonal local products with their traditional procurement. Food service directors typically do not have relationships with local farmers, so they are unaware where to find local products.
5. Melissa shared that a group of New Haven stakeholders are hoping to identify a few key food items that could be procured for school cafeterias through contract buying (grant pending). Some possible key foods are: potatoes, tomato stock sauce, carrots, green beans, apples.
6. Melissa described how timing issues plus limited freezer space and cooler space has an impact on how much processing and storing local products they can accomplish.
7. Melissa described the 'hyper-local' enthusiasm of customers at the Common Ground farm stand; they love being able to see where it was produced at Common Ground.
8. Melissa believes there is demand for local products in lower income communities, but it has to be affordable and accessible. She shared that Common Ground is partnering with CitySeed to launch a mobile market that will leverage SNAP benefits and Double Value Coupon Program benefits to effectively subsidize fresh produce for customers in communities with limited access.
9. Melissa is very concerned about coming up with ways to provide good produce to low-income residents without relying on subsidizing prices through grants and aid. "I know the demand is out there. It's a travesty...they don't have access to good produce period. This is where I wonder if urban agric can play a role."
10. Melissa feels consumption of locally grown would increase if it were more readily available to the public through grocery stores, if there were more locally-made value-added options (such as tomato sauce from Bridgeport), and if institutions could align better with using seasonal local produce.
11. Idea: Cost analysis so we can figure out all of the pressure points on the high cost of food in CT.
12. Idea: Training in healthy cooking and eating for lower income communities (e.g. in housing projects) would help spur demand for local produce.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps – I don't see a lot of local food getting into the major retailers, it is mostly the farmers markets that have a limited clientele. We just participated with CitySeed writing a grant to strengthen the farm to school path, and we found by researching for the grant that there is no freezer space in New Haven. So there are just some real basic gaps that are barriers when you are trying to bring local food into the institutional buyers.
2. Land availability – we do some new farmer training on site. Land is very, very expensive, hard for new farmers to find land that is reasonable in cost and allows them to grow profitably.
3. Consumer knowledge – I work with inner city neighborhood, people have no concept about agro-industrial complex and where food comes from. They are without that general knowledge. Most shop at S&S. So I am thinking about a specific population.
4. Regulations – related to inability to get more local produce from FreshPoint and the failure of farmers to adopt GAP. We do interact a lot with public health dept due to our food service. While I think New Haven has been pretty good, it's not always easy to deal with local health regulations when serving local food.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Infrastructure gaps - Figuring out how to address these gaps is an opportunity.
2. Land availability
3. Consumer knowledge
4. Other – increasing access. Having access to locally grown produce for a lot of people. There is an economic barrier in urban areas and in certain low income neighborhoods. Even for me, we purchase a half a pig and drive two hours to get that. Most people won't do this. What would it take so I can get those pork chops more readily nearby?

Section III – Quotes

There is a limited number of people that want to dig in the garden and plant a tomato.

We have a lot of people that are very passionate about local food and agriculture that are putting a lot of energy and it gives me hope.

Can we figure out cost? Always have a group of people willing to pay more, and that will support a certain amount of farming, but if we really want agriculture to be a big part of our economy we need to bring the price point down.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Kevin Sullivan, owner, Chestnut Hill Nursery

Date: 05/30/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Kevin feels strongly that we don't have a consumption problem in CT, but rather we have a production problem.
2. Kevin believes that the profitability of farms, of all sizes, is of critical importance to the future of agriculture to the state. He believes that this is a given, and suggests that we tackle this on a number of levels-strategically. This strategy will require time, data, technology, communications and infrastructure to support for farming and farmers, and an integrated and meaningful push to support farms and farming in a way that includes the mid and larger farms of the state which he sees as buoy for smaller farming operations.
 - a. Kevin feels we really need clear data and strategy that focuses on farm profitability. We have lots of agriculture operations that are not doing very well in terms of profitability. We need to track farm profitability to best understand the interventions and levels of support that we can provide for farm viability across the sector. To this end, it would be very helpful to understand what farms and types of farms are most profitable use of farmland in Connecticut (in terms of dollars per acre) and to help identify and promote a diversity of top tier products (including greenhouse/nursery).
 - b. Kevin feels that data and strategy need to *recognize* and *support* full time farmers. This means first and foremost understanding the costs of running a full-time farm business are different than a part-time farmer that has a separate source of income and benefits. If Connecticut is serious about supporting agriculture we will take full time farming into account in terms of data collected, and strategies that we visit for diversifying, promoting, and developing agriculture. Kevin feels that new policies including: policy that accounts for technological advancement, genuine economic development policy that reflects support for small and developing businesses, could be highly beneficial for farm productivity for full time farmers.
3. Kevin: What is important is that agriculture is advancing and profitable, and in order to make that possible we need to support farming as a vocation and include support for the profitability of farms across a wide range of sizes, shapes, colors, and products. The profitability of farming will help to combat soaring land prices, skyrocketing labor costs, and unparalleled risks of farming - this will help to incentivize young farmers into the business and keep us old guys in it.
4. Kevin sees the regulatory environment as a huge threat to doing agriculture business in CT. DEEP's approach, in particular, presents an enormous challenge because the agency refuses to engage in real conversation/observation/communication with agriculture community. Pitfalls include conflicting interpretation of state level and federal laws for storm water management, and outdoor wood furnaces
At the town level, zoning rules are applied differently to brick and mortar operations; e.g. farmers markets enjoy extensive signage compared to Chestnut Hill Nursery.
5. Policy and regulatory issues: Training is needed for politicians that are making political decisions that impact farmers and farm businesses. A critical step in moving agriculture forward is the need to educate policy makers on how their decisions impact farm businesses. This probably needs to happen at every level of government. Policy can make or break agricultural businesses. policy makers need to understand

agricultural and how their decisions directly impact our businesses and when possible and necessary we need to have better ways of negotiating our needs in the policy sphere.

6. At Chestnut Hill Nursery, consumer purchasing behavior is driven by price, not labeling product 'local' and 'CT Grown'. The recently completed marketing focus group conducted by CNLA confirms this and clearly indicates that the consumers decision is based almost solely on a price point. A marketing effort for CT agriculture and its 'local' quality should use a different path; e.g. Marketing efforts for CT agriculture should not only focus on local but also recognize that 40-60% of the Greenhouse Nursery product is exported out of the state and returns hundreds and millions of dollars to the local economy.
7. Aside from the importance of finding ways to market the local aspect of our products, it is important that we can become priced competitively. In order to level the playing field and keep us viable on a global scale we need technology and education programs that keep us relevant and competitive. Other countries are superior to us in terms of education and technology and their approaches to both. University of Connecticut has a role to play, CT Department of Ag has a role to play, farmers themselves have a role to play. But we are already lagging behind and need to seriously consider the technological advances and educational advances that will keep us competitive. Technology and Education are critical components and must not be overlooked.
8. Kevin feels there needs to be more collaboration and communication between UConn, CAES, DoAg, and VoAg so everyone is working together and the 'dots are connected'. [I think you should explain the "dots are connected" part. This is important because it is probably the "juicy" part of whatever you were saying.
9. Kevin sees the pressure to get GAP certification as the result of the agriculture community failing to reassure consumers that their products of safe, and letting the media tell the story instead. Now that customers are asking for GAP, Kevin feels growers need to react and get certified.
10. Idea: GCAD should meet monthly in order to help with transparency for this strategic planning work, as a counteracting strategy to people feeling frozen out, and to help GCAD members build a working relationship with each other.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles:

1. Input costs – in regards to labor, energy, taxes – There is a very high cost of doing business in this state. I can't manage my business or control these costs because I am at the mercy of the legislators (e.g. diesel tax and heating oil tax).
2. Market competition – referring to products from Canada, and also Mexico and regional competition (e.g. DE and MD). They can produce and land a product cheaper than we can do it here (even with increased transportation) Note: Kevin observes that their ability to do that points directly to our gaps in technological production techniques.
3. Regulations – it's insane and it's getting worse; adds to our costs.
4. Labor

Notes regarding top four opportunities:

1. Market competition – We have tons of consumers, we need to encourage innovation in order to access these consumers.
2. Market demand – Not only 3 million people in state, plus NY and Boston. Lots of consumers and lots of customers.
3. Geography – we are real close to consumers, small state, close borders, can efficiently manage that.
4. Land availability – there is lots of underutilized and fallow land. There is so much farmland available.

Section III – Quotes

Draft



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Henry Talmage, Executive Director of CT Farm Bureau Association

Date: 05/30/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. We will never really be able to compete by lowering costs of production; the only way to address the reality of higher costs of production here in CT will be for producers in CT to move in the direction of specializing their production with branded value-added products.
2. In order to increase production of specialized value-added branded products, farmers will need:
 - infrastructure that is on-farm or shared among a few farms (season extension, storage, and processing)
 - specialized labor and more expensive labor (marketing, service, processing, sales, distribution, drivers)
 - land use policy that is consistent with this kind of production.
3. Agri-tourism is an important piece of moving specialized, value-added branded products to consumers (including tourists from out-of-state). We need to work on understanding this opportunity and avoiding the train-wreck that is coming from the business needs of this kind of agriculture vs. land use regulations.
4. Increased specialization of products will make better use of available farmland for which it is most suited (considering location and parcel characteristics).
5. We need to understand both our own strength and weaknesses and those of our competitors for ‘local’ in the region (eastern PA, NJ, Hudson, Valley, MA and RI), to determine our greatest opportunities in the regional market.
6. We have a competitive advantage by sitting in the middle of the corridor of NY-Boston, but how do we take advantage of that?
7. We really don’t understand local demands as well as we think we do. We don’t understand the depths and limits of local demand.
8. We could really benefit from a better understanding of how towns can impact economic development through policies that impact local agriculture businesses.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – across the board this is a real challenge, added to this list are taxes, there are some underlying reality that it is going to be more expensive to do business in CT, -- economies of scale, tax structure, etc – a reality we have to face.
2. Labor availability/skills – for production (harvesting, planting, etc) and in terms of value-added workers (marketing, service, processing, sales, distribution, drivers). Both of these needs are a big challenge from labor point of view. Our agriculture model in CT will include a higher %age of labor than commodity production.
3. Market competition – I think one of the significant challenges here has to do with the sub-category of regional competition. Local production is a small piece of all agriculture, but there is significant competition in the narrow share of the market that looks a lot like Connecticut agriculture (Hudson Valley, MA, RI, NJ, etc). If we are going to go after that part of the market we have to understand how we 'stack up' compared to other regional 'local' growers/businesses.
4. Geography – We are dealing with a marketplace that has come to expect the lack of season in their product. For us to make meaningful inroads we have to look beyond in-season. How do we make 52-week season impact and what are the technology challenges we need to overcome. We have a real limiting factor due to season.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – The number one thing we have going for us is 'where we are'. It's important to talk about CT and CT consumption, but we are within Boston-NY corridor and we should be looking there for our opportunity. We may find our marketplace is really a regional marketplace. Transportation corridor that is ideally suited to that. Our location is 'better' than their location, how do we capitalize on our advantage of being in the middle of that corridor?
2. Market demand – A useful tool in all of this is a population map, where is the population and overlay of disposable income, if you do that you start to realize how CT jumps off the map. We should recognize that and we should look for niche marketing opportunities, not try to be everything to everybody. Just because we can grow it doesn't mean we can do it in a cost-effective manner. Maybe we can grow strawberries in CT, but maybe we should grow a packaged product that can travel that is a premium product. Really need to look at specialty markets.
3. Land availability – There is a difference between raw acreage and land that meets specific needs for production. There may be either proactively or by default a focus on land based on its attributes that is more strategic. So it's not what we have, but where we should be. We're going to see over time specialized production and agri-tourism will grow where there is a natural transportation flow. Need to look at existing land and determine what really works there. May see smaller specialized farms that function well on account of where they are located. May see some realignment as generation shift from older to newer farmer owners. I don't think we are really seeing a lack of farmland as a limiting factor.
4. Infrastructure gaps – There are infrastructure gaps for individual farms, less as industry-wide. At a business specific level, I can see more and more issues such as storage, processing, value-added components that help address season extension and can be on-farm or serve just a small group of farms.

Very specialized operations that have very good competitive branding that will need small, de-centralized infrastructure improvements. May see small farms banding together to do processing; will see more branding of product by the producers at small scale rather than large scale infrastructure. Would have to see higher price return on these value-added products. On a per unit basis each commodity costs more to produce here than elsewhere. The only pathway is to take over more control of the value-added processing and get it closer to customers. We cannot compete on price with canned beans in the general marketplace. We are in a middle of marketplace that values farmers as being local, and they are willing to pay a premium for that. If a farmer is able to take the raw product and make it branded in a way that is associated with the farm, you have a higher shot at keeping more return on that product. Infrastructure really needs to be producer owned and controlled.

Section III – Quotes

We should give up the notion of ever being a low cost producer of anything. Recognize the reality of our geography and that is not an outcome we can get to.

We need the industry to specialize in higher end, value-added, branded products and look beyond borders as our market region. If it works in CT, it might work just as well in Boston and NY.

I think we spend a lot of time on misguided efforts, and we really need to understand what the particulars of market forces and the realities of costs are. Oftentimes we sit down and convince each other about how great the future is without a good understanding of how to get there.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Don Tuller, Tulmeadow Farm, West Simsbury

Date: 07/06/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. Don is developing his own infrastructure (expanding ice cream manufacturing space into a commercial kitchen) to do his own value-added processing; he has heard ideas of a cooperatively owned facility, but he is not waiting for this to happen.
2. Don expressed interest in advanced growing systems, beyond season extension technology, in order to be a more reliable supplier of product. CT growers don't seem to have much access to expertise, demonstration projects, or research on energy efficiency.
3. Don is concerned that some farmers are overly reliant on grant programs that might not be available in the future.
4. Don has not needed to apply for DEEP permitting for irrigation, but he has the perception that this process may be onerous.
5. Don feels the challenge of regulations for farmers is knowing what regulations that you might be violating that you are not even aware of.
6. Don finds that producers in CT can get dispirited thinking that costs are so high here and so they should leave – there may be an advantage to farming in other states, but there is not a huge advantage.
7. Don feels that training in the state is being done pretty well and there are a fair number of options. However, Don noted that when a new production idea or technique gets a lot of exposure through training it can gradually affect margins and reach a saturation point (e.g. greenhouse tomatoes).
8. Don feels the biggest threat to CT agriculture is labor availability.
9. Don's customers are most interested in whether he grew the products, or if he knows the farmer who grew it – even if it comes from MA. This assurance from Don himself means more to his customers than the CT Grown brand.
10. Don's experiences with inspectors from DoAg, DCP, and local health district have been very fair.
11. Don wonders what will happen in the future to all the acreage that is currently devoted to dairy, and what other high volume use can that land serve? The answer to this will likely point to infrastructure needs for processing, etc.
12. Don sees a big threat to local farms coming from Big Box discount food sellers (e.g. WalMart) due to their ability to bring in very low cost food which is an alternative to locally produced food which costs more because we need to charge more to cover our costs.
13. Possibly well intentioned legislation, such as GMO labeling, is pushed by people who are not involved in production of those products and lack understanding of economic impacts.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

1	2	3	4	5
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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – specifically energy, whether there is electricity, fuel. And labor.
2. Regulations – whether GAP, or water reg. Don't know what is coming down from Army Corps, but also state regulations on irrigation.
3. Market competition – we depend on direct marketing. Just saturation of large supermarkets in the marketplace. Consumers are used to having things 12 months a year. Expectation of local grown season is so short, and seasonality aspect of this. International competition and from other parts of the country.
4. Labor availability/skills - Labor challenges as well. Failure of government to deal with guestworker issues. Ultimately I am afraid we will lose our ability to produce food.
5. Infrastructure gaps – the hope of maintaining the critical mass of agriculture is in using larger acreage as a crop. If we transition out of dairy how will we keep this land productive. Large acreage mechanization. Really isn't any place to take the stuff – maybe some local opportunity for grain production.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – close to markets. We do have season length disadvantage, but we do have relatively adequate and regular rainfall which is supportive of agriculture. Community is very supportive of local agriculture. We have opportunities to direct market, which means getting a higher price.
2. Market demand – if we do it well, there is a local market demand.
3. Natural forces – The fact that we are not subject to these droughts nor catastrophic flooding because of our watershed areas (most cropland not prone to flooding).
4. Consumer knowledge – we have CT Grown, of course that is a work in progress.

Section III – Quotes

[In regards to animal welfare...] Don't ask an atheist to write your religious service. Shouldn't ask a vegan to write the cooking instructions for your hamburger.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Gregory Weidemann, Dean of College of Agriculture & Natural Resources, University of Connecticut
Date: 05/31/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. UConn CANR is engaged in helping to strengthen agriculture with limited resources and staff, as evidenced by recent investment in economic impact studies, IPM programming, GAP training, turf and non-invasive programs.
2. CANR and DoAg and CAES are all natural partners in addressing needs of industry stakeholders, but that partnership is limited by funding.
3. Dean Weidemann feels that addressing infrastructure needs for agriculture (aggregation and distribution, storage, light-processing) represents an important opportunity for growing the industry. Small cooperative models that build and own this infrastructure ought to be considered.
4. Dean Weidemann feels the green industry clearly has unique needs, but he does not really understand those needs yet, nor is CANR serving this industry adequately through extension. There is great growth potential for greenhouse and nursery and an opportunity to take what is being done in Europe and apply it here.
5. Dean Weidemann sees an opportunity in helping producers access larger markets – through farm to institution, larger/regional farmers markets, and making inroads in retail stores by adopting new technologies in season extension, light processing, and storage.
6. Declines in funding for CANR from federal and state resources have negatively impacted the industry due to the resulting reductions in extension training and technical services.
7. If the GCAD could develop a strategic plan that clearly identifies needs and direction, then UConn CANR would look to put extension and resources into place to make that happen.

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Input costs – I hear this from stakeholders pretty consistently. We are a heavily unionized state so labor costs are high. Energy costs are high. Going to be an ongoing challenge for all aspects of agriculture. Feel the University needs to take a stronger role in addressing this challenge.
2. Infrastructure gaps – in regards to food production at least, see these gaps in terms of infrastructure lost over time along with the shift away from local agriculture. How do we regain this?
3. Labor availability/skills – hear this from several sectors, including nursery and dairy.
4. Farmland availability – an ongoing challenge, limitations to how much is really out there and available. Our farm operations are very fragmented, and this introduces cost challenges.

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geography – we are ideally suited for a lot of local and regional production because of proximity to population centers, and haven't taken full advantage of that.
2. Market demand – as you look at local food system, there is unmet demand and additional opportunity, but we haven't gone about it in a systematic way in how to address this.
3. Consumer knowledge – consumer demand for local is so strong.

Section III – Quotes

University role is showing producers the business models and then producers can pick up what they want. Our role is not to tell producers what to do, but bring them options.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: David Yandow, Fresh Point

Date: 05/24/12

Section I – Take Aways

Following each interview, the team discussed what they heard and agreed that the following points were important to share with GCAD members

1. New processing capacity would be a game changer and could make our CT Grown products available year-round. Technology that should be considered includes pre-cooling, sterilization, IQF, light processing, packaging, storage.
2. In David’s view, GAP is going to be a requirement for producers that want to sell through distributors. He feels the state can play a big role helping farmers prepare for third party GAP audits, referencing the coaching farmers receive from MA Dept of Agricultural Resources (agency staff write food safety plans, evaluate food safety manual, pre-inspect farms, and schedule audit).
3. CT producers have a real advantage because their product is ripe a few weeks ahead of other growers in the region, and if their product is first in the stores they may get to stay there throughout the season of customer demand.
4. In David’s view, the agriculture industry should gear up resources to supply the grocery stores/retailers; there is more potential growth in this direction than in sales to institutions.
5. Buyers among the institutions and the grocery stores are satisfied by a product delivered that is labeled ‘locally grown’ or ‘regionally grown’ (i.e. they do not necessarily insist on CT Grown).

Section II – Core Questions

On a scale of 1-5 (5 is highest), how optimistic are you about the future of Connecticut agriculture?

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The following notes attempt to relate the spirit of what was said to the interview team in regards to obstacles and opportunities and are recorded here in conversation format.

Notes regarding top four obstacles to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Market demand – anybody can grow stuff, the hard part is selling it. That’s what we were always good at. We have somewhat of a demand now, and we are on the cusp of blowing it up and going big.

2. Regulations – specifically GAP certification – just found out that even the tobacco guys are going to be required to be GAP certified. Some of our farmers are really fighting so hard on this. I am personally against all of this regulatory stuff. I tell the farmers - these are things you should be doing anyway. We can have classes here or at FreshPoint or Vernon TAC – but we need someone on the payroll who is going to provide one-on-one help to farmers trying to get certified. Farmers are scared by GAP, they say it is hard to get ready for the final exam.
3. Market supply – we are not going to have enough stuff to meet demand.
4. Labor – has always been a problem – we have to make it as easy as possible for the farmers. There are times farmers can't get their stuff picked. At Fresh Point, we also have a hard time getting labor in our business and finding the right people as drivers. There is no processing in the state of CT. There is a little guy doing this in Regional Market in Hartford. A lot of this produce can be processed, but you need to have customers (we have a lot of customers).

Notes regarding top four opportunities to the growth of Connecticut agriculture:

1. Geographic – look where we are! S&S has a major warehouse in MA, Shaws is in MA, Hannaford/Price Chopper/Big Y – they are all here. Consumer population is an advantage. We are two/three weeks ahead of MA, sometimes 4 weeks ahead of Maine – great for when grocery stores want to run things (first guy in usually gets to ride the horse the rest of the way).
2. Infrastructure – if we could erect a processing facility, a great role for aggregator to take on who has the capacity to pre-cool crops as soon as they come out of the field (we have been teaching farmers how to air stack beans and air cool beans, chimney stack of beans and squash). Farmers could bring in the produce and we could pre-cool it. Some do hydrochill- but it is expensive to run (such as Chapman Farm). This is what they are doing it down south. Very little pre-cooling done here (our notion is to stack it and throw it in the cooler). If we built a processing facility, there would be multiple services. We could do IQF (nitrogen frozen); we can extend the season for Connecticut Grown fruits and vegetables by offering frozen IQF products to customers in the winter and spring months. Market demand is there for sterile product. We offer “extended season locally grown processed items” for cauliflower, corn kernels, peppers, green beans. IQF program at Fresh Point is working with a major food service company. Processing plant gives us a dock. We have a Hartford tomato packing plant – doing very well – using gas green tomatoes, not local.
3. Market competition – we have a ct-grown item, how can you compete if you are from Ohio
4. Availability of land – I think there is a lot of land out there.

Section III – Quotes

[In regards to GAP certification] - I tell the farmers - it's like getting up in the morning, brushing their teeth, combing their hair. These are things you should be doing anyway.