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Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt and Rep. Joe Courtney Lead Connecticut Congressional Delegation to Urge Changes on USDA's Hemp Production Rules

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Joe Courtney (CT-02) and Connecticut Agriculture Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt released a letter they sent to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to share comments related to USDA's interim final rules for hemp production. The letter, which was signed by the entire Connecticut Congressional delegation, notes that the existing interim rule – particularly the portions that deal with the sampling, testing, and disposal of industrial hemp – places heavy financial burdens on a promising but fledgling industry that cannot afford them.

In their letter, Commissioner Hurlburt and the Connecticut Congressional delegation encourage USDA to make specific changes to the interim rule so that the hemp production program is less restrictive for Connecticut farmers. For example, the USDA's current rule would force hemp growers to have their product tested using only DEA-approved labs, even though Connecticut does not currently have any DEA-registered laboratories. In their letter, the delegation urges USDA to allow any properly trained grower, or others who meet requirements under the law, to collect the hemp samples themselves, and argue that a robust inspection and random sampling and testing program by state inspectors is adequate to ensure compliance.

Other recommended changes include corrections in the areas of requirements for the destruction of the crop, an overly restrictive negligence threshold, and Farm Service Agency reporting requirements. In their letter, Commissioner Hurlburt and the Connecticut Congressional delegation wrote:

“As strong advocates for hemp production in Connecticut, we write to you today to share our comments and concerns related to the interim final rules for hemp production published by your agency on October 31, 2019. While they help define the path forward for our farmers who wish to grow hemp, they contain a number of restrictive requirements that may prevent these very people from even taking advantage of the new agricultural opportunity.

“The parts of the program that deal with sampling, testing, and disposal are most onerous and costly to a would-be grower. Imposing DEA-compliant requirements at each step of the growing and harvesting adds additional financial burdens on a fledgling industry that cannot afford them. [...] Our state’s hemp farmers want an opportunity to grow hemp, and have it treated the same as any other agricultural commodity. The rule as currently written assumes hemp is a controlled substance until it is proven otherwise.

[...]

“State departments of agriculture are perfectly capable of managing this program as has been demonstrated during the pilot phase.

“We hope that these suggestions will be given consideration as USDA works to implement the 2018 Farm Bill legalizing hemp as a newly revived and viable agricultural commodity in the United States.”

Commissioner Hurlburt and the Connecticut Congressional delegation’s full letter, including a complete list of recommended changes to the USDA’s interim final rules for hemp production, is [available online](#), and has been included below.

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