

**PA 490 Working Group Meeting**  
**March 10, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 450 Columbus Boulevard in Hartford by Office of Policy and Management (OPM) Undersecretary Martin Heft at 9:32 AM.

Undersecretary Heft asked everyone to make self-introductions.

Working Group Attendance:

Undersecretary Martin L. Heft, Department of Agriculture (DoAg) Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt, Christopher Martin, Paul Larson, Damon Braasch, Nicholas D'Addario, Mark Walter, John Emmanuel, Keith Bishop, Francis Whelan, Kim Grijalva, Ben Freund, Mike Gilman, Bonnie Burr, Connor Bunovsky, Ella Kennen, Jennie Kapszukiewicz, John Casertano and Bill Lee.

Guests: Dr. Charles Towe of UConn and Keith Stechschulte of Farm Credit East

State agency staff attendance: Dr. Kayleigh Royston, DoAg; Amanda Samokay, DoAg and Nathan Wilson, DoAg.

Undersecretary Heft mentioned that the meeting packet includes notes of the February 10, 2026 meeting. He noted that at the request of the last meeting, there will be two presentations today on the current process for developing land use values. He reminded everyone of the Governor's directive and that the presentations are to outline the current practices that have been utilized in the past few cycles. He added that our overall task is to make recommendations of next steps and options so we have something to build forward from and the past may hold lessons, but it is our shared focus, collaboration and commitment to process that will shape what comes next. He then recognized Commissioner Hurlburt for opening remarks.

Commissioner Hurlbut thanked the members of the Working Group for their continued attention to improving the PA 490 data collection, review and valuation processes. He continued that the presentations focus on how the data has been collected and evaluated for the PA 490 process and that this process has not changed significantly over the past cycles and this is an opportunity to learn about that process and inform us of where and how we can improve it. He thanked the UConn Zwick Center for Food and Resource Policy and Farm Credit East for joining and for thinking about how to improve the process. He requested that members to be thinking about how we can achieve the goal of making recommendations for consideration – what does success look like, what are the challenges that would be faced with alternative methods, any costs associated with a revised program, etc. and that the Governor has mentioned stability and certainty for land owners, but are there other items that we should keep top of mind as we progress through these meetings.

**Business:**

Commissioner Hurlburt introduced Dr. Charles Towe for a presentation on the UConn Zwick Report. Dr. Towe presented and discussed the slide deck.

Dr. Towe offered the following recommendations:

- Create a standardized and complete farm database that includes both contact information with emails and acreage details.
- Reporting values by land class.
- Delineate between organic and non-organic.
- Knowledge of agriculture intensity and use of land.

Questions from the workgroup members on the presentation materials:

- Ms. Kapszukiewicz inquired on the differences of the 2020 and 2025 survey lists, and the reference to municipalities in 2025. Dr. Towe noted that the list was from DoAg, and they didn't reach out to assessors. Undersecretary Heft explained that municipal assessors are notified as another group to assist in outreach of the survey to any PA 490 landowners, for example putting a notice up in their office. He added that some assessors did fill out the survey improperly and they were not allowed in the sample data. Dr. Towe noted this is a random sample, not a census.
- Mr. Braasch asked about the forestry report that assessors are responsible for submitting and if this information could be used in any way to obtain mailing information. Mr. Martin noted that they receive a summary with the total number of parcels and acres, but not individual or parcel information.
- Mr. Bishop inquired if the DEEP annual report could be provided to the group. Additionally, he noted that it seems like variations over the years on attempt to get responses and reach a saturation point. Dr. Towe noted that they targeted those that replied previously, and in follow-up to get more responses utilized the initial distribution.
- Mr. Freund stated noted the problem is straight-forward and not getting participation. As a landowner it's incumbent to file 490 status, should be a requirement of landowner to participate. He added that the land classifications should not be part of the survey, as confusing.
- Mr. Emmanuel felt there is responsibility on local Assessor to get data (landowners, email, etc.) in an organized way for all municipalities. No need to work in 169 different silos.
- Mr. Bishop agreed that the database is the big problem. He noted that the acreage and volume have no correlation to rental values, and needing another methodology evaluating it, not to overly spend time on trying to develop a solution.
- Mr. Braasch stated that Assessors do have list of people who are classified with PA 490 qualified, but do not collect email addresses. He added that land classifications are

needed for value and use; and that there are other ways to capitalize different forms of income (i.e. income tax return).

- Ms. Burr commented that this is about the land, not the farmer's income. She added that land is competitive and what is capable of being planted on that land. She reiterated that the fact is this is about the soil, not the farmer's income.
- Ms. Grijalva noted that she is in the field of communication and inquired on the survey. She added that a multi-facet approach is needed, and to think about audience. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that the survey was part of multi efforts including multiple postcards, Agriculture reports, emails and social channels. He added that there are challenges with all those methodologies. Commissioner Hurlburt noted that the survey data results and process are available in the original packet, the UConn report and Farm Credit East report and recommended all take advantage of reading through for more information.

Commissioner Hurlburt introduced Keith Stechshulte for a presentation on the Farm Credit East Report. Mr. Stechshulte presented and discussed the slide deck.

Mr. Stechshulte offered the following recommendations:

- Conduct an annual land rental survey.
- Eliminate land classes from the survey and focus on usable acreage and land utilization.
- Verify survey derived values and value changes against market value changes by a licensed appraiser.
- Formula derived approach across land classes that is consistently applied.

In response to the value of farmland increasing, Commissioner Hurlburt noted that DoAg does have data on average cost per acre based on development rights. He added that the average cost per acre for 2025 was \$7,400 for development rights. This increased from \$5,500 in 2024 and \$6,400 in 2023. The state is capped at \$20,000 per acre.

Questions from the workgroup members on the presentation materials:

- Mr. Freund noted the different markets on development rights and PA 490 is highly incentivized. He reiterated the need to participate in survey to get PA 490.
- Mr. Braasch inquired about the capitalization, and if there was a range. Undersecretary Heft noted the rates are all summarized in report.
- Ms. Burr noted that towns look at farmland as an economic business opportunity and others look at it for quality of life. Need to review the cost of services less than residential development. She added that the most recent cost of services to farmland by American Farmland Trust is about ten years old.

- Mr. Whelan re-iterated that the PA 490 application is filed out once until there is a change of ownership. There are rental agreements between the parties, but not part of the PA 490 application. Undersecretary Heft noted that this could be a recommendation to complete an annual statement/survey to keep the PA 490 status active.
- Ms. Grijalva noted the leasing form and that it breaks down the categories. This can be tied back to PA 490. She questioned mathematics in the process. Mr. Stechshulte noted the limited data, and taking similar land classed to make somewhat of an objective decision versus making a purely subjective guess. He added by doing so, it drove the numbers up on those bottom-end land class categories.
- Ms. Kennen noted the focus on the methodology line up and requested that we do not spend time thinking about the means but thinking about what we want to achieve. She added as we get deeper into the discussion, we consider more methodologies and have criteria to weigh our thoughts against.
- Mr. Freund remarked that he cannot accept the excuse of people not knowing what they have, where they come from. For this benefit I get an obligation - Get the privilege, there is an obligation.
- Mr. Bishop inquired on further clarifying the data on the land classification breakdown split and gave an example. Mr. Stechshulte noted he couldn't speak to the exact and he didn't complete the work, but that Mr. Bishop's analogy is largely what was done. He noted round two was more of a subjective approach, due to the lack of data and statistical relevancy.
- Ms. Grijalva noted the responses with zero, barter, nonpayment and cash lease factors. Mr. Stechshulte noted they were not factored into the results.
- Ms. Kapszukiewicz stated that we have identified ways we could capture better data. There are low-cost methods such as an insert in tax collection bills. She asked if DoAg and the state want better representation. Commissioner Hurlburt stated it is an easy yes to get more data. There was better ability to do multiple rounds as funding was in place for 2025 due to OPM securing \$50,000. Determining the right number needed and a representative sample to provide more accurate data will provide better outcomes. Ms. Kapszukiewicz added that it is important to get representation across the entire state, not just particular regions.
- Mr. Martin provided clarification on the annual Assessor's report. He noted that pursuant to CGS 12-107d (k) municipal assessors report land classified as forest land to the State Forester in June. As of October 1st, an 83% response had been received.
  - [Classification of Land as Forest Land](#),
  - [Form for Annual Qualified Forester's Report to State Forester](#)

### Parcels and acres classified as PA 490 land

as of October 10, 2025, with 83% of towns reporting

490 Classification	Number of Acres	Number of Parcels
Farm (including any underwater farmlands used for aquaculture)	210,199	10,615
Forest	475,647	9,120
Open Space	130,836	9,188
10 Mill	5,918	102
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>822,600</b>	<b>29,025</b>

- Mr. Lee stated that at the end of the day we are only receiving 15% survey response at best. The product is only going to be as good as the data. We need to find a better way to get better return rates.
- Commissioner Hurlburt asked Mr. Stechshulte about data received by Farm Credit East when making financial decisions for a farm. Mr. Stechshulte noted that the data submitted is for a financial incentive. There are data points that could inform the capitalization rate as opposed to getting it from the landowners, but there is a confidential issue with the customer. The lending is based on what the farm can afford to repay, more so than the asset.

Undersecretary Heft thanked both Dr. Towe and Mr. Stechshulte for their presentations and time.

#### **Next Meeting:**

Undersecretary Heft noted the next meeting would be virtual only on March 24th and will include the topics of other states and national methods and court cases. He added that April 14th will follow that. He then called on Ms. Grijalva about future meeting topics.

Ms. Grijalva noted a farmer led breakout group has met on same topics as are coinciding with this work group, just allowing for a bit more fluid conversation in an informal environment. This will hopefully ladder up to what is being discussed in this group. The sessions are being recorded and pulling out key takeaways that will be shared. She offered anyone wanting to participate to contact her.

#### **Written Comments:**

Undersecretary Heft noted that included in the meeting packet are the written comments received since our last meeting. He asked that if they have not yet been read, please take the time to read through the thoughts and suggestions. These ideas will be helpful as we formulate recommendations and areas to explore further.

**Public Comments:**

- Duncan Wilbur - Submitted three pieces of comments that speak for themselves. Just looking for direction from group to decide if we are going to do a survey and how it is going to be rolled out.
- Robert Maddox - He noted that about a dozen years ago, he proudly entered the PDR program and wanted to bring to this committee the impact of assessment changes on those farms that have made the decision to be permanently protected. The bottom-line suggestion he made is whatever amounts determined on assessment, he believes that all PDR farms should pay half that amount, and they should be set out, and the reason being is he never took into consideration that there'd be wide variations of assessment value. He took into consideration there'd be variations of the mill rate. Additionally, he noted the Farm Service Agency map which shows exactly the number of acres.

Commissioner Hurlburt noted that Ag Day at Capital will be on Wednesday, March 18th with 50 organizations presenting, and encouraged members to attend.

Undersecretary Heft thanked all for their participation and support of this process and adjourned the meeting at 11:12 AM.