Department of Agriculture

Bryan P. Hurlburt, *Commissioner*
Established: 1925
Statutory Authority: CGS. Sec. 22.1
Central Office: 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103
Number of Employees: 52
Recurring operating expenses: $8,182,243
Organizational Structure: Office of the Commissioner, Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation, Bureau of Aquaculture, Bureau of Regulatory Services, with Business Office and Human Resources support from the Department of Administrative Services, and legal services provided by the Office of the Attorney General.

Mission

The Department of Agriculture's mission is to foster a healthy economic, environmental, and social climate for agriculture by developing, promoting, and regulating agricultural businesses; protecting agricultural and aquacultural resources; enforcing laws pertaining to public health, animal health and animal care; and promoting an understanding among the state's citizens of the diversity of Connecticut's agriculture, its cultural heritage, and its contribution to the state's economy.

Statutory Authority

Statutory authority for the Department of Agriculture is found in Sections 12, 22, 26 and other sections of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Public Service

The Department of Agriculture provides public benefits by empowering its three bureaus to promote and protect Connecticut Agriculture. Through the agency's Bureau of Regulatory Services, inspectors ensure domestic animals' health and wellbeing, the safety of produce and dairy products, and that local agricultural businesses are properly trained to meet food safety requirements. The Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation provides direct assistance and programs to farm operations entering, diversifying, or expanding their agricultural businesses. It makes direct positive impacts on communities through the Farmland Preservation Program, the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Farm to Chef, and Farm to School programs. The Bureau of Aquaculture oversees marine and inland aquaculture production activities, administers the state Shellfish Sanitation Program, and operates the laboratory in Milford, leasing and restoration of shellfish beds, and licensing of persons engaged in commercial harvesting of shellfish.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture continues to inform the public with direct engagement of media representatives; and local, state, and federal government officials about various aspects of

Connecticut agriculture through its Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report, news releases, social media, small group or one-on-one meetings, and radio and television appearances.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications conducts a full range of activities that serve the Department and its stakeholders. The office manages public information, media and community relations, social media, marketing communications, emergency and crisis communications, and internal communications.

- 58 press releases and statements distributed to the media
- 1,125 media mentions generated reaching an audience of 2.8 million with a publicity value of $36.88 million based on Critical Mention analytics.
- Responded to more than 200 media inquiries with interviews or statements
- 29 press events coordinated, primarily with the Governor or Lt. Governor
- 25 industry events attended to engage with producers and share services and programs available.
- Social media growth included:
  - 10,760 followers on Facebook (+2% increase)
  - 6,965 followers on Instagram (+25% increase)

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Government Affairs is responsible for managing legislative and regulatory information and coordinates referral activities, which include development of the agency's legislative proposals and application of strategies to achieve the goals of DoAg's legislative agenda. The office tracks and analyzes legislation, oversees the development of the agency's regulations and policy, and ensures all programs and policies are implemented according to statute and in a manner that reflects the mission of the department. The office handles inquiries, requests and other related constituent services for congressional members, state legislators, state agencies, lobbyists, and members of the public.

During the 2025 legislative session, DoAg achieved the following:

- Proposed and successfully passed Public Act 25-7, An Act Concerning the Minimum Quarantine for Certain Dogs and Cats Exposed to Rabies, which reduces the minimum quarantine period for some animals, reducing cost to rescues and municipalities who house these animals and eliminates the rabies quarantine waiver process.
- Supported the successful passage of Public Act 25-33, An Act Concerning the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Municipal and State Planning, and the use of Neonicotinoids and Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides, which prohibits using a pesticide that has any neonicotinoid, unless, upon receiving a request, the DEEP Commissioner determines that there is no other effective control option. To make this determination, the bill requires the commissioner to consult with CAES and allows the CAES Director to consult with the Pesticide Advisory Committee.

  The bill exempts from the ban any neonic that is:

  1. For use in, or application to, agriculture, seeds, ornamental shrubbery, or trees; or;
  2. Not labeled for plant use, like those for personal care products, pet care, veterinary purposes, or indoor or structural pest control.

- Supported the successful passage of Public Act 25-152, An Act Concerning Programming at the Department of Agriculture and Other Farming and Agriculture Related Provisions, which;
    - Clarifies fees for soil amendments and fertilizer, ensuring parity;
    - Establishes a refundable business tax credit for farmer investments in eligible machinery, equipment, and buildings;
    - Increases the tax exemption for farm machinery from $100k to $250k;
    - Allows for the drone application of seeds and pesticides by those licensed in pesticide application and holding a drone license from DEEP;
    - Amends State Building code to exempt hoop houses and high tunnels from some building requirements;
    - Establishes a Farmers' Crop Loss Reimbursement Grant, to be bond funded;
    - Grants immunity from civil liability to agritourism businesses that offer the general public the opportunity to observe or participate in agriculture-related activities;
    - Revises the oyster harvest season to better support the industry and oyster spawning times;
    - Establishes a Manure Management Grant Program, to be bond funded;
    - Clears up jurisdictional responsibility with PFAS in fertilizer and soil amendments between DEEP and DoAg;
- In Public Act 25-168, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2027, and Making Appropriations Therefor, and Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items Implementing the State Budget;
    - Increases annual allocation for Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program;
    - Allocates funding for the Local Food for Schools Incentive Program and revises language to make the State Department of Education the lead agency on this program;
    - Increase in the Community Investment Account allocation to the Agricultural Viability Grant, Farm Transition Grant, CT Grown account, Farm Link, Seafood Development Council, Farm Wine Development Council, and Food Policy Council, among others;
- In Public Act 25-174, An Act Authorizing and Adjusting Bonds of the State and Concerning Grant Programs, State Grant Commitments for School Building Projects, Revisions to the School Building Projects Statutes and Various Provisions Revising and Implementing the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2027, there is additional funding for land access grants, to be run by DoAg.

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION

The Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation is comprised of three units: the Agricultural Development Unit, the Climate Smart Agriculture Unit, and the Farmland Preservation Unit. The bureau offers programs and services that assist farms with entering, diversifying, and expanding their agricultural businesses, incorporating climate smart agricultural practices, supporting the responsible dual use of agrivoltaics and administers the Farmland Preservation Program, among many others.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT

- Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
    - Redeemed over $1,000,000 of FMNP benefits in program year 2024 (FY25) to 30,317 WIC participants and more than 21,000 seniors benefiting 204 certified Connecticut farmers at 102 farmers' markets and 23 certified farm stands.

- Farm Transition Grant
    - Awarded $527,995 to 29 farms across Connecticut to support production of CT Grown legumes, mushrooms, sheep, poultry, honey, berries, cut flowers, eggs, beef, grapes, hydroponic lettuce, maple syrup, apple cider, sweet potatoes, and apples.
    - Of the 29 awards, 12 supported new and beginning farmers with critical equipment to fortify their businesses; 8 increased farm production and operation with advanced equipment; 1 enabled the research and development of a new farm product, specialty dried beans; and 8 propelled farms towards diversification by funding projects to produce a new product or offer a new service.
    - Of the 29 awards, 20 supported farms that had not received a Farm Transition Grant from CT DoAg within the last 5 years.
    - Total projected value of awarded projects is $3,942,534, a 27% increase over 2024 awards, generating increased economic activity for the state.
- Agriculture Enhancement Grant
    - Awarded $576,125 to 22 municipalities, councils of government and non-profits across CT.
    - Of the 22 awards, 10 supported Youth Agricultural Education, 2 strengthened the local Food Supply Chain, 4 increased resources for Urban Agriculture, 3 increased farmers' market promotion efforts, 2 created educational resources and grant programs to support farmers, and 1 evaluated new and emerging agricultural technology.
- CT Grown for CT Kids (Farm to School)
    - Awarded $830,902 to 34 grantees, with 23 grantees located in Alliance Districts, School Readiness Programs, or both; prioritizing communities with the greatest need.
    - Anticipate reaching 22,052 students statewide through CTG4CTK-funded programming, a significant increase from 16,071 reached in FY 22/23 as projects are completed.
    - Redesigned grant tracks to better reflect Connecticut's agricultural future for FY26 programming.
    - Worked closely with CT Farm to School Collaborative; partnered with CT State Department of Education on the Local Food for Schools Incentive Program (LFSIP) to strengthen local procurement and education linkages; and continued collaboration with Put Local on Your Tray (UCONN) and managed a Technical Assistance program to support grantees in reaching programmatic goals.
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
    - Released a 2024 CT DEI report update providing status and details of steps taken on all recommendations in the 2023 DEI report.
        - 24.2% complete and ongoing
        - 49% in progress
        - 36.8% in development
    - Increased diversity on agency boards, councils, and commissions – approximately 50% of currently seated board positions are held by historically underserved individuals and an average of 16.25% are held by BIPOC individuals.
    - Increased representation in marketing and outreach materials, including a feature article in 2024 Connecticut Grown magazine, social media posts, and CT Weekly Ag Report.
- Land Capital Marketing Access (USDA funded)
    - Held 3 cohorts of the Land Ownership Readiness Course with UConn Extension with 72 producers registered.

    - Issued 61 certificates of completion for the Land Access Readiness Course.
    - Received 52 interest forms and responded to inquiries.
    - Held 15 one-on-one intake calls with interested producers and the Beginning Farmer Navigator.
    - Onboarded 14 technical assistance consultants for one-on-one assistance in land evaluation, business planning, marketing and sales, financial record keeping, and tax advising.
- Local Food Purchase Assistance (USDA funded)
    - Distributed $2,191,904.57 for the purchase of CT Grown food products from 166 producers in FY25; a total of $4.45 million since the program began.
    - 30 socially disadvantaged producers included in the program
    - Distributed food in 116 towns and cities in Connecticut, with 467 locations.
    - More than 500 distribution locations through the 8 subrecipient organizations
- Organic Market Development Program (USDA funded)
    - Received $263,743 to foster a three-year partnership between CT DoAg, UConn Extension and CT National Organic Farms Association (CT NOFA) to enhance the market for CT Grown certified organic products.
    - Met monthly with UConn and CT NOFA to prioritize and discuss upcoming project activities, outline next steps, and remain in compliance with USDA required reporting.
    - Released a Request for Proposals and selected a media vendor to conduct comprehensive consumer- and producer-facing surveys and promotional marketing campaign.
- Organic Cost-Share Program (USDA funded)
    - Awarded $27,405 in grant funding to 37 certified organic operations to cover a percentage of their annual certification costs.
        - 22 certified organic farms
        - 15 certified organic processors
- Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant (USDA funded
    - Awarded funds to 3 infrastructure projects in FY24 and provided assistance with project implementation as needed.
    - Held second round of competitive funded awards
        - Received 69 eligible applications requesting more than $5.7million in funds.
        - Sent 17 applications to USDA for review totaling more than $1.5 million in funds.
    - Continued to contract with the CT Small Business Development Center, the Carrot Project, and the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (now Tierra Viva Collective) providing 271.25 hours of free technical assistance to 111 producers.
- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (USDA funded)
    - Awarded more than $250,000 to subrecipients in FY24.
    - Applied for and received $427,715 from U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund four projects enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops.
    - Conducted site visits or attended events with 4 subrecipients.
    - Created information video and fact sheet for the program, and updated program and subrecipient webpages.
    - Revamped funding priorities to be concise, understandable, and comprehensive.
- Farmer Stress Relief and Mental Health

  - Maintained CTFarmStressRelief.org to offer resources to Connecticut producers with more than 11,000 visits.
  - Extended the AgriStress Helpline availability through August 2025

- Farm to Chef

  - Inactive as no longer statutorily authorized
- Food Export Northeast
  - Utilized $194,973 in cost share reimbursement to 8 CT companies for eligible expenses associated with promotion of CT food and agriculture products
  - Established 54 new distributorships
  - Facilitated 753 new supplier/buyer connections
  - Assisted 5 first-time export sales to new markets
  - Increased number of participating companies by 10%
  - Participated in 67 activities
  - Confirmed $938,000 in actual export sales
- Ag Directional Signage
  - Revised program brochure for distribution and improved program awareness
  - Updated website information for clarity and accuracy
  - Engaged CT DOT to revise the MOU to better articulate the program roles and responsibilities.
- ConnecticutGrownStore.com
  - Fulfilled 198 orders
  - Distributed 804 point of purchase cards to farmers at no cost
  - Provided 30 CT Grown tents at cost-share to farmers, a savings of $6,500 to farmers.
- Agency Website: The importance of an updated, relevant website as the agency's information source to the industry and consumers is critical. In FY2025 the following occurred to ensure this effort was adequately maintained:

  - Updated and/or created over 289 pages on the CTGrown.gov website
  - Updated Boards, Councils and Commissions pages for consistency and easier navigation
  - Updated six grant pages to be more user-friendly and consistent
  - Worked with DAS BITS team on website modernization framework.
  - Updated vanity URLs.
  - Created redirects from orphaned pages to programs in the bureau they belong under.
- Boards Councils and Commissions: The bureau works with four statutorily authorized boards and councils to have industry representations to the agency and to advance the industries of focus. These include:
  - Farm Wine Development Council: Provided staffing/administrative support to the Connecticut Farm Wine Development Council to deliver one educational symposium, integrated a hybrid Passport to CT Wine Country program with a digital app and paper passport booklet resulting in 14,745 users with 36,218 unique visits recorded and supported coordination of 9 farm wineries participation in CT Building at Big E.
  - Connecticut Milk Promotion Board: Provided staffing/administrative support to the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board to deliver more than $330,000 in programming through marketing, consumer education, and dairy farmer engagement initiatives; invested in programs in schools to enhance education around dairy and provide healthy, nutritious meal options; provided funding to create opportunities for Connecticut dairy farmers or dairy industry stakeholders; to connect with consumers at more than 10 local

events; provided education to school nutrition professionals on the correct storage requirements for school milk and provided milk coolers to select schools who participated; sponsorship of Connecticut Dairy Day at the Hartford Yard Goats and provide milk samples from local farmers at the event; and connected with consumers at The Big E.

- Connecticut Food Policy Council: Provided staffing/ administrative support to the CT Food Policy Council to facilitate four regional speakers during monthly meetings focused on increasing food security and visited three Hartford area food access/social service initiatives including Forge City Works, Hands on Hartford/Gather 55, and KNOX urban farm to experience the impact these programs are having firsthand.
- Connecticut Apple Marketing Board: Provided staffing/administrative support to the Connecticut Apple Marketing Board, filled nine of the 11 available seats; held four regular meetings; recommended a strategic planning process and release of a marketing RFQ in FY 2026 to support marketing of apple producers and CT Grown orchard products.

CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE UNIT

Through Public Act 22-118 the agency was allocated a total of $14 million to support climate-smart agriculture practices for farmers in Connecticut to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This included $7 million for the Climate Smart Agriculture & Forestry Grant (CSAF) and updating the Farmland Restoration Grant Program to change the name to the Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency program (RRP) authorizing grants to support implementation of climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices.

The following were achieved during fiscal year 2025 for RRP:

- Executed 15 of the 20 awarded contracts.
- Facilitated 20 site visits by soil scientists
- Created and approved 20 Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency Plans
- Advanced $520,00 (more than $50% of total funds allocated) to awardees to begin projects

The following were achieved during fiscal year 2025 for CSAF

- Bristol Beef LLC completed their project to install Climate Smart processing equipment resulting in a water consumption decrease of 11%; gas consumption decrease of 7%, and electrical usage decrease of 6% as of April 2025.
- Collective Oyster Recycling and Restoration (CORR) recycled a total of 580,027 pounds of oyster shell and planted 537,000 pounds of shell in the Long Island Sound for shellfish bed restoration.
- The Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy (NCLC) disbursed a total of $72,000 to 19 awardees, including 4 Agricultural Assessment awards and 15 Project Implementation awards.
- CT Resource Conservation & Development (CT RC&D) disbursed $249,763.21 to all eight Round 1 awardees and more than $248,000 to 12 Round 2 awardees. 25 farms have also utilized the Equipment Sharing Hubs since July 1, 2024.
- UConn Extension awarded microgrants (up to $2,400) to 36 farms totaling $82,870 to implement Climate Smart Adaptation Strategies including rainwater collection, cover cropping, rotational grazing, composting, and no-till practices.

- New CT Farmer Alliance (NCTFA) awarded a total of $264,000 among 23 farms to implement climate smart practices including rotational grazing, hedgerows, composting, manure spreading, solar, no-till practices, silvopasture, covercropping, upgraded equipment for energy efficiency, and irrigation.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION UNIT

As of June 30, 2025, the program has preserved 50,454 acres on 445 farm parcels since 1980. The long-term goal of the program is to preserve 130,000 acres, with at least 85,000 of prime, statewide, or locally-important farmland soils.

During FY2025:

- 10 farm parcels were permanently protected in fiscal year 2024-2025
- 656 acres were permanently protected
- Leveraged $970,000 in federal contributions through the USDA's Agricultural Lands Easement Program, with federal and local sources providing 27% of the total costs of acquiring these PDR easements
- CT FarmLink – CT DoAg assumed maintenance responsibility of CTFarmLink.org, along with all social media and newsletter assets during FY25.
    - 173 new farm seekers profiles were published – 13% increase over FY24
    - 8 new farmland listings were published – 70% decrease

BUREAU OF AQUACULTURE

The Department's Bureau of Aquaculture is the designated State Shellfish Authority, regulates the shellfish industry, and is responsible for shellfish sanitation in all commercial and recreational areas statewide. The bureau is responsible for classifying and managing shellfish growing areas; conducting shoreline surveys to identify pollution sources; collecting routine water quality samples; licensing and inspecting shellfish companies; and controlling for bacteria, *Vibrio* bacteria, viruses, biotoxins, and poisonous and deleterious substances that can cause human illness. The laboratory analyzes the samples to support the program and monitor shellfish diseases. The Bureau is also the lead on aquaculture development, the liaison between state and federal permitting agencies, and assists industry members in completing the Joint Agency Aquaculture Permit. The Bureau authorizes the placement of recovered shell for enhancement and rehabilitation services.

- Public Act 25-152 modified the public natural oyster seed bed season in response to warming water temperatures, which cause oysters to spawn earlier than they historically have. The oyster seed harvest season now closes June 15, annually, rather than July 20. The bill also increased the maximum seed oyster dredge weight from 30 pounds to 60 pounds, preventing the use of a heavier dredge which could negatively impact small seed oysters and the structure of the natural bed bottomland.
- The Bureau successfully completed the Growing Area Program Element Evaluation Report (PEER) on November 5, 2024; Risk Assessment and Risk Management Element PEER on December 20, 2024; Laboratory PEER on May 21, 2025; and Control of Harvest Element PEER on May 22, 2025. All program elements were found in conformance with the NSSP, and all new or emerging concerns were successfully addressed.
    - Of note, CT DEEP, which leads the Patrol Element, has established a new relay reporting system for all industry members on Sharepoint, enabling access by all agency regulators.

    - This is the first Lab PEER in 15 years and staff quickly responded to address deficiencies and purchase updated equipment to meet National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) requirements. The laboratory was found to be conforming to the standards set forth by the NSSP for three procedures previously evaluated by the FDA and two new procedures. The laboratory is the first in the country to be successfully evaluated for the identification of Male Specific Coliphage (MSC), which is a viral indicator that allows the Bureau to assess raw sewage impacts on growing areas and reopen areas sooner than 21 days after a raw sewage discharge, such as from a sewage treatment plant. CT additionally became the state lab certified by the FDA for the most testing methodologies under the NSSP.
- Applied for, received, and administered multiple Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) grants for the shellfish and dairy programs, including:
    - Received $35,089.43 through the Shellfish Equipment grant, which was used to purchase field and laboratory equipment.
    - Received $19,647.52 through the Grade "A" Milk equipment grant, which was used to purchase safety and personal protective equipment for the dairy field inspectors, a certified thermometer to allow inspectors to verify the accuracy of facility thermometers, a teslong borescope to investigate supply lines used to transport milk back to the plant, syringes for the tuberculosis testing program, tools to repair issues found during plant inspections, and laptops and tablets to continue electronic inspections.
    - Received $14,140 through the Shellfish Training grant to fund multiple staff to attend national conferences and trainings, as well as $6,000 for the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISCC) meeting, through the end of 2025. Six staff members, including four presenters, attended the Northeast Shellfish Sanitation Association (NESSA) meeting. Funds were also awarded for Bureau staff to stay near the Stonington Borough wastewater treatment plant for a dye study that will be complete in collaboration with FDA in October 2025.
    - Received up to $32,625.92 from the Milk Training Grant to allow staff to attend FDA training courses and meetings, as well as $2,253.00 for NCIMS.
- One staff member attended FD342 Advanced Sanitary Survey of Shellfish Growing Areas. This course builds upon the prerequisite FD242 and covers Advanced Shoreline Survey, wastewater treatment plant evaluation and questionnaire, conditional area management plans, sampling and study design, data analysis, advanced volumetric dilution, drogue and dye studies, and GIS.
- One staff member attended FD248 Shellfish Risk Assessment Risk Management (RARM). The course reviewed essential principles of the RARM requirements, conducting illness investigations following foodborne outbreaks, conducting Vibrio risk assessments and differentiating illnesses and outbreaks, and the process of traceback to identify implicated product in an illness investigation.
- Four staff members attended the Milford Aquaculture Seminar. This seminar is a forum for technology transfer among NOAA Milford Lab staff; aquaculture, scientific and academic communities; regulators; and the public.
- Three staff members attended Aquaculture 2025. The World Aquaculture Society meeting is the largest aquaculture meeting in the world. This year was a triennial conference that combines the annual meetings of the National Shellfisheries Association, Fish Culture Section of the American Fisheries Society, World Aquaculture Society, and the National Aquaculture Association. This meeting brings together aquaculture experts from around the world and showcases cutting edge research and technologies in the aquaculture sector.

- The Bureau hosted the Annual Harvester's Meeting, where staff present a range of topics aimed at improving the marketability and quality of shellfish, and provide technical recommendations to ensure the Industry has the most current information necessary to maintain CT's low number of illnesses related to the consumption of shellfish. In total, there were around 40 Industry members in attendance.
- The Bureau has established a contract for a new Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), which will provide advanced capabilities for monitoring shellfish industry vessel activity to ensure vessel activities comply with license requirements to protect public health as well as prohibit illegal harvest. The monitoring of seed oyster vessel activity on the public natural seed oyster beds will enable effective resource management in order to improve annual recruitment and sustainability.
- In FY 2025, CORR (Collective Oyster Recycling and Restoration), a non-profit statewide shell recycling organization, recovered almost 850,000 pounds of shell from restaurants and wholesalers from the waste stream in the first two years since its founding. DOAG contracted with CORR for 300,000 pounds cured shell to be planted in Long Island Sound in June, with ARPA financial assistance. CORR delivered the cured shell to the Aquaculture Laboratory in Milford and loaded it onto four industry vessels, where shell was transported and washed overboard on an enhancement project area within the 3,500-acre Bridgeport-Stratford designated natural oyster seed bed, the Housatonic River, Milford Gulf Pond, and Farm River and Branford River natural oyster beds.

Metric	**FY 2024**	**FY 2025**
Licenses issued	127	138
PEER Evaluations Completed	3	4
Annual or Triennial Regulatory Reports Written	12	17
Comprehensive Sanitary Survey Reports Written	3	1
Closures or closure extensions implemented	841	375
Number of illnesses investigated (includes Single source)	7	33
Number of single-source illnesses attributed to CT product (like norovirus)	0	1
Number of single-source *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* illnesses attributed to CT product	0	0
Number of single-source *Vibrio vulnificus* illnesses attributed to CT product	0	0
Seawater samples (fecal coliform)	5,605	4,153
Shellfish tissue samples (fecal coliform)	236	216
Male specific coliphage (viral) samples	34	84
Vibrio parahaemolyticus and *Vibrio vulnificus* monitoring shellfish samples	24	37
Phytoplankton samples to monitor for harmful algal bloom species	183	162
Marine biotoxin samples	13	18
Shellfish Health Certifications Reviewed	8	19
Pathology samples (typically 30 individuals each)	16	19
AFDO Grant Funds Received	$80,670	$109,755

DABA staff that completed FDA shellfish trainings	4	1
Restoration Enhancement rehabilitation	100 acres	150 acres
Number of Instagram Followers	675	714

- The DABA issued 24 Seed Oyster Harvesting, 23 Shellstock Shipper III, 13 Scientific Research, 7 Finfish Aquaculture, 10 Seaweed Producer, 1 Seaweed Hatchery, and 4 Seed Importation licenses this year.
- Staff performed sanitary and record inspections of the 80 shellfish harvest vessels, 41 shellfish harvest operations, and 25 wholesale dealer/distributors on a biennial basis as required by the NSSP, along with necessary follow-up inspections throughout the year.
- Added one new shellfish harvester as a Shellstock Shippers.
- Kelp aquaculture - Staff inspected 10 kelp operations growing 38 lines of 200-600 feet or approximately 17 acres of kelp. The Bureau, working in conjunction with CAES, analyzed seven kelp samples for polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) levels. PFAS are an emerging group of man-made contaminants that persist in the environment and have been associated with detrimental health impacts. PFAS levels in all samples were below the limit of detection. The Bureau is coordinating a review of contaminant data with DPH.

LABORATORY

- Joseph DeCrescenzo serves as the Dairy Laboratory Evaluation Officer (LEO) for the State of Connecticut and is responsible for evaluating all Appendix N Facilities and Certified Dairy Laboratories along with analysts performing milk laboratory test methods in accordance with the requirements of the Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance.
- On a bi-annual basis, the LEO schedules and performs laboratory evaluations of both FDA certified appendix-n screening facilities and certified laboratories. There are a total of 2 certified laboratories and 11 screening facilities. Half of these facilities were evaluated in 2025. In addition, the LEO continues to speak with both new farms and new dairy processing plants about becoming an FDA certified Grade A facility.
- The LEO also organizes proficiency testing for the labs and certifies all the analysts before coming online to perform the procedures, which includes administering written and practical exams. The LEO also assists new labs, and certified facilities develop and fine-tune all quality control/quality assurance operating procedures at their facility. Connecticut has a total of 72 certified analysts that are evaluated every two years. In 2025, 12 new analysts became certified to process dairy samples. In January 2025, antibiotic splits for all Grade A facilities were distributed at no cost to the dairy plants. A total of 500 antibiotic split samples were generated.
- The LEO visits intra-state farms to help educate the farms about the necessity of antibiotic screening. The LEO makes and organizes split samples for these facilities to participate in to effectively measure their efficiency in processing samples for antibiotic detection.
- Laboratory staff successfully participated in the 2024 NELEOM lab proficiencies and the 2025 FDA shellfish proficiency. Unknown samples are sent to the laboratory to measure its efficiency.

SHELLFISH DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

- Dr. Lydia Bienlien serves as the State Shellfish Pathologist and is responsible for the Shellfish Health Program. This year the program successfully reinstated in-house disease diagnostics for the 2024 Fall Survey. The Disease Surveillance Program monitors the health of both farmed and wild oyster populations along the Connecticut coastline and dates back to 1997. Recent years

(2019-2023) required out-of-state testing to accommodate the unfilled position of State Shellfish Pathologist; however, the program has now returned to fully in-state with the associated specimen samples and data being entirely in the care of the Bureau of Aquaculture.

- The annual Fall Survey is a significant undertaking that partners with stakeholders to monitor oyster diseases in Connecticut. Activities include: site selection, sample collection, processing, implementing diagnostic assays, analyzing results, long term storage of samples, digital data management, and report production. The 2024 Fall Survey partnered with 9 stakeholders, had 14 sites, and analyzed the health of 420 individual oysters.
- The Shellfish Health Program is also involved in maintaining aquatic biosecurity. In that capacity, Dr. Lydia Bienlien has continued to oversee animal importation disease testing requirements and formulate and provide recommendations for aquatic animal disease control policies and standards. This included maintaining a list of approved hatcheries for state importation and advising on several potential and/or ongoing aquaculture projects in the state.
- The Shellfish Health Program successfully recruited two summer interns through the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Fellowship program at the University of Connecticut, bringing more manpower to the Bureau and training the next generation of aquaculture-minded individuals at no extra cost to the Department of Agriculture.
- Dr. Lydia Bienlien has continued to work with local, national, and international stakeholders, including presenting information to local industry members on shellfish disease dynamics, providing technical support and training to colleagues at NOAA, and serving on an international expert panel on MSX disease.
- Based upon a historic oyster infection that spread statewide and significantly impacted populations and the industry in the 1990s, disease surveillance has largely focused on oysters. The Shellfish Health Program has begun preparing to expand in-house diagnostic abilities to include clams. This has involved developing and testing clam user protocols and optimizing laboratory workflows with plans to include clams in next year’s disease surveillance activities.

BUREAU OF REGULATORY SERVICES

The Bureau of Regulatory Services is responsible for enforcing state laws and regulations and certain federal laws in fulfilling the Department’s mission relative to protecting public health and safety; ensuring the safety of both plant and animal derived food products; ensuring the general health and welfare of all domestic animals including livestock and poultry; and managing emergency preparedness and response activities for animal disease outbreaks and natural disasters.

The Bureau is organized into five operational units: (1) Food Safety and Agricultural Commodities; (2) Dairy/Milk Safety; (3) Office of the State Veterinarian and Animal Health; (4) State Animal Control; and (5) Licensing and Animal Population Control Program. Although each unit has separate and distinct responsibilities, certain situations and conditions necessitate collaboration and cooperation between staff of the various units.

The Bureau continues to secure non-state funding to enhance and support programmatic activities. The Bureau has multi-year cooperative agreements with the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to implement state programs to enforce (1) the Produce Safety Rule of the Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) and (2) the FDA’s Animal Feed Regulatory Program Standards (AFRPS). The Bureau continued its yearly cooperative agreements with the USDA’s Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services (APHIS, VS) fund activities (1) relative to reportable poultry and livestock disease surveillance and (2) animal disease traceability.

FOOD SAFETY & AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES UNIT

- The Produce Safety team completed year four of five in the second cooperative agreement with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Year four activities included: inspecting fruit and vegetable growers utilizing a risk-based inspection program; farm inventory development; standard operating procedures development; maintaining and updating the farm registration and mobile inspection systems; and training new staff members while maintaining and focusing on our project plan.
    - 458 total produce farms in Connecticut, including:
        - 26 total fully covered farms, including:
            - 19 large covered farms
            - 3 small covered farms
            - 4 very small covered farms
        - 154 qualified exempt farms
        - 278 farms not covered based on produce sales less than $25,000
        - 182 Connecticut fruit and vegetable farms have registered through the state's E-License system, which is also linked to the mobile inspection program.
    - Conducted inspections at 8 farms for Connecticut Good Agricultural Practices (cGAP), a voluntary food safety audit for produce growers to help farms access different markets.
    - Conducted routine inspections at 18 of the covered farms utilizing a risk-based inspection program
    - Provided FDA funding to UConn Extension to provide Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course, which had 18 farmers enrolled.
    - Attended 5 outreach events to connect with growers on the various programs available.
    - Inspected a selection of farmers markets to ensure compliance with Connecticut Grown regulations and inspect for food safety requirements.
- The Animal Feed Program is in the fifth and final year of the FDA Animal Feed Regulatory Program Standards (AFRPS) Maintenance Grant.
    - 71 registered commercial animal feed manufacturers are located in Connecticut, and 6 routine animal feed manufacturing facility inspections were conducted.
    - 156 routine samples were collected by animal feed inspectors for a sample analysis conducted by Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station testing for proximate analysis, mycotoxins, macro-minerals, contaminants and pesticides.
    - FDA Animal Feed Contract is maintained, and all contracted inspections were completed which included: 5 BSE Feed Inspections and 2 Veterinary Feed Directive/ BSE Inspections.
    - 1 consumer complaint regarding animal feed was received and inspectors conducted an investigation.
    - 9 animal feed label compliance inspections were conducted finding 150 unregistered products being distributed in Connecticut. There are 16,064 registered animal feed product labels registered, and all new or revised labels are reviewed by inspectors.
    - Attended five outreach events.
    - 371 Fertilizer companies sell 4,917 different fertilizer products in Connecticut. A total of 41 samples were collected for routine sample analysis to ensure the guaranteed analysis was accurate.
- Fertilizer Program

  - There are 4,801 registered fertilizer labels in Connecticut and all new or revised product labels are reviewed. Forty-two samples were collected for routine sample analysis to ensure the guaranteed analysis was accurate.
- Soil Amendment Program
  - There are 1,426 registered soil amendment labels in Connecticut and all new or revised product labels are reviewed.
- Liming Material Program
  - There are 119 registered liming material labels in Connecticut, and all new or revised product labels are reviewed.
- Seed Program
  - 297 vegetable seed samples were collected for routine sample analysis to ensure that the germination percentages are above the minimum requirement for each vegetable kind.
  - 6 grass/forage seed samples were collected
  - 89 seed companies hold a seed labelers license in CT.
- Hemp Program
  - There are 57 licensed hemp producers with a total of 21.3 acres of hemp planted for the 2024 growing season. Only 16.2 acres were harvested due to severe weather conditions.
  - 83 official hemp samples were collected by inspectors to determine that the THC concentration was below 0.3%.
  - 18 Grow Site Inspection completed
  - 5 Performance Based Sampling Inspections completed
- Shell Egg Inspection Program
  - 3 farms are under the shell egg inspection program who have more than 200 birds but less than 3,000 birds producing eggs and who want to sell their eggs retail or wholesale.
  - 12 Egg Grading Inspections Completed
  - 6 Egg Grading Facility Inspections Completed
- Poultry Slaughter Program
  - 3 farms are registered in the poultry slaughter programs for those who process over 1000 birds but less than 5,000 turkeys or 20,000 poultry of all species in a calendar year. These facilities receive annual facility inspections and hazard analysis critical control point paperwork inspection.
- Honey and Maple Syrup
  - There are 57 Honey and Maple Syrup farms registered

DAIRY UNIT

- Collected and analyzed the following:
  - 1,040 samples of processed/manufactured milk, and milk products
  - 78 samples of cheese
  - 373 samples of raw milk to ensure compliance with state and federal milk safety regulations and detect the presence of animal drug residues
  - 84 retail raw milk samples tested for the presence of human pathogens
  - 166 water samples collected for testing from dairy production and processing facilities
  - 176 milk containers

15 milk samples collected for vitamin analysis

  - The department began sampling for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI):

    - 65 Milk Plant silos were sampled and sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa.
    - 338 Farm Bulk Tank samples were collected and taken to Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory at UConn.
    - All samples have been found negative for HPAI.

- The following inspections, evaluations or audits were conducted:
    - 150 Grade A Dairy Farm routine inspections
    - 52 Retail Raw Milk Farm inspections
    - 110 routine Milk/ Cheese Plant inspections
    - 104 Pasteurizer Equipment tests
    - 21 Bulk Milk Tanker inspections
    - 18 milk plant samplers evaluated
    - 28 milk hauler samplers evaluated
    - 105 Special inspections of dairy producers and manufacturers (inspection or quality violation follow-up)
    - 6 Milk Plant listing audits
    - 6 Farm bulk tank unit (BTU) audits
- Issued the following orders or warnings:
    - 26 stop sale orders to milk producers and milk processors for product quality violations
    - 44 warning letters were issued for violations of milk quality standards or inspectional standards.
- Continued the development of digital sample records of dairy products
- Supplied all dairy producers with PPE for H5N1
- Received grant funding from Association of Food and Drug Officials to facilitate training and purchase equipment needed to implement the Grade “A” milk safety program.

OFFICE OF THE STATE VETERINARIAN AND ANIMAL HEALTH UNIT

With USDA cooperative agreement funding support, the Bureau continued animal disease surveillance and outreach activities for Avian Influenza, Scrapie, and other reportable animal diseases; continued implementation of the National Animal Disease Traceability Program; and partially funded two positions associated with the cooperative agreement programs. The Bureau provided funding to the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (CVMDL) at the University of Connecticut to conduct essential diagnostic services; to meet animal disease program surveillance goals; to assist in animal disease investigations; and to provide test data to support disease-free status certifications such as U.S Pullorum-Typhoid Clean State. State animal health surveillance information is coordinated by the State Veterinarian and shared with USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services through quarterly accomplishment reports and participation in the National Animal Health Reporting System (NAHRS) and the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN).

Also, with USDA Veterinary Services cooperative agreement funding support, the unit continued its activities with Animal Disease Traceability, Official Animal Identification requirements and monitoring and enforcing compliance with state and federal laws relative to livestock and poultry interstate movement:

- Livestock and Equine Interstate Movement - processed 4,051 Interstate Certificates of Veterinary Inspection encompassing the movement of 10,876 livestock and equine animals moving into and out of this state.
- Gathered and Submitted 599 Brucellosis samples.
- Gathered and submitted Porcine Pseudorabies samples resulting in 355 samples submitted to CVMDL.
- Tuberculosis tests for cattle and goats totaled 2,840.
- Official Animal Identification devices issued (pursuant to USDA Animal Disease Traceability Rule): 5,996 RFID (radio frequency identification devices), 800 NUES (metal) ear tags issued directly to CT licensed livestock producers and licensed, accredited, category II veterinarians.
- Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) Tests - processed 530
- Responded to 17 reports of sick or dead domestic poultry.
- Updated standard operating procedures for Retail Poultry dealers.
- Restarted the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Surveillance testing program.

STATE ANIMAL CONTROL UNIT

During fiscal year 2025, the State Animal Control Unit was comprised of 8 sworn State Animal Control Officers (SACO) (1 supervisor and 7 SACO's).

The unit performs routine and unannounced inspections of Department of Agriculture licensed and regulated facilities. These include commercial kennels, grooming facilities, pet shops, dog training facilities, animal shelter facilities, animal importers, and municipal dog pounds. The unit is also responsible for conducting criminal investigations pertaining to animal cruelty. The state is divided into seven territories; each officer is assigned a territory encompassing approximately 25 to 30 towns, each residing in their designated area. The unit is responsible for training new animal control officers within Connecticut. Additionally, the Chief State Animal Control Officer is the liaison between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff and municipal animal control officers regarding reporting suspected animal abuse.

In FY25, the Animal Control Unit performed:

- 1,732 inspections (27% increase over previous year) of pet facilities, including:
  - 860 grooming facilities
  - 337 commercial kennels
  - 238 dog training facilities
  - 144 pet shops
  - 136 municipal dog pounds
  - 17 animal shelter facilities
- Processed 41 rabies cases in which humans or domestic animals were exposed to a rabid animal
- Conducted 562 formal investigations which required documentation in a formal report through the e-License investigative report module.
- Handled more than 3,000 calls for service/complaints
- Issued:
  - 6 written warnings
  - 9 infractions
  - 1 arrest
- Received 123 reports (24% increase) from Department of Children & Families reporting suspected animal harm, neglect, or cruel treatment

- Submitted 93 reports to Department of Children & Families received from various Animal Control Officers under the current cross-reporting statues
- Conducted the Animal Control Officer Training Program, an annual instructional training program for animal control officers, which resulted in:
    - 25 certificates of completion issued to Animal Control Officers who completed 80 hours of instruction following a curriculum as mandated by Conn. General Statutes 22-328.
- Provided virtual training to approximately 300 Connecticut municipal animal control officers regarding the changes to restraint and disposal orders.

LICENSING UNIT

The Licensing Unit is responsible for the intake and processing of more than 40 different license types, all of which have transitioned to the enterprise eLicense system. Total licensing fees collected for FY24 were $2,306,312.87. A total of 6,868 licenses were issued.

DoAg Licenses for FY25

Credential Type	Active, and In-Renewal
ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER	264
ANIMAL IMPORTER	211
ANIMAL SHELTER FACILITY	19
BULK MILK TANKER	17
CERVIDAE HERDS	11
COMMERCIAL ANIMAL FEED MANUFACTURER	70
CHEESE MANUFACTURER	22
COMMERCIAL KENNEL	238
COMMERCIAL FEED	669
COMMERCIAL FERTILIZER	396
COMMISSION SALES STABLE	1
CONNECTICUT FARM WINERY, BREWERY AND CIDERY	32
CT GROWN MANUFACTURER FOR ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR	11
EGG GRADING PLANT	5
EQUINE AUCTION	1
GROOMING FACILITY	610
FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWER	177
HEMP PRODUCER	58
LIMING MATERIALS	34
LIVE POULTRY DEALER	81
LIVESTOCK DEALER/BROKER	29
MAPLE SYRUP & HONEY PRODUCER	55
MILK DEALER	90

MILK EXAMINER	128
MILK LABORATORY	8
MILK PRODUCER	91
MILK SUB-DEALER	96
PET SHOP	73
POULTRY MORTALITY DISPOSAL	8
POULTRY SLAUGHTER FACILITY	3
RAW MILK CHEESE MANUFACTURER	5
RETAIL DAIRY STORE	2,732
RETAIL RAW MILK PRODUCER	16
SOIL AMENDMENTS	340
SEED LABELER	89
SWINE GARBAGE FEEDER	3
SWINE GROWERS	8
TRAINING FACILITY	167
TOTAL	**6,868**

ANIMAL POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAM

The Department's Animal Population Control Program (APCP) continues to increase the level of immunization against infectious animal diseases by providing sterilization and vaccination benefits for dogs and cats to (1) Connecticut residents for dogs and cats adopted from municipal pounds; (2) to low-income residents for dogs and cats that they own; and (3) to non-profit organizations engaged in activities aimed at reducing the population of feral cats.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the APCP provided vouchers for 3,858 animals (1,650 dogs and 2,208 cats) from municipal impound facilities, pets owned by low-income CT residents and feral cats from non-profit organizations. 2,286 of the 3,858 vouchers issued were redeemed for a 59% overall sterilization rate for intact dogs and cats adopted from municipal impound facilities, issued to low-income residents and awarded to non-profit feral cat groups cats from non-profit organizations.

End Report