

TRANSCRIPT

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**OF CONNECTICUT FARM BILL FORUM WITH UNDER SECRETARY FOR
NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT MARK REY AND MODERATOR
NANCY BULL, ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR OUTREACH AND PUBLIC SERVICES,
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT BERLIN, CONNECTICUT - OCTOBER 1, 2005**

LETTER FROM REP. ROSA DELAURO AS READ: The Berlin Fair is one of our state's finest fall attractions, and I have no doubt that you will enjoy your time spent here today. I certainly appreciate your making yourself available, and I believe today's discussion will bring you greater insight into what the upcoming Farm Bill means to Connecticut and our agricultural industry.

The coming Farm Bill debate will be extremely important for our state and our country. As the ranking member on the Agriculture Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, I have a special interest in the Farm Bill. The actions that the authorizing committee, the Agriculture Committee in the House, are very important for me as one who has to lead the way on funding for these programs.

I will await a report on your comments today and plan to seek additional input from all those concerned about the issues covered by the Farm Bill. Since I was first appointed to the Agriculture Subcommittee, I have made it a priority to meet annually with farmers from across my district and in the future I hope to expand those meetings across Connecticut. Though my schedule does not allow me to accept every invitation I receive, I hope that all of you know that my door is open as consideration of the Farm Bill begins in Congress and for any other matters of importance to you.

I believe that in this next Farm Bill we have an opportunity to increase attention to issues of importance to Connecticut and New England in general. We made a start in 2004 and 2005 to enhance development of our specialty crops here and across the country. Personally, I believe there will be more attention to the changing face of agriculture, the increasing importance of sustainable agriculture, the growth of consumer interests in organic crops and animals and/or products grown or raised with fewer additives or chemicals are some of the areas I believe may get more justifiable attention.

Research on agricultural issues, nutrition, damaging plant and animal diseases, and many other topics is very important in Connecticut. We have a robust group of agricultural scientists in our state, both at the New Haven Experiment Station and at the University of Connecticut. The potential development of zoonotic diseases, our security for plants, animals and humans who eat them or are around them is an emerging issue of great substance. Research is an important title in

the Farm Bill, and determined by the leadership of the United States in the food and fiber markets of the world.

Connecticut farmers and rural communities also understand the critical nature of our environment as well as open space and water conservation. And we can also benefit from some of the Rural Development programs in Connecticut.

Finally, nutrition programs are very critical to Connecticut. The Food Stamp and WIC programs are reauthorized in the Farm Bill. The link between our farmers and direct consumers is growing and I hope that the Farm Bill will pay attention to building that relationship because it can promote access to fresh, nutritious high-quality food for everyone, from schoolchildren to our seniors.

In closing let me say that the Farm Bill is an enormous undertaking covering as it does everything from authorizing these nutrition programs to credit, crop insurance and international trade as well as all the topics previously mentioned.

Today I am sure you will not be able to discuss all of them, and that is why I will look forward to learning your priorities for Connecticut. So I cannot be with you this morning, please remember that my door is always open and I hope that you will not hesitate to contact me. My deepest thanks to all of you for participating in today's discussion. Your invaluable insight both allows myself and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to better meet your needs. I look forward to continuing our work together.

With my very best wishes and warmest regards.

Sincerely,

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Thank you so very much for being with us and for once again reinforcing the strong support that we have from the Congresswoman for agriculture and the food system. She plays a very critical role. It's my pleasure now to introduce to you Mark Rey, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment at USDA. Secretary Rey oversees the Forest Service and the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

One of the reasons I think it's so critical that Secretary Rey has come to be with us today is of course in Connecticut NRCS and the Cooperative Extension System have a very strong partnership as we work with private landowners. But also in Connecticut as all of you know we're 58 percent forested and 90 percent of that forestland is privately held. That makes us very unique as a state compared to some of our other states where most of the forestland is publicly held.

Prior to being appointed under secretary in 2001, Mr. Rey served as staff to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. He's worked for the American Forest and Paper Association, an industry group with which Cooperative Extension has had partnerships across the country. And he's also, some of you will appreciate this more than others, but he's also a native of Ohio, which of course as I am I find a very special bond when you have buckeyes that come together. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and he's with us today to listen and to hear what you might have to say.

Mr. Secretary, welcome to Connecticut.

[Applause.]

SEC. MARK REY: Thank you for that kind introduction, Nancy. As I look out at you it occurs to me that a few of you are wondering whether I'm a bit overdressed, and you're probably wondering who provided me the staff advice to wear a suit to an agricultural fair. But I actually am wearing a suit for a specific reason. And that reason goes back to the very first months of my tenure in this position. After I'd been in the position for only two months I agreed to participate in a field trip in the Central Valley of California to look at some conservation practices that NRCS and some of our cooperators had put on the land in the Central Valley.

I arrived at the location to start the trip at the appointed time and unfortunately things were late getting started, so our area conservationist who was running the trip was quite excited about the opportunity to run this trip said, you know we're running a little bit late, so why don't we all get in the buses and we'll do introductions at the first stop? So we all dutifully filed on to the buses, drove to the first stop, and we were so excited about launching into the description of the conservation practices at the first stop that we forgot all about introductions, talked his way through the first stop and said, my goodness, we're even later now. Let's get to the second stop.

So we went on the buses and drove to the second stop and he started talking at the second stop. Then I noticed as I was sort of hanging back at the fringe of the group that there was one old fellow, a grower in the Central Valley, who's craning his neck, looking around, obviously searching for something. Since I was on the fringe of the group, he kind of ambled up to me and said, "So which one's the new knucklehead from Washington?"

[Laughter.]

I concluded then that if I wore a suit at every event there'd be very little likelihood I'd ever be asked that question again because everyone would know that only a knucklehead from Washington would wear a suit at an agricultural fair. So that's why I'm wearing a suit today.

But I'm glad to be here. I'm interested in hearing what you have to tell us, and I'd like to start by thanking the Berlin Lions Club for making this opportunity available and Dave and Paul Alkas for hosting us in this almost brand new barn.

It's my pleasure to be here today on behalf of Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns to hear directly from you, Connecticut's farmers and rural residents, about issues of concern. In preparing

for the development of the 2007 Farm Bill Secretary Johanns announced in June the first of what would become a nationwide series of Farm Bill forums to be held across the country. That first forum was held in Nashville, Tennessee, and we've conducted 31 more and have planned several additional forums through the end of this year.

Various under secretaries like myself will also be conducting forums such as this in the hope that no place is left unheard as we develop this next Farm Bill.

Before we get too far along with this forum we have a message from the person who asked Secretary Johanns to solicit ideas from as many people as possible while conducting these listening sessions. And so if the powers that be in charge of the audio equipment will queue up the tape, we'll hear that message now.

PRES. GEORGE W. BUSH: Thanks for letting me speak to you at this Farm Bill Forum. America's farm and ranch families provide a safe and abundant food supply for our people and for much of the world. You represent the best values of America -- stewardship of the land, hard work and independence, faith, service and community.

Mike Johanns understands the importance of America's farmers to our country, which is why I chose him to lead our Department of Agriculture. I'm proud of his work, and he will lead our efforts on the next Farm Bill. Secretary Johanns and I believe the first step in this process is to ask each of you how today's Farm Bill is working and how it can be better.

As we look to improve America's farm policy, we will continue to focus on the following goals.

See, America has about 5 percent of the world's population which means 95 percent of your potential customers are overseas. So one of our goals must be to ensure that America's farmers and ranchers have access to open, global markets.

A second goal is that we want future generations to have plenty of opportunities to go into agriculture.

Thirdly, we need cooperative conservation that encourages good stewardship of our land and natural habitats.

We also need to act wisely in delivering help to our producers. And we must promote cutting-edge agricultural products and research.

Finally, we must ensure a good quality of life in rural America. The Farm Bill is important legislation that meets real needs. The next Farm Bill should further strengthen the farm economy and preserve this way of life for farmers and ranchers of the future.

Hearing your advice is an important step toward meeting these goals. I thank you for all you do for our country, and thank you for listening.

SEC. REY: Well, as you can tell from that message our President is determined to see the comments you offer today be used while formulating what the next Farm Bill would look like. As Nancy mentioned in my introduction, I'm the under secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment with jurisdiction over the USDA Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. My career has been spent working on conservation, and as you may know the Farm Bill is one mechanism that helps us do just that.

The previous Farm Bill was considered landmark legislation for conservation funding and for focusing on environmental issues. The conservation provisions of that bill have assisted farmers and ranchers in meeting environmental challenges on their land. That farm bill also simplified existing programs and created new programs all seeking to enhance the long-term quality of conservation on working farms, ranches and forestlands.

What goes into a Farm Bill, what will go into the 2007 Farm Bill, will have long-lasting effects on our nation's natural resources, and that's why we're here today, to hear your thoughts, comments and concerns on what should be included in the next Farm Bill.

To that end Secretary Johanns developed six specific questions that we are seeking answers to today. The first question relates to challenges for new farmers. How do we prepare farm policy to provide a future for new entries into the agricultural community? Our policies as they are developed through the 2007 Farm Bill should welcome the next generation of farmers and avoid unintended consequences like higher land prices that discourage new entries into agriculture.

Second question relates to how do we stay competitive in a world marketplace? Over 27 percent of the cash receipts from agriculture come from abroad. That's a very, very large piece of all farm income across the country. We must remain competitive in domestic and global markets in order for American agriculture to succeed.

The third question relates to farm program benefits. Is the current distribution system the most effective way of distributing the benefits? Benefits should stabilize farm prices and income. The current programs and crop insurance is a good example, and we've had some conversations about that already, distribute assistance based on past and current production levels. Some would argue that the structure of those programs favors larger farms over smaller ones.

The fourth question relates to conservation, the one that I'm most familiar with. How do we frame our conservation policies in a way that provides for cooperative conservation?

I, the Secretary and the President continue to believe that our farmers are the best conservationists in the nation. Some suggest anchoring farm policy around conservation and the tangible benefits that are produced by cleaner air and water and less-developed landscapes.

The fifth question relates to rural economic development. How can federal rural and farm programs provide effective assistance in rural areas? If you look back at Farm Bills of the past, there wasn't much there relative to rural economic development. In the 2002 Farm Bill it was a pretty significant piece. The reason for that is that farming and rural America were once

considered synonymous, but the demographic and economic characteristics of some rural areas have changed, and some believe that farm legislation should invest more in the infrastructure of rural America generally.

And then the last area, the last question, is the expansion of agricultural products, markets and research. We have great resources at our disposal at USDA. What are we doing right with those resources in terms of research? And if we're not doing the right things, what should we be doing instead? American agriculture is changing rapidly. And some say our agricultural policies should do more to help develop new products and markets.

Those are the six questions that we'd like you to focus on, but we're obviously eager to hear about anything you want to share with us today. We think there will be enough time to hear from all of you, but if we run out of time or you simply think there's something you forgot to say, please know that you can always go to WWW.USDA.GOV and click on Farm Bill Forums. Please know that the comments submitted on the web in writing or voiced here today are all given the same weight and the same exact amount of study and analysis.

Finally, before asking questions today please state your name, city and state and your involvement in agriculture in connection to the Farm Bill. Also speak as loudly and as clearly as possible so our transcribing can accurately capture your thoughts. The entirety of today's proceedings will be transcribed so we'll be able to study it as we begin to work on the 2007 Farm Bill.

Lastly, I'd like to offer a specific message for the younger people here today, the Future Farmers of America and 4-H group and the other youth groups. You are the reason for this tour. I hope the ideas and advice we receive today pave the way for your future success in agriculture.

I will assure you that we will conclude in plenty of time for you all to be where you want to be at 1:00. After careful study I've concluded you are probably equally divided between Yankees and Red Sox fans. As I grew up near Cleveland, Ohio, I have no dog in your particular fight except that as I am confident the Indians will take two from the White Sox. All I hope is whether it's the Yankees or the Red Sox, one team takes two of the next two games because that will assure that the Indians will make the playoffs.

So with that I thank you for being here today, and I look forward to a productive discussion this morning. I'll give the podium back to Nancy.

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Mr. Secretary, as a Cincinnati Reds fan I'm a little taken aback by the Cleveland Indians, huh? I'm not sure if we're in the Yankee territory or the Boston Red Sox territory. On the border? Okay, got it.

As the secretary said, we will focus on six areas of concern in the Farm Bill today. Those are just briefly new farmers, competitiveness in a global market, farm program benefits, conservation goals, rural economic growth and expansion of agricultural markets.

One of my roles as moderator is to see that everyone has a chance to speak and that all issues are brought to the table. We are asking that you try to keep your comments to two minutes. I do have a timing system up here that will tell me when you start and when you stop, but unfortunately you can't see where you are in that process. So at the end of two minutes I will stand and ask that you bring your remarks to a close.

I have been asked to remind you also that according to the guidelines for the hearing we don't expect any inappropriate outbursts. As staid New Englanders I don't think that would be a problem, but we do ask that you don't applaud or cheer or stand up and rally in the middle of anyone's comments.

We are asking you though because this is being recorded and being transcribed that you come to a mike to speak. There is a mike in the middle and there's a mike on either side. And as the forum progresses if you wish to speak just please go to the mike and stand and wait to be called on.

We do have a roaming mike if you would like to speak and are unable to move to the mike easily. Just raise your hand, and we'll have someone bring a mike to you so that you can speak where you're seated.

As the secretary mentioned, you can go to WWW.USDA.GOV and look at the testimony both given today but also given at the other Farm Bill listening sessions. If you haven't read that, you might find it quite interesting because the issues sometimes are similar but yet different across the country. You may also send written comments by mail if you prefer or there are two boxes on the back picnic table marked USDA if you'd like to leave a copy of your testimony today.

So without any further comments we would like to invite our two youth who have been asked to speak first at this forum. This is a tradition of the listening sessions, which really reinforces that the future of agriculture is with those of our young people. And so we are pleased today to have with us, and I think I will ask both of our young women to come forward at this time so that we will introduce them and then they may speak. First will be Elyse Brodeur who is chapter president of the Southington High School FFA Chapter. She is a senior this year. And speaking second will be Rebecca Harrison, vice president of the Litchfield County 4-H Beef Club and is a junior in high school this year. So Elyse?

MS. ELYSE BRODEUR: In my almost four years of agricultural education I've been faced with the challenges or working with a narrow definition of "agriculture." The speech I wrote about the issues we have with over-vaccination of household pets and the future of animal health was labeled "not agriculture." Therefore my question to you is, how can we encourage ag innovation when a large number of businesses are excluded by USDA policy?

My next question to you is, how can we change this?

The definition of agriculture under the Farm Bill must include emerging industries. Students and others who wish to pursue a career in agriculture need to be made aware of the broad

range of opportunities. We will not have growth or development in this industry if all of our resources are directed into the same commodities as they were in the past. Education is the key to continual strength of American agriculture. Will the education I'm receiving today be applicable under the Farm Bill? The instructions students receive in the classroom is far more advanced than what the bill covers now, and far more advanced than it ever has been in the past.

For instance, I consider myself very lucky to receive the type of education I do in this prestigious industry. However I wonder where the agricultural leaders of the future will gain knowledge if there is no emphasis on continuing education.

As an agricultural student and a prospective ag educator it is very discouraging to believe that the USDA would leave out any area of agriculture. The point of the education we are receiving is to promote the growth of the industry. I can only hope that the Farm Bill will be open to new advancements, not just to tomorrow but also to five and 10 years into the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Elyse. Rebecca?

MS. REBECCA HARRISON: I am Rebecca Harrison from Southbury. I'm 16 years old. I've been involved with 4-H for nine years and FFA for three years. I'm an honor roll student and attending the voc ag program at Nonnewaug High School. I'm currently the vice president of my 4-H club and involved in team leadership programs for the state of Connecticut.

Seven million children nationwide are involved in 4-H; 55 percent of these children aged 7 to 19 are from major metropolitan areas, suburbs, and inner cities. These kids have after-school activities to attend to, homework that needs to get done, or animals that need to be taken care of or fed. These 4-Hers care about their grades and how their animals are looked after.

I began in 4-H at 7 years of age learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. The USDA support in the Farm Bill will enable 4-H to continue to provide positive youth development during out-of-school time and empower youth to become effective leaders and contributing members of society.

4-H empowers youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnership with caring adults through organized clubs, camps and after-school programs. The essential elements of 4-H are belonging, independence, mastery and generosity. These elements are achieved through initiatives that focus on healthy lifestyles, science, engineering and technology and civic duty.

In all programs, 4-H regards youth as capable individuals who contribute in meaningful authentic ways in the organizations and communities where they live, learn, work and play.

The need for science, engineering and technology education is essential for tomorrow's leaders. I have attended conferences and workshops that have provided access to the latest technologies, advances in agriculture, life sciences, family and consumer resource management, human development and nutrition because of 4-H and its connection to U-CONN.

4-H is such a part of U-CONN that they have a flavor of ice cream called "empowerment," mint ice cream empowered to 4-H. The farm policy should support the agricultural end of life that I live. I hope to take over my family farm and get involved in an agricultural career.

I attend Nonowag High School. This may sound like an ordinary school to you, but to me it sounds like so much more. This is not only a regional high school but is the home of the [inaudible] agriscience program. This program does not just offer tractor-driving courses but it offers animal husbandry, veterinary science, horse management, conservation, floraculture, agriculture mechanics, and agricultural productions.

Each course covers a different area of agriculture. Each course has something that interests someone. I think that each course is interesting and has something to do with what I want to do in the future.

Just like any other person in the country, I want to feel like I have led people I know into a better lifestyle. Anyone that wants to eventually lead needs discipline. Science, engineering and technology is a huge part of being a leader. I want to help animals get better to have better medications to get well faster. Without my agricultural background I will not be able to get into college so that I can start my career goals.

To be able to participate in the career I want to get into I need to be able to be proficient in science. This is not just biology and chemistry. This is agricultural science as well. I need to know the latest advances in technological science and know how to use the equipment provided. I also need to know certain types of engineering so that I can use the information it provides me with to use in my career. Here are three things that you will use in agriculture that you can learn in high school and college. This proves that agriculture is a very needed career in life.

4-H has provided positive youth-adult relationships. I am still in contact with most teen-age role models from when I started 4-H. They have now finished college and are starting their careers. Yet they continue to provide mentoring to myself and other 4-Hers. 4-H has provided me with confidence, competence, character and caring. I have learned through positive relationships with adults, peers and older peer role models. I have learned life skills and leadership.

I love school. I love 4-H. I love FFA. But most of all, I love working with my cattle every day and developing new skills and perfecting old ones. I don't know what I'd do without my cattle or if I didn't have something to do after school. I hope that what I have said to you today will help you realize what the youth of America needs. Please continue to provide funds for 4-H programs and support the positive influences on youth today.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Rebecca.

[Applause.]

One of the real strengths of both our FFA and 4-H programs is the ability to teach youth to do public speaking. And I think it's always heartwarming to see the skills that young people learn

through these educational programs and are so willing to share. So thank you to both of you for your time and the effort you put into your remarks. I think if you look at some of the other listening sessions you'll be proud of what our youth have just said, so thank you very much.

At this point we're going to move to Commissioner Prelli who would also like to make some comments. Our Commissioner of Agriculture, Phil Prelli.

COMMISSIONER PHIL PRELLI: Secretary Rey, for the record I am Philip Prelli, commissioner of Agriculture, state of Connecticut. It is my pleasure to be able to provide testimony today, and thank you for coming to Connecticut. I will tell you have greater courage than me; I never mention the Yankees, Red Sox feud in Connecticut as a politician, and they already know who the knucklehead from Connecticut is after six months in the job.

As I am sure you are aware Connecticut has participated in many of the programs, which have been part of the previous Farm Bill. Over the last 10 years the state has averaged approximately \$1 million each year in the Farm and Farm/Ranch Protection Program. What makes this even more impressive is that we have been able to leverage that with our state money, municipal money and not-for-profit organizations to preserve large quantities of farmland in our state.

Partnering with all these groups has helped make your effort more successful. Equal successes can be also shown with the EQIP and the AFO-CAFOS strategy grants as well as crop insurance, the WIC and senior nutrition programs, Farm to School, specialty crops, farm export, and many other cooperative agreements.

This partnership between your agency and mine is a vital ingredient supporting Connecticut farmers. This would also include the regional work with which your agencies assist us. The farmers in our region would be at a severe disadvantage without the expertise of such agencies as NRCS, the Extension Service, FSA, FAS, APHIS, and the other affiliated agencies.

As we look forward to the 2007 Farm Bill we know that we will have to seek changes. In the ever-changing agriculture environment, issues will have to be addressed differently and sometimes at greater speed than is currently available. Who knows how the existing world trade discussions will affect farm subsidies? We cannot afford to have this money leave the agriculture arena.

This is not a major issue in the Northeast, but we must find new and unique ways to funnel that money to our farmers to ensure their viability.

We should look at using more block grant programs by defining those in such a way that they can be changed to address the pertinent issues of the day. Making the application and reporting process less bureaucratic and easier to follow would be a positive step. There are times now when it is questionable on whether it worth the personnel time needed to apply and report on the grants for the amounts received. Block grants would allow us flexibility to meet the needs of our constituents and ensure the money reaches the farmers.

We must also continue to address the environmental needs of our farmers as we have done under the past bill with such funds to address the CAFO needs with the clean water. We must now look to the new clean air concerns and help our farmers address this need.

As this is not fully defined as yet, we will need to be again flexible in the way we approach this issue.

In Connecticut and the Northeast specialty products and niche markets are a major part of our agricultural venue. These include but are not limited to such products as greenhouses and nurseries, broadleaf tobacco, organic farming, mushrooms, shellfish, poultry, maple syrup and other specialty crops. Many of our farmers sell their products at local farmers markets and on their own farms. The Connecticut-grown brand is respected and adds value to our products as we saw earlier today. Support for these programs should also be included in the 2007 bill.

The dairy industry is still a major concern in Connecticut and the Northeast. The Northeast Dairy Compact helps us to ensure the dairy remains viable and that local products were available to our region. I understand it will be difficult to reinstate the compact, but I need to put a plug in for it anyway. It was a program that helped our farmers with milk taxpayer dollars. The MILC program has helped some of our smaller farmers, and I would ask at a minimum that this be continued.

In closing let me again thank you for being here. It is our responsibility to bring forward programs that not only assist our farmers and preserve agriculture but to make them easily accessible and flexible to meet their needs. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Thank you, Commissioner Prelli.

We'll now move to those of you who wish to speak. We will start the timer. We did ask people to sign in but we won't go in that order necessarily. As you wish to speak please feel free to move toward one of the open mikes. I will start the timer as you start to speak, and when I stand again you'll know that your two minutes are up. So who would like to go first? Go right ahead, sir.

MR. DAVID PENNY: Good morning. My name is David Penny. I'm the first selectman of the town of Somers, tenth generation farmer I guess if I count correctly in North Central Connecticut. Under Secretary Rey and to all who helped organize this opportunity to speak to the Farm Bill, thank you very much for the opportunity. If indeed it's the first listening forum relative to the Farm Bill that's happened in Connecticut, well better late than never.

I would hope that it's indeed a sign that there is a growing awareness that farming in Connecticut, farming in New England, is a significant part of agriculture in the United States but that it also is an endeavor that has its own unique characteristics and requirements. And the Farm Bill needs to incorporate and be mindful of that uniqueness.

Local is the issue for Connecticut agriculture, and it is the opportunity for local land use, conservation and environmental issues, to be most cost-effectively addressed when we can support

local farms. The best opportunity for local farms is producing products that can be marketed locally. The program we're just witnessing this morning for the local milk is a fine example. It is the most as I said cost-effective way of keeping farmers on the landscape. Farmers in the rapidly urbanized landscape are one of again the most effective ways of supporting the conservation and environmental goals that we all hold.

One of the things I find from my perspective as a local administrator is that the regulations that is often out there produced at the local level is contrary and provides barriers to local farmers. USDA can help provide education and technological understanding that will enable local regulators to more effectively accommodate both their goals for health and land use controls and support for local farmers at the same time. Thanks again for your time.

MODERATOR: Let's agree to hold applause on speakers and we'll wait until the very end. So thank you very much.

MR. GORDON GIBSON: Secretary Rey, for the record, I am Gordon Gibson, legislative director of the Connecticut State Grange. I'm also speaking this morning on behalf of Connecticut Farmland Trust, a private nonprofit land trust dedicated to preserving farmland in Connecticut; and the Working Lands Alliance, a coalition of approximately 130 organizations concerned with preserving farmland and food in Connecticut.

Many people think of Connecticut as an industrial state and not an agricultural state. We are a small state. Our entire state is smaller than some of the counties out through the Midwest and the Great Plains. But still we have a tremendous agricultural industry. Agriculture contributes \$2 billion annually to Connecticut's economy and provides 50,000 permanent jobs, mostly for low and moderate-income wage earners.

We have some of the best farmland in the world. I didn't say the United States-- I said the world. But we are rapidly losing it irretrievably to development. The Department of Agriculture and the Connecticut Farmland Trust along with many local land trusts are preserving what we can. But still we are losing 8,000 acres a year or approximately 8 acres for every acre we preserve.

Our biggest problem to preserving land is money. And we would ask and hope that the 2007 Farm Bill will provide more funds to preserve this land.

A second issue to us is food security. I got in the habit of eating many year ago as you can tell by my waistline, and I don't intend to break that habit. But for the first time in the history of the United States in 2005 we will be a net food importing country. And the Northeast including Connecticut is very close to that. Some of our food is traveling 1,500 miles to reach us. And with the increase of cost in transportation and what will happen if some of the foreign countries we're bringing our food in form a food cartel similar to the OPEC oil cartel?

I will wrap up very quickly by saying Connecticut people want local products. We need programs that will help the smaller states with local programs. One size will not fit all. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Let's move to the microphone over here on this side by the tractors.

MS. LITA GOYA (sp): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Lita Goya, and I am the active member of 4-H. I am hoping to attend Mattabessett FFA program. This morning I am going to tell you a story about my family farm. Most people would assume people who live in Connecticut are not what you would call average farmers. But words cannot describe my farm. With about 100 acres of land and all the animals you could possibly imagine we also let FFA members come to our farm and walk away with not just 1,000 hours but the memory of good times and years of agricultural experience of showing and working with livestock.

One of the FFA members graduated high school and is now attending the University of Oklahoma. With all the years that she worked on our farm she received a state proficiency award and is now looking forward to being a large animal vet. One of the newest FFA members who is working on our farm as well as my best friend who once didn't know how to ride a horse or show a sheep is now showing and fitting sheep, goats, rabbits and horses. Nicole is also on the livestock judging team and has the highest amount of hours in her class.

Nicole and I were in the Middletown transfer helping our friend. Nicole is hoping to become an all-around vet and attend Tulsa University. I am planning to follow my lifetime dream of becoming a horse trainer and having a farm of Suffolk sheep and Brown Swiss dairy cows. I am the next generation of agriculture.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Let's move over here to Chris.

MS. CHRIS COFFIN: Hi. For the record I'm Chris Coffin. I'm the New England director for American Farm Land Trust. I spend a lot of time in Connecticut. Secretary Rey, I wanted to address two issues that you raised. First, one of your questions, which were let's, can we talk about policies that will welcome new entry into agriculture?

From our perspective the importance of access to affordable farmland is key in Connecticut and throughout New England. Because of farm values in the state and elsewhere in New England it is simply not possible for many young farmers to get into the business of farming unless we manage to keep farmland both available and affordable. That is why we consider state farmland protection programs to be key, and for that reason why the Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program is so important.

On that front in terms of the cost we can have farm and ranchland FRP projects in Connecticut that cost millions of dollars and last year FY '05 Connecticut got \$3 million in FRPP which in our mind can really accomplish very few projects.

When you look at then sort of and as you mentioned you said there are groups out there who are interested in anchoring farm policy around conservation. AFT is certainly one of those organizations. We believe there are great many more needs in terms of conservation that can also provide more income support for farmers.

On that front just two quick points. Regional equity in the 2002 Farm Bill has been critical for this part of the country. It has doubled conservation program funding in New England and in

Connecticut. There is still a backlog of \$327 million worth of projects and farmers who have applied -- (audio break)

It has tremendous potential we believe, but again we see the concept of green payments as one as Gordon Gibson says one size does not fit all. We need to have a program. It's not working yet in New England for a variety of reasons, but we need to try and make it that it can suit the needs of all size and types of farm operations.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Chris. Let's go right over here.

MS. NICOLE MCCAY (sp): Good morning. My name is Nicole McCay. I attend the Matabasset (sp) Chapter of the FFA. My goal is to be involved in agriculture today and tomorrow. Currently I have attended many local agriculture fairs showing sheep. I have learned that agriculture is a very important industry. I am glad that I can learn about agriculture through the FFA and 4-H. We need to continue the support so I can continue to be involved in agriculture as adult. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Nicole. Let's go this side.

MS. MELISSA SPEAR (sp): First I think you should increase the amount of time allowed in these forums to three minutes because everyone seems to have difficulty with two.

MODERATOR: To clarify -- thank you for bringing that up -- we will have time when everyone has spoken who wants to speak, we will then open the mikes for more general discussion and we can have more time at that point.

MS. SPEAR: Great. Thank you. My name is Melissa Spear, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit land conservation organization with offices in 27 states including one here in Connecticut. Our mission is to preserve the recreational agricultural and open space values of land for the benefit of private citizens, local communities and the public. And we achieve this goal by partnering with states, counties and towns as well as other nonprofits -- and of course the NRCS through the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program which is a very important program for us.

Over the last four years we successfully completed or are in the process of completing over 25 FRPP projects across the nation including 13 here in New England. We'd like to express our appreciation to you, Under Secretary Rey, and to NRCS for your consistent support for the FRPP over the last four years. Nationally the infusion of relatively consistent levels of federal Farm and Ranchland Protection funds has leveraged more than 2.5 times that amount in state and local and private funding. And through this process a uniquely American way of life has been protected and important agricultural lands have been preserved.

I'd like to talk a little bit about an ongoing project here in Woodstock, Connecticut-- protection of Valley Farm that I think really illustrates the way that FRPP funds can be leveraged by New England's agriculture communities to help maintain their viability. It's representative of many of the farm protection projects here in New England.

As towns in the region have watched their farmland communities shrink and the economics of farming in the region have become increasingly difficult, many have looked for ways to provide tangible support to farmers who wish to continue their agricultural enterprise and contribution to the local economy.

The town of Woodstock for example has appropriated local tax dollars to a land acquisition fund for the purchase of development rights on prime agricultural land. The funds that small communities are able to bring to bear for agriculture preservation are not enough on their own to meet demand. For example, the value of development rights on the 100-acre Valley Farm alone are estimated at \$800,000, and real estate prices continue to rise. Therefore the success of this project is dependent upon funding partnerships between NRCS, the state Department of Agriculture, and the town of Woodstock. It would not be a successful project without the NRCS funds. And I'll submit the rest of my testimony.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Melissa. Appreciate that.

MR. JAMES CIPRELLI (sp): Good morning. My name is James Ciprelli. I'm the chairman of the Kings Mark Resource Conservation and Development Council, an area here in western Connecticut. I'm also the president of the New England Association of RC&Ds. There's 15 RC&D councils in the six New England states. I also sit on the National Board as a result of that presence of New England.

The nation's 375 RC&D Councils are a proven delivery system for USDA programs and services. Resource Conservation Development Councils play an important role in the conservation, economic development and utilization of the natural resources. The public-private partnership between RC&D Councils and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service Resource Conservation and Development Program is based on the assumption that local citizens with help provided through the USDA can develop and carry out an area plan that identifies and addresses local needs while at the same time providing an return on every federal dollar invested in the program.

The upcoming Farm Bill provides a unique opportunity to more directly tie councils to delivery of the full compliment of the USDA programs and services in our local communities. Recent decisions by USDA have limited the ability of the federal RC&D coordinators to fully assist the councils. Authority needs to be clarified in the Farm Bill to give them the flexibility they need to access USDA programs so they can continue to assist the local volunteer councils.

The Farm Bill also provides the opportunity for the USDA to recommit to fully funding the federal investment in the public-private partnership so that RC&D Councils could continue to improve quality of life in local communities through conservation and economic development as they have for the past 40 years. the RC&D Councils are willing to provide additional guidance in the continuing Farm Bill discussions, and you'll see that and hear that throughout the rest of the hearings you're going to have.

On behalf of the two RC&D Councils in Connecticut I'd like to present you with a T-shirt from our Tour the Farms road race that we had. It's a bike race we had in the Litchfield Hills and also in Northeast Connecticut.

If you look on the back you'll see 32 sponsors and partners that we developed for one small event.

MODERATOR: Thank you, James. We're going to move over here. David?

MR. DAVID BULL: Good morning, Secretary Rey. I am David Bull. While we live in Columbia, Connecticut, we operate a 200-year-old grain farm in southern Ohio. I'll address questions one, three and six.

The long-term objective of federal U.S. farm policy must be maintenance of a viable food production capability and food security. It must ensure young people have the education and access to capital to be able to produce across sufficient quality land that's available to grow this food.

The Farm Bill is only a tool to make this happen.

My first point is to encourage expansion of Section 12-381, the Farmland Protection Program. We sold a conservation easement of our Ohio acreage to a trust, specifically to block urban development and perpetuate local farm capability. Federal policy should emphasize major expansion of easement instruments to enable production soil preserves for our future national security.

Second, Tom Friedman recently told us the world is flat, that global consumers will purchase most efficiently where production costs are lowest. There are no more artificial barriers. The 2007 Farm Bill should facilitate expanded international trade in concert with Departments of State and Commerce. Food must replace widgets as a key export base to overcome the burgeoning trade deficit. Legislation must demand strategic agricultural trade, not perpetuate myopic protectionism.

Third, land grant universities were created to champion education for the common man. Regrettably these same universities have regressed into research with results archived and isolated. I urge you to reinstate the function of the Cooperative Extension System as a key transfer element of knowledge back to the rural and urban population.

Rural development cannot progress without educated people.

I appreciate the opportunity to make these points and encourage your consideration of the points we've raised.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll move to the center.

MS. ANN COLBY: Yes, thanks. My name is Ann Colby. I'm with the Southbury Land Trust. And I just want to talk to you, about another specific illustration of the way the conservation programs in the last Farm Bill were successful and why we need to build on those in the next Farm Bill.

In Southbury we have been -- our farm preservation program has just been tremendously aided by specifically FRPP. To give you an example, the three years prior to the 2002 Farm Bill the land trust in the town of Southbury preserved one farm. In the three years following the 2002 Farm Bill we've worked on five successful farmland preservation programs projects and four of them were a success solely because of funding we received through FRPP. We would not have been able to protect those farms without it.

As a result of the success and the terrific education program that the local NRCS has provided to farm owners, we are getting an increased demand constantly from more farm owners in our region and from the next generation of farmers who are looking for less expensive land to lease. And yet we in our town are looking at a window of opportunity perhaps five to 10 years to preserve the remaining farmland in our area due to two factors-- the ageing of the current farm owner generation and the rising cost of land.

So farm families in our town are facing tough decisions they need to make now. And we need to be there to partner with them to offer them the resources for more and better choices. And I just want to reiterate the calls for more funding for Connecticut in the next Farm Bill for our conservation programs. They are working, they're efficient, they're effective, and we hope we can build on those past successes. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Ann. We'll move to the mike.

MR. MICHAEL LUTZ (sp): My name is Michael Lutz. I'm from Haddam, Connecticut. I have a small farm. I'm also representing the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District of which I'm a board member. In my district the largest issue is pressure of development on farmland. There are two farms right next to me. One recently the farmer was deceased and it looks like the heirs are not going to be able to hold out against development. And the farm right next to them is already been split once and the farmer there is of the older generation. What happens next on his farm is of great concern to our town also. So the federal funds to preserve these farms are very important.

The second item is technical support. I would like to support NRCS and the technical support that we get from them at the district and as a property owner the direct help that I can get from the NRCS. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Michael. We're going to move over here to Anna.

MS. ANNA LEGRAND (sp): Good morning. My name is Anna Legrand, and I represent the Connecticut IPM program. Today I'll be addressing topic number four, achievement of conservation and environmental goals.

The Integrated Pest Management Program, or IPM program provides information and training on environmentally sound pest management tactics. Our goal is to help growers with their pest management needs in a way that protects the environment and also ensures the profitability of their operation. Through our partnership with NRCS we have been providing IPM training to growers who qualify to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program or EQIP. This training is delivered through weekly visits to the participating growers. The IPM staff helps the grower in dealing with any current pest problems as well as providing training on how to carry out seasonal long IPM for a particular crop.

Our presence at the EQIP sites not only benefits the participating growers but we also take information gathered there and relay it to other growers around the state.

For example the fruit IPM educator Lorraine Lors (sp) uses weather data collected at a growers' site to predict the occurrence of applescott (ph) infection. Then through several communication means she alerts growers about the likelihood of applescott infection and when treatments are justified for this problem. Two key aspects of IPM are the emphasis on tactics that prevent pest problems and the ability to predict when pesticide applications are justified.

With this information we are able then to cut down on unnecessary use of pesticides. We are currently training 14 growers who have qualified to the EQIP program. This program just started last year, and we continue this year again. These growers will receive IPM training for three years covering a variety of crops including vegetables, field corn, small fruit and treefruit crops.

We are also expanding our services to (unclear) growers that qualify to participate in the EQIP program. The partnership with NRCS and the funding received through EQIP has supported our IPM program and most importantly has provided an incentive to growers to try new IPM strategies. We are thankful for the support, and we hope that the next Farm Bill will continue to sponsor programs like EQIP, which benefit Connecticut growers and our environment. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Anna. We're going to move to this gentleman and then to the middle.

MR. RUSSELL ROBINSON: Name's Russell Robinson, director for New Haven County Connecticut Sheep Breeders and member of the American Lamb Board. My statement today is, I don't expect an answer right away, anybody to jump up and say anything, but I know it's a big concern not only here in Connecticut but throughout the entire nation. Animal identification is a big issue with a lot of people across the nation today.

To my knowledge still in Connecticut and New England is not entirely successful and it's our hope that you would continue to support this until all the problems in this area have been hashed out. I understand that due to the vast economical advantage that cattle have it's highly possible that within a matter of one or two years the privatization of cattle ID will be highly successful. But due to the controls and the value of smaller livestock such as poultry, sheep and goats, horses, their movement also needs to be tracked. And to my knowledge is nowhere near successful currently. I don't believe that privatization at this time is currently feasible. I think I

believe I speak for everybody in saying that all eyes are on the federal government to help us work this problem out.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Russell.

MR. LEE GRANTIS (sp): My name is Lee Grantis. I live in Bethany, Connecticut. I'm the coordinator for the greater New Haven Clean Cities Coalition, which is a Department of Energy program that advocates the use of alternative fuels as outlined in the Energy Policy Act of 1992. And that includes biomass fuels.

I'm here to talk about biomass and transportation as well as heating fuels. I don't know if you know this or not, but one major supplier here in Connecticut was going to put 5 percent of bioblend fuel in his heating fuel this year to sell. And the coalitions around the United States are getting asked repeatedly what can we do with the energy issue that's going on right now? Both transportation-related and heating-related, especially here in the Northeast coming this winter, and we're all saying biofuels are the fastest thing you can do to put into effect to alleviate the problem.

Also the price due to the Energy Policy Act and other legislation has brought the price down where it's equal to diesel fuel and/or heating fuel costs. So in our work we are finding a real disconnect between the numerous agencies and the federal government to make this happen, especially the economics of it.

I'm talking about the Department of Energy as well working with the Department of Agriculture, Department of Transportation, and the EPA and probably Department of Commerce too.

We need your help in any bills to include agriculture bills and of course the energy bill did its part to coordinate these activities so it will make it economically feasible to produce our own fuel here in the United States. This is not going to alleviate the problems we have, but it sure is going to make a dent in it. Anything we can do to cut down the requirements for fuel from foreign countries which are limiting our freedom today would help. So I ask for coordination help.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Lee. Marian, before you start I just want to remind anyone in the audience if you'd like a microphone brought to you so you might speak from your seat, please indicate by raising your hand and we'll accommodate that.

MS. MARIAN STANNARD (sp): Thank you. My name is Marian Stannard from Durham, Connecticut. I'd like to address the farm policy as a consumer. Two of our biggest issues in the first five years, the 21st Century, have been homeland security and the cost of fuel for transportation. And farm policy can address those two concerns.

In my opinion homeland security is not just making sure our food supply is safe. It's also making sure the population has access to that food. Having grown up in suburban Connecticut and lived here all my life, I can picture many parts of the country where the public feels cut off from their food source.

Twice in the last few years a major interstate highway has been shut down in the state of Connecticut diverting truck traffic completely around the entire state. How many of those trucks were our Connecticut food supply? What can the Farm Bill do to ensure that more food is produced and stored in the state of Connecticut? Farmers cow is a great example of how the public knows there is milk produced in Connecticut so the next time there's a storm and we had that run on the supermarkets like we always do that empties the shelves of milk hopefully there's Connecticut milk there. We're not waiting for those trucks to come in from out of state.

What about produce? Why is all our produce brought in from other parts of the country except for the season Connecticut-grown farm market season? Why aren't there more places to store produce in Connecticut? What better way to use a lot of our vacant industrial buildings than to find a way to support their transition into a storage facility? We're growing a tremendous amount of produce in Connecticut, and once that first frost hits it's all got to be shipped back in.

Another thing to consider is how many other products could be grown in Connecticut if farm policy didn't just support volume? Maybe there were policies to consider, is there a way to say there should be an incentive to grow near a population center? Obviously farmland preservation helps that. We need to make sure that farmland preservation also includes ways to make sure that if you have high costs of production you still can grow in Connecticut even though you may not have 1,000 acres to produce potatoes-- produce them on a smaller plot and find a way to store them here in Connecticut so the product is close to the consumer.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Marian.

MR. JOE WELCH: Hi. My name is Joe Welch. I'm a member of the Shelton Land Conservation Trust. And today I'm here in support of any continued funding and educational programs for invasive plant management. We began managing one of our parcels, 65-acre site, that was an old farm and it was overgrown with a lot of invasive plants.

And through the NRCS and a few other sites on the Internet we were able to educate ourselves and get some guidance and eventually funding that's really making a difference opening up about 20 acres or so that's going to be left as fields, areas for field habitat, once a year. We'd just like to thank the efforts and mechanisms for funding that allow us to do this because before that there was a lot of just volunteers and you could spend a lot of time out trying to get work accomplished that with a little bit of funding you can bring in specialized equipment and really get a head start.

And what we have found is, we learned from our experiences that we're actually in the process of trying to educate others and pass along this information. Thank you again and hopefully the funding will be there in the future.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Joe. You do remind us that the Farm Bill is the authorizing mechanism, and Rosa DeLauro sits on the Appropriations Committee which is the funding mechanism, and that's an important partnership. And Rosa's staff, Bill Hendricks, is still in the back of the room if you came in late and wanted to speak with him.

BLACKIE: Good morning. Secretary Rey, it's reassuring to see a left-hander on the stage. Everyone knows left-handers are right-minded. You'll notice I'm holding my pen likewise.

SEC. REY: Just as long as you don't see my penmanship.

BLACKIE: I have that problem too, so. As a farmer I want to be very competitive in our domestic market, but I think domestic markets means different things to different people. To me the domestic market is for all the consumable food and plant products, products people in this state like to buy from local farmers.

The Farm Bill must have a much stronger presence in the horticulture and specialty crops area. The fact that I have to compete with the Canadian market that seems to be able to get their crops down here to Boston, New York markets so much cheaper than I can grow it suggests we have a very serious problem.

We must develop more programs that encourage production of most of the local grown food and plants. I'd also like to address the USDA office closure. I want to speak in opposition. As I understand it, Connecticut has been asked to close a disproportionate number. I'm opposed to that.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Blackie. Nate.

MR. NATHAN CUSHMAN: Under Secretary Rey, I certainly appreciate this opportunity to raise an issue before you. I'm Nathan Cushman, a dairy farmer from Franklin, Connecticut. And once again I really appreciate the opportunity to speak before you and impress that you have time in what I know is your very busy schedule to be here.

But I would like to talk about the Environmental Quality Incentive Program which we have signed up for, signed up for previous years. I think it's essential to help livestock producers come into compliance with the permitting process. I also have a few suggestions that from our experiences with the previous EQIP program and what we're going through currently that might be helpful.

We had signed up in February of 2003. We operate on three different locations, very, it's a complicated program with a number of practices, and we were outsourced to a private engineering firm. Took two years for them to come up with a plan. In the meantime the costs of all the practices have escalated way beyond what we had budgeted, and also in the meantime standards have changed to make what we had budgeted not doable at the current costs.

So I think that if we had good success working with our conservation as previously the current firm is really not familiar with agriculture and the structures that we're involved with. So again I would really support continued funding. I think it's essential and I think we should look at working with our own NRCS staff and once we start a program we stay with existing standards rather than continuing to revise them.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Nate. We'll move to this one. Roy?

MR. ROY JEFFREY (sp): Good morning, Mr. Under Secretary. My name is Roy Jeffrey from Storrs, Connecticut. I'm water quality coordinator for the University of Connecticut Extension System and also a member of the board of directors for the Connecticut Farmland Trust.

My comments focus on the conservation and environmental goals question. The 2002 Farm Bill authorizations and subsequent appropriations in the research and education title, particularly the Smith Lever and Section 406 line items enable CES to work with producers and community officials in the area of water quality. I'd like to highlight two of those areas.

First, we work closely with dairy producers to protect water quality through the implementation of nutrient management plans, plans that are based in part on research conducted at UCON. A key to success here can very much be attributed to having a very close working relationship as we partnered with NRCS and the EQIP program. The net result of course has been farmers being able to continue to be the good stewards of the land that they manage while maintaining a profitable operation.

Secondly, we worked closely with municipal leaders through our nationally recognized NEMO program and our Green Valley Institute Program to better protect natural resources and water quality. This educational work has been especially useful for communities located in the urban-rural fringe of Connecticut where municipal leaders are now better able to implement ways to protect valuable natural resource areas including farmlands.

Speaking of farmlands, I should mention that the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program has been very effective in helping public and private entities across the state leverage some of the funds they need to protect Connecticut farmland. And increased opportunity to protect farmland in turn serves to benefit our educational efforts through the NEMO and Green Valley Institute programs.

As we look to the future it's clear that agriculture and associated land uses will need to play a strong role in the stewardship of our natural resources, especially cleaner air and water. Research and education are important to achieving success. There may be a need however to look at innovative ways to fund Cooperative Extension work in this area putting opportunities for new and strengthened relationships with other agencies. Thank you very much.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Roy. Paul.

MR. PAUL MILLER: Yes. I am Paul Miller, a dairy farm from what they call the Quiet Corner in Connecticut. We milk 600 cows in a family operation. I'd like to thank Mr. Roy for coming today.

And what I'd like to say is that agriculture in Connecticut is still very alive. We're still worthy of federal dollars. And I think the Farmland Preservation Program is helpful. I think there's some key roles that need to be looked at when funding dollars to preservation programs and trusts. I don't want to dampen the thought of having land in trust, but I think that number one the threat is from houses. Number two, it's from landowners that take their land and decide they don't want

agriculture on it; they'd rather have lawns and pretty green grasses to look at because they don't understand agriculture.

I think number three that a lot of the land trusts are heavy on preserving nature and put restrictions on that land that inhibit the ability to farm and farm profitably. Some of that might be wanting to save certain species of birds and therefore not allowing a farmer to cut the land until after August when it's not worth anything.

I'd also like to speak briefly on the MILC program. I think it needs to be able to handle family farms such as ours and not be restricted to small single-family member farms. And it's important to include multigenerational farms in the MILC program, and I think that's one of my key gripes.

I think as this morning we were part of a recipient of the Farmers Cow and value-added grants and I think value-added grants are something that are key to keeping a point of origin and local produce in the state of Connecticut. I think the continuation of value-added grants is very key. And again I would like to thank you for coming to Connecticut and listening to us here.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Paul. We're going to take one more person to testify, and then we're going to take a brief break and we'll reconvene following that. So Marilyn, if you would please?

MS. MARILYN ALTOBELLO: Good morning, Secretary Rey. My name is Marilyn Altobello. I'm an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Connecticut. My comments pertain to competitiveness and economic viability of Connecticut agriculture.

The Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 has provided for the Crop Insurance Education in targeted states program. Since 2001 USDA Risk Management Agency has partnered with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System to provide crop insurance and risk management education to Connecticut agricultural producers and their advisors. The overall objective of this effort is to improve the economic viability of Connecticut agriculture and the financial well being of its producers.

The Connecticut Farm Risk Management Team along with the statewide advisory group that was formed for this project has conducted educational programs for the past four years and a fifth year has been recently approved. Educational topics have included crop insurance, marketing, farm business planning, estate planning and farm transfer, tax planning and debt management, use of pesticides, farm labor issues, and working with local officials.

Delivery has been through a variety of means including workshops, one-on-one advising, presentations at commodity group meetings, a website and direct mailings. We've reached over 3,500 producers and agricultural advisors each year and about 400 per year have attended our programs.

The Farm Risk Management Team has received positive feedback and many comments from producers have benefited from our programs. They and others have provided good suggestions for future programs so there exist many opportunities to expand our offerings. Therefore, it's important that the funding for the crop insurance and risk management education program be continued beyond the current five-year commitment and that if possible additional funds be allocated to these efforts in the future.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Marilyn. At this time we will take a 10-minute break. We'll reconvene at 10:40. If you'd like to provide additional testimony at that time if you've not yet spoken and would like to speak, please go to the mikes as we come back together. Once everyone has testified we'll go to more general discussion time. So thank you, and we'll see you in 10 minutes.

MODERATOR: Best way to get the crowd back is to just start. We will remind you that if you choose to speak you should go to a microphone and when recognized identify your name, your town and your relationship to agriculture, conservation and/or conservation.

We did think that perhaps Congresswoman Johnson might be able to come this morning. She had a last-minute conflict, but the congresswoman who of course is an advocate for agriculture was kind enough to send to Mel Gaitling (sp) right over here to be with us. And so thank you very much for coming and sampling some of that excellent Berlin home cooking.

Okay, we'll start with the center mike, please.

MS. KIM STONER: My name is Kim Stoner. And I work at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven. People tend to forget that there is another agricultural experiment station, which is not affiliated with the land grant university system in this state. And I also am the vice president of the Northeast Organic Farming Association.

And in my professional work I want to say that I do research and public service to farmers in sustainable agriculture. And I would like to speak in support of the sustainable agriculture research and education program and the very tiny but very important organic agricultural research programs in the USDA. Both of those are very important in providing a research and education base to help move agriculture towards more sustainability both environmentally and economically.

And then I would like to say that in my experience with the Northeast Organic Farming Association we find that there are a lot of people who are very interested in farming in Connecticut and who are facing tremendous challenges as new farmers. Access to farmland, as many people have already spoken about today, is a critical challenge. But another challenge is a comprehensive strategy to get farmers successfully established on preserved farmland.

There is a fair amount of farmland preserved in one program or another which is not being very actively farmed up to its potential. Many of the new farmers did not grow up in farming families, and they need assistance in developing realistic production plans, marketing plans, and

business plans, and an opportunity to get experience implementing those plans as apprenticeships or on incubator farms.

And there are a number of successful incubator farming programs around New England and apprenticeship programs, and it's also very important to support the community food security programs that provide local links, ways for people to buy food from their local farmers through farmers market programs and community food security programs.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Kim. I just remind you, if you do have written comments you'd like to leave, and we would encourage that, there are boxes on the back table. Or if you want to go to the website, WWW.USDA.GOV, you may also add your comments in that manner.

Melinda?

MS. MELINDA NAPLES: My name is Melinda Naples. I'm a new dairy farmer from Durham, Connecticut, and I am 22 years old. I want to state that because that was one of my first points is that getting started in agriculture, especially production agriculture, as a younger person is very difficult now.

One of the things I found made it difficult is there being a lack of programs out there to start up young farmers that don't have a lot of established credit. And also one thing I think would help this is loan officers. I went through FSA for my loan.

One thing it would help for us to come into the new era of agriculture which is selling locally-grown food, especially in the Northeast, is educating more people through FSA and other lending agencies to let them know what the local markets in the Northeast are since we're very different from the rest of the country. It's not such large-scale commercial production.

The excuse I got for not lending to me for processing my own dairy products was that they don't know that market of the locally sold products. I say that is an excuse because I think it is. I think it's something we need to improve on to educate these officers.

One thing I think we really do need to support and realize is that New England and the Northeast is very different from the rest of the country in agriculture, and it's going very much towards your locally grown and selling local products. That's something I want to do eventually is process my own milk and possibly make cheese and other dairy products. We need to support and realize in the Farm Bill that the Northeast is different. We're not all large-scale commercial production and to support that locally grown.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Melinda. If I could step out of my role as moderator and tell you, my role with the Cooperative Extension System, when Melinda came to my office maybe five years ago now and said, here's my business plan, I'm going to start a dairy farm in Connecticut at a time when many dairy farms were going out of business, it's a true pleasure to see someone who's actually living what she wanted to do and making it work for her. So thank you for coming today, Melinda.

Erica?

MS. ERICA FERN: Thank you. I'm Erica Fern with Connecticut Farm Bureau. I'm also a start-up farmer in West Suffield, Connecticut. I'd like to recognize today and reemphasize the diversity of Connecticut agriculture. We're here in a new building today that the Berlin Fair has put up to honor the history of our agriculture in the state.

We are not historical farmers in Connecticut. We are beyond diverse in our business attitude and the products we sell, the way we sell those products. We need a Farm Bill that allows us to address that diversity. We need risk management programs that allow our farmers that are not commodity producers that go even further than the AGR programs to have us help with risk management on our farms.

We need a Farm Bill that doesn't pit commodity programs against other agriculture. Connecticut is other agriculture, and we're strong, and we're extremely proud of that. And we need the programs that support us with Cooperative Extension funding. Those are the people that help us with our start-up farms, with our growers, with our marketing. And without that support and that financial backing we have even more difficulty reaching our markets and being successful.

Farmland preservation in this area is extremely important because of the pressure from building. We need not only to be strong in our farmland preservation efforts, but we need to be strong in our viability efforts and the ability to make money-producing products that our consumers provide.

Our consumers in our area in Connecticut, the Boston and New York markets, are extremely well educated. And we're giving them the products they're asking for, and we need to do an even better job, and USDA support and Farm Bill support for those efforts would be greatly appreciated.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

MS. MARGERY SHANSKY (sp): Thank you. Good morning. I am Attorney Margery Shansky. My office is in New Haven. But my practice extends through New Haven, Middlesex, New London, Tolland, and Hartford Counties.

I am associated with the Connecticut Land Use Leadership Alliance, which is an integrated program that originated through the Land Use Law Center at Case University. And we present a four-day land-use leadership training to decision-makers, land-use board members, town planners, town leaders. Attorney Penny, who spoke to you earlier is a farmer from Somers, participated in one of our four-day programs.

Our goal is to inculcate a higher degree of understanding and awareness of natural resources and tools for achieving sustainable development in Connecticut. We encourage the full recognition and acknowledgement in the Farm Bill of Connecticut's agricultural needs and agricultural goals.

We take in our four days the opportunity to give land-use leaders hard-core information about environmental and natural resources. We have been supported in that effort by the NRCS to whom we are exceedingly grateful.

And then one-half of our program is devoted to collaborative training exercises and training in and of itself in order to first of all empower commissioners to exercise the authority within their jurisdictions without embarrassment, apology and unease.

And secondly to try to even the playing field between the developers who come forward with development ideas that threaten open space and farmland so that instead of reacting in all cases to proposals that are made to commission, they are able to plan, able to have a higher degree of planning and awareness of the impact of their actions in a broader context than just the proposal before them.

I'm currently involved with the Wildlife Conservation Service, WCS, on the Farmington River biotic corridor drafting a series of zoning regulations for the seven towns that share the Farmington River in order to take a broader watershed view of what's going on. And of course agriculture enters into that equation as well, so we thank very much the Department of Agriculture for the support thus far and encourage that as the first young lady speaker said, education is the key.

And it doesn't just reside in the young people. Land Use Commissioners in New Haven in Connecticut are largely volunteer lay people who do not have backgrounds. Our goal is to uplift the dialog and give them the tools they need. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Margery. If anyone else would like to provide two minutes of testimony, please move to one of the mikes and we'll call on you next. Thank you. Go right ahead.

MR. DICK DAVIS: My name is Dick Davis. I'm president of Simsbury Land Trust. And I'm here to state my strong support for the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. We're the recipients of two grants for farmland protection, and I just want to make a couple points of how very important these are both to the local level and I think in the bigger picture.

Of course we have very valuable agricultural soils and active productive farms that are at risk because of generational changes and rise in land prices of going out of existence. So that's the basic reason.

But I think one thing that's not talked of as often is the importance, kind of the flipside of population density/high land prices, the importance of the program in areas like that as well as across the country, and that's if that's where the people are in the long term we're not going to have a successful farmland protection unless you have broad-based public support.

And these programs have gotten tremendous support locally. We raised, because of the USDA program we were able to raise over \$1 million in private donations for these two farms.

That could never have happened without USDA program support. It gave us credibility, gave people the confidence that we'd follow through and get the job done.

Because of it we've also done a tremendous amount of publicity throughout the town and the area. So I just wanted to say thank you very much.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Dick. And under Dick's leadership Simsbury Land Trust was just recognized by the Connecticut Trustees of Eastern States for one of their farmland preservation awards. Please.

MR. JOE JEREMIAH: My name is Joe Jeremiah. I'm a farmer in Longford, Connecticut. I'm also a member of the Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association. We have a greenhouse production facility in Longford, and it's been growing for the last 20 years.

And probably 10 years ago I hardly heard the word Canada. And recent years every year, every week, every month I hear it more and more from our customers. Oh, we can get that cheaper in Canada. Luckily we have fairly loyal customers. We sell to independent garden centers. Some of our colleagues that just sell to big box stores don't have that; every penny really counts.

And we've always been considered on the cutting edge of technology and everything when our colleagues come in, patting us on the back, so you think you're doing pretty good. But if we're so efficient and we can't compete with Canada -- so we got to go check this out. I was amazed and my eyes were opened wide when I went there.

They have every bell and whistle in their facility, things that we cannot afford, even the most, anybody in our state that the largest to the smallest, nobody could afford to have these type of conveyors and plant handling systems and production facilities to grow tomatoes and peppers and cucumbers. And all the produce is being shipped into our state. In the Hartford market there's trainloads every single day.

I'm just amazed. I asked the farmers up there, and they are a little reluctant to tell you, but basically they're dealing with large subsidies. And it doesn't matter if it's just a problem of the day -- right now fuel is an issue. So they're outfitting their greenhouses with wood burning stoves and stuff like that, anything that they need, thermal blankets.

Right now I'm trying to -- there's some grants available I'm told for this, and I just have a hard time getting my hands on information for it. But the producers in this state are every day now -- we've got guys that are telling us they might not even start their greenhouses up until March. And the Canadians are stepping right in and saying, we'll take that production.

I mean that really concerns me more than anything. It's like 10 year ago I haven't heard of it. Now it's amazing. They're expanding where we're looking at possibly a decrease. We were expanding every year for the last 15 years, but they're expanding and we're looking at decreasing. That's just kind of a scary scenario right now.

So we need more funding in the greenhouse end of things for conservation of energy, water and labor for that matter. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Joe.

Erin.

MS. ERIN SEPE: Good morning. My name is Erin Sepe. I'm a loan officer with First Pioneer Farm Credit. And you've heard about how diverse Connecticut agriculture is. The largest part of my portfolio is greenhouses and nurseries and horses. And the horticultural decorations for your stage and the fact that you had to pass equine events to get in here is just a testimony to that.

In making loans to new farmers or even helping existing ones continue, there are a few challenges we run into with the USDA's Farm Service Agency program. And I think there are three easy things you can do to help us out, make loans that we might not otherwise be able to.

The first one is the guaranteed loan limits aren't always high enough at \$813,000, which may sound like a lot to a small farmer. But once we pass that limit we have to go to the business and industry program which those guarantees are not only difficult to get but they have the added requirement of the business being in a less-populated town, which is very difficult to find in Connecticut, and it doesn't always make sense to me that the bigger businesses are in the smaller towns.

Secondly, our farmers are in a litigious society and they know that in estate planning they need certain vehicles such as trusts, family partnerships to continue the farm even when they are gone. However, once multiple entities become involved USDA no longer considers many of these businesses family farms. And therefore they are ineligible for several programs.

Finally, there's really no help for the support activities for agriculture. This means the fertilizer, chemical feed dealers, the farriers and the veterinarians, and the marketers and distributors -- there are no extra programs for them that enable me to work with these businesses. For instance, I have a produce distributor whose first year sales are pushing \$1 million of Connecticut-grown produce. But the challenges that go along with a new business such as limited liquidity, other capital to invest on the owner's part, are a big challenge into making a loan where it might not otherwise be able to be made.

But I can't work with this gentleman no matter what he is doing or how great a job he is doing with the USDA, because he's not growing himself. He's doing the most important thing to preserve Connecticut farmland and Connecticut agriculture. He's providing a means for farmers to be profitable, selling their produce for a higher price so they can remain economically viable as businesses. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Erin. Please.

MR. JOE DEFRANCESCO (sp): I'm Joe DeFrancesco from Northford, Connecticut. We have a vegetable farm, 110-acre vegetable farm along with greenhouse production. I'm a third-

generation farmer. Our farm started in 1900. My sons are in the business too. I have four sons. Three of them are full-time also.

We're finding it difficult to compete today in our industry because of the higher costs of everything going on, competing with produce and things being brought in from other countries, other states. I think we have the higher cost of living in Connecticut. Our minimum wage is the highest, so we find it very hard to bring product into the Hartford market. We're competing with Canadian vegetables and things like that. A lot of times they'll bring in pepper product that will say, oh we can get it from Canada \$2.00 cheaper. This is what you're going to get. So it's very difficult to compete with other countries that have different ways of producing things.

I'm also in the greenhouse business, and we're finding it very difficult in the last year or so to compete also. We're finding with the energy costs that everything's going up; with the price of oil, price of plastic is going sky-high and we're finding it very difficult to really compete in the market because of everything being shipped in from other countries.

And some customers are sticking with us; some are not. But we just find it very difficult to contend with it. We sort of need some help to stay in business. With my sons being in business -- they're young generation boys. We want to be competitive and make money on it, not just work. We work hard because it is in our blood to be a farmer. There's a lot of other ways we can be in business, but we'd like to just keep it going.

I think we need some help with the energy costs, some other ways of heating. We could probably use a lot of oil in our industry, a lot of diesel fuel for trucking. So we need some help to help us with some programs with energy cost for conservation, and other programs that would pertain to our business to keep it viable in the state of Connecticut. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Joe. Is there anyone else who would like to address one of the six questions? At this time is there anyone who would like to provide comment in general? Yes, please. Again, identify yourself, your town and your relationship to agriculture.

MR. PHILIP SNOW: My name is Philip Snow. I have a farm in Easton, Connecticut. Easton like Joe just said, the speaker before me, the price per acre in Connecticut is astronomical. No matter what part of the state you go to it's very difficult for farmers like ourselves -- we've been in business close to 100 years -- to make it.

So we need the federal government, United States Department of Agriculture, NRCS, they've helped us in the past. And they continue to help us. But we need a stronger commitment financially for them for easements, easements for farms, not for open space and golf courses, but for farming, because as we saw before when I came in here earlier there's a lot of young people want to go into farming. And that's the only way farming is going to make it, especially in Connecticut, is for the young blood. So we have to make it --

I'm fortunate. I have three children, two in business with me. If it wasn't for them, I have developers every week coming and they say, whatever you want we'll give you. I said, it's not about money. I love the land and I love what I do. Most farmers in this room will agree with that.

You farm because you love it. You don't look at the financial, but we have to make a living. And that's what it's all about. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Anyone else who would like to step to the microphone to make comment?

MR. GORDON GIBSON: If I may, realizing I'm speaking for the second time? Secretary Rey, in my earlier remarks I discussed our concern for food supply in Connecticut. A speaker who followed me asked, why don't we have storage facilities in Connecticut? The simple answer is, we are so hand-to-mouth on our food supply we don't have much to worry about storing.

One of the concerns in Connecticut is the cost of food to the consumer. Right now I can go to a grocery store and I will have to pay almost \$4.00 for a gallon of milk. I can go to a convenience store, specifically a 7-11 a quarter mile from my house. I can buy the identical gallon of milk from the same producer for \$2.69. In a matter of two miles that's a difference of \$1.30 a gallon. Meanwhile put it in consumer terms, our farmers are receiving about \$1.00 a gallon for the milk as it leaves the farm. They can't subsist on that.

We need programs to ensure an adequate food supply. Our people in the Northeast -- and I'm not speaking just for Connecticut now -- people throughout the Northeast want quality locally grown products. Couple of years ago in Rhode Island six dairy farmers got together and they formed an organization, which they are now marketing as Rhodney Fresh Milk. There is so much demand for their product that they cannot supply enough product to fill the needs of all the stores who they're supplying now. There are other stores who want to get in and carry their product; they're saying no, because they just don't have enough product.

We have a group in Eastern Connecticut, marketing under I believe the name of The Farmers Cow, who are doing the same thing.

I want to impress upon you, Secretary Rey, we are not hobby farmers. We are not the big farmers of the Midwest and the Great Plains, but we are very economically important farmers. We're supplying a need. But it is the pressures of urban development that are squeezing our farmers out. And this is what we need to combat, and we need programs for that. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Gordon. Anyone else who would like to step to the microphone to make general comments?

It seems very appropriate this morning that we've heard about interagency cooperation, Secretary-- how NRCS, Cooperative Extension, FSA, APHIS, all of the USDA agencies work together. We haven't heard too much from the consumer, but Gordon's comments relate to that whole issue of how do we also provide nutritious food at a price that people can afford and purchase?

So the secretary will wrap up our listening session with some closing comments and thoughts. I think it's very appropriate that we held this listening session at an agricultural fair where we showcase the products of our state and the hard work of our people of the state. And to

recognize the Fair Association, we have today Richard Miller, president of the Berlin Lions Club who would like to say a few words. But also I think we should give the Berlin Fair a round of applause for their support and willingness to host this listening session.

[Applause.]

MR. RICHARD MILLER: Thank you. We're very happy to have you here on this fine day. And we hope you all take a chance to walk around and see our fair and all the great things we have here. It's been a pleasure for the Berlin Lions to host this event, and Secretary Rey on behalf of the Berlin Lions I'd like to present to you our friendship banner.

[pause in proceedings]

SEC. REY: Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

Well, you haven't heard much from me as I've been spending most of the time listening to you. And I have five pages of left-handed and somewhat scribbled but nevertheless detailed notes that we'll take back and work with as we have with the other Farm Bill Forums, begin the task of putting together the 2007 Farm Bill.

As we've done these forums I have become a connoisseur of state and county agricultural fairs. But I've also been struck by the diversity in American agriculture. The last forum I did was in Idaho, one of the two state fairs that Idaho holds. And the one before that was in Alaska. In Idaho we heard a lot about potatoes and sugar beets and in Alaska a lot about fish. In fact the fishermen were keenly interested in there being a fish title to the 2007 Farm Bill, something we might hear about in some other coastal states as well.

But I'm also struck as we go through more of these by some of the similarities in what we're hearing. Most notably at almost every stop in every state in every region of the country the concern about what the future holds and what the next generation of American agriculture will face, along with a strongly held desire that the 2007 Farm Bill be a much more forward-looking piece of legislation as it will most likely be the Farm Bill that will determine what the next generation in American agriculture faces given the age demographics that we face in agriculture and for that matter even within USDA and among our own employees.

So I think one of the things I can tell you on behalf of myself, my colleagues and the Secretary, all of us who have participated in these things, that message has penetrated and a lot of what we'll be thinking about will be trying to enact, try to construct and convince Congress to enact programs that help the transition from our current generation of farmers to those of you here who wish to be the next generation of farmers and carry forward American agriculture.

There's a lot of work that we'll have to proceed to develop the 2007 Farm Bill. Of course we are hoping to conclude these sessions as quickly as possible, but we've still got over a dozen left

to do. And then in December we will be meeting with our trading partners in Hong Kong to talk about agricultural trade and our commitment to free and fair trade around the world.

One of the most interesting and telling statistics that govern the future of American agriculture are the statistics associated with our consumption and our production. Fortunately or unfortunately, and it is some of both, our rate of production of American agriculture is increasing at twice the rate of our consumption. So we literally will need to be able to develop and access foreign markets at an increasing rate in order for American agriculture to succeed so the trade negotiations that will start this December will go a long way toward determining what the next Farm Bill will look like and how we organize federal support for American agriculture.

And after we conclude those negotiations then we will sit down early next year and start the hard work of trying to draft a Farm Bill along with the Congress, and after Congress considers it interacting with them to seek final legislative passage sometime in 2007.

The thoughts you've given us today and your peers and counterparts around the country have already provided us will be instrumental in helping us decide what should go in that Farm Bill and what it should look like. So for your participation on a sunny October Saturday when there were a lot of other opportunities available, on behalf of the Secretary I'd like to thank you and then wrap this up by fulfilling my commitment to have you out of here in time to be wherever you want to be at 1:00 to see how the remainder of the baseball season plays out.

Thanks very much for your time and your insights.

[Applause.]

MODERATOR: Secretary Rey, as Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment at USDA we certainly appreciate your time and on behalf of everyone here, thank you for making the effort to come to Connecticut for what we think is our first Farm Bill listening session. Thank you all very much for your time.

SEC. REY: Thank you.

[Applause.]