

Committee Name: Agriculture

Co-Chairs: Kevin Sullivan and Bonnie Burr

1. How do you propose the Lamont Administration should prioritize the policy goals in this area, and on what timeframe? Connecticut agriculture has tremendous opportunity to significantly grow and expand its impact on the state economy, providing local jobs, and keeping working lands active. A stand-alone Department of Agriculture will be key to this. Extensive work done in 2011-2012 strategically identified priorities necessary to comprehensively develop agriculture in CT. *The Governor's Council for Agricultural Development (GCAD) was a direct result of PA11-189. Hundreds of surveys and interviews conducted in 2012 illustrated what was needed to create a more robust agricultural economic engine. All the issues raised then, remain priorities today. (See exhibit 1)*

The Department of Agriculture (DoAG) should embrace its role in creating conditions for all residents to have access to CT-Grown food and plants. *An independent DoAG which has financial capacity and/or the flexibility to work with all agricultural partners and businesses to extend their reach is a top priority.* Our state is seeing an expanding number and diversity of small farmers growing their business here who are committed to growing food and plants for their communities. Larger farms want to access CT's buying power and are also looking at coming to our state. With transfer of the Regional Market in Hartford away from DoAG, any comprehensive assessment needs to show how to incorporate ag product marketing into integrated economic development plans. *Another priority should be to create a mechanism to identify where and how to collect excess farm products for use by regional and local food banks. Great significance must be placed on maintaining the Community Investment Act <https://www.ct.gov/doag/cwp/view.asp?q=320938>* These funds have been instrumental in creating economic opportunities and must be left intact to continue enhancing agriculture and not used to shore up other programs. (see exhibit 2 for CT Grown action items)

The highest priorities for such a margin tight, regulated business like agriculture is reducing costly business related inputs including labor, energy, transportation, land access, environmental and food safety. Regulatory challenges exist in all of the aforementioned areas. The pervasive "bureaucracy within the bureaucracy" mentality allows divisions within a department to build regulations layer by layer without regard for what other regulations are in their own department or other agencies. Another urgent point needs to be increasing efficiencies and streamlining regulatory processes to be a "business facing" state versus regulatory only.

When we see growth in individual agricultural businesses, one of the primary reasons for success is the state's proximity to 25 million consumers in the New York/Boston corridor that are thriving economically and have a strong demand for locally grown agricultural products. However, these markets can source their agricultural products regionally and nationally so it's imperative CT agricultural businesses remain competitive. Agriculture is a very labor intensive business. If CT's minimum wage is not in line with other states in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, CT agricultural businesses will be at a competitive disadvantage. As of this writing in 2018, in the northeast region including 12 states, only NY (at \$10.40) and MA (at \$11.00) have higher minimum wages than CT (at \$10.10). CT is already at the high end of the regional minimum wage scale. *Policy must reflect that the agriculture community will suffer with a minimum wage increase.* (See exhibit 3 for regulatory environment)

There are issues with educating children, aspiring teens, beginning farmers, as well as existing producers. Increasing agricultural literacy will engage children at a young age and help them explore careers in agriculture via high school agri-science. Disparate funding mechanisms in all forms of school choice have put agri-science at a severe disadvantage. While college degree programs exist at UConn and some community colleges, farmers and those interested in sustainable agriculture with plants and animals are looking for short term offerings such as certificate based learning opportunities as well as online courses. Poor funding has hampered development of these educational courses. *Investment must be made in the cost of agricultural education.* (See exhibit 4)

2. Which goals are achievable in the first 100 days of the Administration?

1. Reviewing the GCAD surveys and interviews to identify how to bring committees and industry leaders back together and charge them to assign financial implementation costs then take action on all areas versus just advising the DoAG.
2. Inventory all state owned lands to see which have land that can be accessed for production agriculture.
3. Identify and create a listing of all educational programs offered which address interests in agriculture and create a central location for listing these activities so programs are not replicated.
4. Marketing *CT Grown* needs a fresh, invigorated jump start so people understand what buying locally from your neighbor can mean to growing communities.

3. Which goals will require legislation to move forward? Which items can be advanced through the actions of the Administration alone? What is the fiscal impact of these legislative or executive actions? Many of the items in the GCAD can be moved forward with commitment from the administration. There is a fiscal impact that will need to be budgeted for, but those numbers are not available and need to be determined.

4. Are there specific challenges you can identify with regard to achieving the Lamont Administration's goals, and how would you suggest to address those? Given the broad and inclusive nature of strategizing for the GCAD, issues should be cross walked to see what is common between GCAD and the Lamont policies.

5. How will implementation of policy in this area create jobs and spur economic growth? Aggressively reinvigorating the GCAD and utilizing business forward collaborations can turn ag's economic challenges around. In 2010 the USDA Economic Research Service listed CT as having \$211,061,000 in net farm income and in 2017 those numbers dropped to \$84,773,000. Other facts and income data please are found in exhibit 5. You can also follow the USDA /ERS web site and hover/click over CT and then compare rankings by selecting the years you choose to view https://public.tableau.com/views/Gettoknowyourstate2/State-leveldashboard?amp;:display_count=no&:embed=y&:embed=y&:toolbar=no&:toolbar=n&:showVizHome=no

6. Are there opportunities for cost savings for CT state government in the context of implementing this policy? There could be many opportunities to explore cost savings if there is a deep dive to see where there are overlapping regulations so multiple agencies are not doing the same thing. For example, redundancy of state inspectors going to farms who may have a commercial kitchen which sells farm processed goods off the farm. Three departments; DOAG, DCP and DPH (which handles food protection oversight of local health departments) will inspect at the farm. Three inspectors going to the farm at three different times, taking valuable time away from the business. Creating efficiencies and streamlining regulations needs to occur as soon as possible.

7. What examples of success from other states, countries, or the private sector in this policy area should the Administration study? In Connecticut, food and plant production, including cannabis and hemp, can greatly expand the farm economy if we can extend the growing season, create more space for ag production and be environmentally sustainable. Greenhouse production does all that. *National Geographic* highlighted the Netherlands in an article which illustrates what can be done in a small area like Connecticut with dedicated support from the Department of Agriculture. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/09/holland-agriculture-sustainable-farming/>

8. Are there any other issues/considerations you would like to highlight with regard to this policy area? All areas of agriculture should be focused on, not just one sector of farming because when all segments are more successful, that lifts everyone. Efficiencies play out with agricultural services and farm supplies and inputs can be lowered. The industry cannot divide itself and should work more collaboratively.