

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5064

AN ACT CONCERNING AN OPTION TO PURCHASE RESTRICTED

Title: AGRICULTURAL LANDS AT AGRICULTURAL VALUE.

Vote Date: 3/14/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 1/31/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

Co-Sponsors:

Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.

Sen. Christine Cohen, 12th Dist.

Rep. Tom O'Dea, 125th Dist.

Rep. Nick Gauthier, 38th Dist.

Rep. Gregory Haddad, 54th Dist.

Rep. Aundre Bumgardner, 41st Dist.

Rep. Laurie Sweet, 91st Dist.

Rep. Maria P. Horn, 64th Dist.

Rep. Patrick S. Boyd, 50th Dist.

Sen. Jeff Gordon, 35th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

To provide conservation tools that help, farmers generate revenue, make their land affordable for future farmers, and ensure that their land stays in agriculture.

Substitute Language LCO 6218 Removed two other grant purposes (1) acquiring options to purchase land at the land's agricultural use value and (2) purchasing an interest in land that requires the land be restricted for agricultural use.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Jeffery Berger, Vice Chairman, CT State Properties Review Board

The State Properties Review Board supports HB 5064. The purpose of this bill is to administer a grant program for the purpose of providing grants to specified entities to promote current and further agricultural purposes as identified in Chapters of 422 & 422a. HB 5064 will allow the Commissioner to offer grants to qualified agricultural not-for-profits, municipalities, either individually or as a group, a regional council of government, or group of municipalities established by a regional interlocal agreement. The following are three objectives: 1. The acquisition of options to purchase land at such land's agricultural use value. 2. Purchasing any interest in land that requires such land to be restricted for

agricultural use. 3. Developing farmland access and affordability programs, other than such programs that may exist as of the effective date of this section.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, CT Land Conservation Council

The CT Land Conservation Council believes that HB 5064 corrects 2 significant barriers to agriculture in Connecticut. One is access to affordable land. The market, at this time, prices out new farmers. These include new, beginning and/or /Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The Second reason, protected farmland, even land subject to an agricultural easement under the state's Farmland Protection Program, is not necessarily preserved in perpetuity for agricultural purposes, leaving it at risk of acquisition by individuals who have no plans to use it for farming.

Ellie Angerame, Steering Committee of the New CT Farmer Alliance

The New CT Farmer Alliance strongly supports SB 5064 because it will help keep Connecticut farmlands in the hands of farmers. Farmland, in Connecticut, is some of the most expensive in the country. Passage of this bill will help in confronting the climate crisis by helping beginning farmers acquire land and aging out farmers pass on their farmland to individuals who will continue to farm. Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York have already implemented similar programming.

Robert Chang, Co-Director of Policy and Advocacy, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust

Mr. Chang operates Echo Farm, a vegetable and cut flower farm in Woodstock CT. The land trust advocates for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color farmers and there are over 100 famers and aspiring farmers of color. HB 5064 allows these farmers to implement an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value, a program several of our neighboring states have used to help beginning farmers acquire preserved farmland. The bill has flexibility for the Department of Agriculture and partner organizations to innovate and experiment with other mechanisms that could meet future challenges.

Several organizations submitted testimony in Support HB 5064 because allows land to be purchased at its market value, protected with an agricultural conservation easement, and sold to a farmer to keep small locally owned farms in the future:

Holley Atkinson and Stephen Plumlee, Co-Owners, Northwest Corner Farm, Winchester, CT

Tom Crider, Vice President, Southbury Land Trust

Robin Chesmer, Graywall Farms

Nicole Davidow, Aspiring Farm Owner, Southington, CT

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, COST

Chelsea Gazillo, Sr. New England Policy Manager, Working Lands Alliance

Ali Ghiorse, Founder, The Foodshed Network

James A. H. Hafner, PhD., New England Regional Director, American Farmland Trust

Meg Hourigan, Coordinator, Connecticut Food System Alliance

Kaitlyn Kimball, Director of Agriculture, Sunset Farm

Janet Kramka, Backyard Blooms

Susan Mitchell, Owner/Operator, Cloverleigh Farm

Elizabeth Moore, Executive Director, Connecticut Farmland Trust

Sherlene Rodriguez, Program Director, CT Northeast Organic Farming Association

Liz Wimpfheimer, CT Farm to School Collaborative

Over 30 Residents of Connecticut sent in Testimony in Support of HB5064

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Judy Ganswindt

Date: March 28, 2025