



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Office of the Commissioner

Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity Employer



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing February 27, 2023

Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt
Department of Agriculture

Good morning Chairwoman Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum and Paris, Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio and honorable members of the appropriations committee. For the record, my name is Bryan Hurlburt, and it is an honor to be here before you today to discuss Governor Lamont's FY24-25 budget recommendations for the Department of Agriculture DoAg or the Department).

Agriculture is a \$4 billion industry in Connecticut, made up of 5,500 farms that provide jobs for 21,000 residents and cover 370,000 acres of land, including 79,000 acres of shellfish beds in Long Island Sound. This is an industry that has stood the test of time, continues to adapt to new environments, and helped feed our residents during the COVID pandemic.

Over the past four years, we have retooled a number of long-standing programs and efforts to better respond to the needs of the industry and provide more tailored support across the state. We have brought trainings and information sessions online to increase access and approachability, and we have led the charge on animal health issues such as High Path Avian Influenza, ensuring clear communication in the field and having strategic plans to protect both animals and industry should Connecticut be faced with an animal health outbreak. For our Farm Transition Grants, we have created a new eligible grant category- a New Farmer Microgrant of \$5,000 which bolsters new and beginning farmers at a critical time in their business, often allowing them to purchase equipment or products to ensure success in future seasons. In agriculture, we tend to speak about diversity in terms of crops and production techniques. A strong agricultural industry means that we need to not only have more people at the table, but also more diversity around that table. In 2021, the Department launched the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group and solicited volunteers to offer their experiences, knowledge, and expertise to help us at DoAg ensure that our farm community is as diverse as our state is.

If we are going to focus on bringing more farmers into the industry, producing more goods, we also need to pay attention to the markets that they will eventually sell into. That means more families need to have better access to the great products CT farms offer. We've used state and federal funds wisely to expand access and affordability for families by increasing the value and total budgets for Farmers Market Nutrition Programs for seniors and families on WIC, partnering with EndHungerCT! to fund the state-wide SNAP Doubling program, and partnering with FoodShare and six local food hubs to purchase CT Grown goods to distribute through food banks. These efforts invest dollars into our agricultural economy and ensure families have more access to healthy, local foods.



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The Governor's budget recommendations for FY24-25 will allow our agency to continue to foster a healthy economic, environmental, and social climate for agriculture in Connecticut. These recommendations will allow our staff to continue doing a terrific job with developing, promoting, and regulating agricultural businesses; protecting agricultural and aquacultural resources; enforcing laws pertaining to domestic animals; and promoting an understanding among the state's citizens as to the diversity of Connecticut's agriculture, its cultural heritage, and its contribution to the state's economy.

We are very satisfied to see the Governor's commitment to programs which will continue to enhance and assist the agricultural, aquacultural, and animal health sectors. With these funds and our committed employees, we will do everything we can to carry out our duties as an agency.

From a purely operational standpoint, we have been successful in ensuring the proper management of the Department and avoided the challenges that the retirement wave could have presented. DoAg has filled, or is actively pursuing positions, and over the past four years have been able to hire and refill positions in every unit of every bureau. Over half of the agency has a tenure of less than five years at DoAg, and these individuals are essential to the department carrying out its responsibilities to Connecticut's residents.

That said, DoAg currently has 52 positions and 5 vacancies, of which 4 are currently being recruited.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have and thank you for your time.