

CT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

Minutes of Meeting

March 3, 2011, 9:30am

CTDoAg large conference room, Hartford, CT

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Hindinger, Jim Zeoli, Ben Freund, Joseph Bonelli, Paul Larson, John Guskowski, and Robin Chesmer.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department – Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, George Krivda, Jr., Director J. Dippel, Denise O’Meara, and Katherine Winslow; Others – Ben Bowell of Working Lands Alliance.

I. Call to Order:

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:42 a.m.

II. Review of September 13, 2010 minutes:

The minutes of the September 13, 2010 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed and approved (Larson/Guskowski – Unanimous).

III. Business:

- Budget/Legislative update.** Chairman Hindinger recognized and stated his confidence in the new Commissioner of Agriculture Steven Reviczky. Commissioner Reviczky reported the Governor is supportive of farming and has proposed \$10 million of state bonding for each of the next two fiscal years in his budget for farmland preservation.
- FLP Program update summary and related matters.** Director Dippel passed out a status summary and map of farms in the Farmland Preservation Program (Program). Dippel reported that the Agency recently submitted the federal Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) application for 34 farms totaling over \$19 million. Over \$8.5 million may be eligible for federal reimbursement. The past couple years, approximately \$3 - 5 million has been available, and Dippel hopes funding at this level will continue. Approximately 11 farms for a total of about \$8.5 million are pending closings on the purchase of the development rights. In December 2010, the State Bond Commission allocated \$5 million for farmland preservation from the FY11-12 budget, and another \$5 million remains unallocated. The State Bond Commission meeting scheduled for February 2011 was cancelled. Over \$8 million in Community Investment Act (CIA) funding has been spent and a balance of \$6 million is assigned to projects. Dippel reports that the State is ready to close on the development rights to

another 10 farms within the next four months. In calendar year 2010, 15 farms were protected by the Program. Dippel hopes to close on at least 20 farms in 2011. So far this year, the State closed on joint projects in Ashford owned by Knowlton, an historic farm family which abuts Paradis Farm and Joshua's Tract Conservation & Historic Trust land. The State also closed on a Hutton farm in Somers that features beef and vegetables and is part of a 2,000-acre protected farm block. The 143-acre farm owned by Kuss in Woodbury included a 60-acre gift, as well as an 83-acre bargain sale, of development rights. The FRPP partnered on all of these but the Hutton farm. [Chesmer enters] A brief discussion of the federal environmental hazard assessment requirements followed. Zeoli asked about the status of the pending farm in Wallingford and suggested the Commissioner make a visit to the owners. Chairman Hindinger believes the offer to be appropriately fair. The federal Enhanced Easement Incentive was extended by Congress through the end of calendar year 2011. Farm acquisitions are being funded by State Bond monies while surveys, attorneys and all incidental costs are being funded under CIA. CIA monies will also be used for acquisition costs. The Commissioner stated that he would like to act on a 2009 recommendation by the Board to begin a pilot program of the Community Farms Preservation Program (Community Farms). The Commissioner proposes to dedicate \$1.5 million of CIA money for this purpose. Chairman Hindinger acknowledged the hard work of the Criteria Subcommittee in getting the application done. Dippel will send Zeoli an application as he knows of a farm in Orange that may qualify. The Commissioner will propose this to the Governor with the Board's approval. A motion was proposed and passed,

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board would like to reiterate its December 7, 2009 recommendation to the Commissioner of Agriculture that the Community Farms Preservation Program be established as a pilot program using the score sheet prepared by the subcommittee and that funding of \$1.5 million be requested for the initial pilot. The Board would further recommend the Commissioner use his discretion in accessing CIA funds to roll out the pilot, with special consideration that funding for the existing Farmland Preservation Program not be compromised. (Freund/Guszkowski-Unanimous)

3. **Adaptation Subcommittee of the Governor's Steering Committee on Climate Change – Agriculture Working Group.** Agent Winslow reported the Climate Change Preparedness Plan has been drafted by the CT Department of Environmental Protection. The plan contains strategies for how the four sectors, infrastructure, natural resources, public health and agriculture, would adapt to climate change in Connecticut. Public information meetings will follow this spring and then the report would be delivered to the Legislature. The report will be available on the website at ctclimatechange.com. It was discussed that many agencies have people on staff devoted to planning initiatives; however, the Department of Agriculture does not; so staff devoted to existing programs have their time diverted for planning projects of this type. The Office of Policy & Management will be doing a new state conservation and development policies plan which is intended to drive state investments and allocation of public

resources. Dippel says that results-based analysis will be developing measures for accountability. The Board will be asked to be involved in this process.

4. **Legislative update.** Chairman Hindinger discussed a few bills pertaining to farmland preservation. Hindinger reported on a bill pertaining to nurseries and greenhouses and the Farmland Preservation Program. He stated nurseries/greenhouses are not excluded from the existing Program and that all applicants are subject to the same scoring criteria and limits to farmland soils and impervious surface impacts. Ben Bowell says Kevin Sullivan joined the WLA Board and they've been discussing and dispelling myths about the Program. He hopes for dialogue regarding the nursery/greenhouse industry and their options for protecting their farmland, such as term easements or another program. UConn & NRCS want to talk about the science of the soil and best management practices and Bowell requests the Board to convene a discussion on this topic. AFT is researching the subject at their New England office. In the nursery industry, Larson indicates the typical production would be the replacement of soils. Dippel says we do have farms in the Program doing the pot in pot method which is essentially the same as above ground containers per Larson; growing a tree in the bag is not large scale in CT. There are greenhouses in the Program as well. The Commissioner welcomes the opportunity for conversation but the language in the bill is problematic. The Commissioner says we negotiate each easement and all kinds of options are available. The Commissioner wants to work with the industry to some useful conclusion; Kevin Sullivan will respond to the Agency about a meeting this spring. Chairman Hindinger discussed a bill on state-owned agricultural lands, specifically Southbury Training School (STS). The agencies will need to cooperate on the configuration of the STS easement land and the language in the easement. A motion was proposed and passed,

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board through Working Lands Alliance or Connecticut Farm Bureau shall provide some written testimony supporting the state-owned agricultural lands preservation. (Freund/Guszkowski- Unanimous)

Chairman Hindinger shall discuss with Bowell after the meeting.

5. **Any other business**

IV. Subcommittee Reports:

1. **Community Farms Program Criteria Report.** Subcommittee Chairman Guszkowski asked if the \$1.5 million for Community Farms would still be viable if the budget includes the \$1 million in state bonding proposed by WLA. The Commissioner believes a pilot is needed and the statute is silent on this issue.

Further discussion on CIA produced a motion that was proposed and passed,

The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board would like to remove the sunset clause on the dairy subsidies drawn from CIA money and continue state dairy support efforts during this difficult time for the dairy industry and in the absence of an

immediate resolution to the federal pricing of milk.
(Freund/Chesmer – Unanimous)

2. **Stewardship and Policy Report.** Subcommittee Chairman Chesmer showed the Do's & Don'ts brochure and explained how it would help farmers considering the Program, and help them formulate what questions they need to ask before committing to it. The Board recommends the Commissioner send the brochure to applicants, municipalities, and post on the Agency website. Bonelli asked for a date on the brochure so this and a few minor updates will be made before posting on the Department website. Chesmer stated the idea is to be proactive and encourage people to ask. Zeoli suggested it be sent to current owners of preserved farms as a "for your information" piece. Chairman Hindinger thanked Chesmer and the subcommittee for its excellent work.

V. Adjournment:

Next meeting, Monday, June 6th, 2011, 9:30am, at Department of Agriculture, Large Conference Room, Hartford. The meeting was adjourned at 11:06 a.m.
(Guszkowski/Zeoli – Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Katherine Winslow.
Date 3/9/2011.