

DRAFT

CT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

DRAFT Minutes of Meeting

September 13, 2010, 9:30am

CT Farm Bureau conference room, Windsor, CT

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Hindinger, Steven Reviczky, Ben Freund, Susan Rose, Jim Krissel, Joseph Bonelli, Paul Larson, Lucy Nolan, and Robin Chesmer.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department – Commissioner F. Philip Prelli, Director J. Dippel, Lance Shannon, and Katherine Winslow; Others – Jiff Martin.

I. **Call to Order:**

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m.

II. **Review of June 7, 2010 minutes:**

The minutes of the June 7, 2010 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed and approved (Larson/Rose – unanimous).

III. **Business:**

1. **Budget/Legislative update.** Commissioner Prelli indicated he submitted a current service budget for next fiscal year for the Department of Agriculture (the Department) which is higher than the budget for the current fiscal year. He stated that the operations budget was cut by 60% in the previous two years, but the Department continued operations using 10% of the Community Investment Act (CIA) funds used to support the dairy subsidy program. He stated that the Department is down four staff leaving only one microbiologist in Milford and there is a hiring freeze in effect. He is cutting areas that don't affect core services. [Krissel enters] The Commissioner put in a request that the \$5 million to be swept from CIA this fiscal year be taken in equal amounts of \$1.25 million each quarter. Freund indicated Connecticut dairy farmers are working with Working Lands Alliance on a policy statement for this fiscal year that supports both farmland preservation and the dairy industry. The policy, drafted by Freund, Reviczky, Terry Jones, Peter Orr and Jiff Martin, promotes \$10 million in state bonding for the Farmland Preservation Program (Program), one million in state bonding for the new Community Farms Preservation Program, and rescinds the July 1, 2011 sunset on the dairy subsidy payments from CIA. The initiative may be branded with the slogan, "Keep Connecticut Farms Farming" with strong emphasis on more of Connecticut food dollars to be spent on Connecticut-grown food. The initiative also includes strong support and funding for the Department, University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and College of Agriculture & Natural Resources, and Connecticut Agricultural

Experiment Station. The Commissioner met with Deputy Commissioner of U.S. Department of Agriculture, Kathleen Merrigan, and other New England state commissioners in Rhode Island last weekend. New England governors and their commissioners are working to strengthen farm to institution systems, open space preservation throughout the region, and the sale of beef processed in Vermont to other New England states.

2. **FLP Program update summary and related matters.** Director Dippel distributed a summary of the status of projects and indicated that 279 farms, comprised of 36,450 acres have been protected, or approved for protection, through the Program to date. On average, more than \$6 million per year was bonded from 2004 through 2010 through Governor Rell's administration. A bond balance of \$10 million has not been allocated yet for the current fiscal year. Over \$5.6 million in CIA funds are available. Dippel's figures show that all available funds, estimated at over \$45.6 million, are committed to farms in the pipeline. Last month, the Program completed purchase of development rights (PDR) to three farms for a total of 13 farms completed in 2010 to date. Ten more farms are under contract pending PDR. Dippel stated the Program receives an average of one application per week, usually from farmers with estate planning issues. Shannon indicated that the Attorney General approved new state-only deed language that reduces, but does not eliminate, the warranties required by the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. Dippel discussed some of the factors that slow down the PDR process, such as boundary line and mortgage release issues. Dippel distributed the August 18, 2010 issue of the Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report with an article entitled, "State Farmland Preservation Program 15 Farm Closing!", as well as the September 5, 2010 Hartford Courant article entitled, "An Orchard Stays Alive". The Dippel discussed the status of Savin Farm in Lebanon stating the Department is working on a lease of 100 acres of dairy support land with Cushman Farms, and a lease on 160 acres, including the dairy barn milking facility, to M&K Dairy. The Department is working with another representative of the Department of Public Works to demolish several structures on site; demolition has not begun yet, but progress is being made.
3. **State owned agricultural lands discussion.** The Commissioner is encouraging other Commissioners to consider longer agricultural lease periods on state-owned lands. He states the Governor has charged the four Commissioners to come up with a proposal. The Board Committee recommendation encourages the protection of state-owned lands in perpetuity. One complicating factor is the difficulty identifying the boundaries of the existing state-owned agricultural lands as Special Acts have vague descriptions of what land is to be transferred out to municipalities, such as the case at Fairfield Hills in Newtown.
4. **Governor's Steering Committee on climate control [change].** Winslow gave an update on the status of the Adaptation subcommittee (Subcommittee) and its Agriculture Working Group (AWG). The AWG workshop held at UConn in August 2009 identified the five Connecticut agricultural commodities at highest risk from climate change: maple syrup, dairy, warm-weather produce, apple and pear orchards, and shellfish. The risk assessment report was published in April 2010 by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for the Subcommittee. The AWG just completed sessions brainstorming adaptation strategies for the highest risk commodities. The Commissioner indicated that

water use is a key issue for all work groups (others being Infrastructure, Public Health and Natural Resources), as well as education and research. The AWG is considering a filter for climate change adaptation in the approval of agricultural grants. The DEP will publish an adaptation strategies report for the Subcommittee in December 2010, with opportunity to comment at public meetings prior. Martin stated she anticipates policy changes as a result of these strategy recommendations and the Board passed a resolution that, "Farmland preservation should figure prominently in Connecticut's climate change adaptation strategy" (Freund/Chesmer – Unanimous).

5. **Any other business.** Dippel stated a Public Act 490 study is being completed and Reviczky explained the Connecticut Farm Bureau (Bureau) received a CIA grant to update the PA 490 guide and conduct a value study. The Bureau will present the guide and study findings to the public with sessions in each of eight counties; Reviczky distributed the program schedule.

IV. **Subcommittee Reports:**

1. **Community Farms Program Criteria Report.** No report.
2. **Stewardship and Policy Report.** Chesmer indicated a meeting would be held the last week in September or first week in October; he will send a meeting announcement to schedule.

V. **Adjournment:**

The next meeting of the FPAB is scheduled for Monday, December 6, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. at the Connecticut Farm Bureau in Windsor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:18 a.m. (Krissel/Bonelli – unanimous).

Respectfully submitted: Katherine Winslow.
Date 9/20/2010, rev. 9/28/10.