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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 346, AN ACT CONCERNING THE FARMLAND RESTORATION AND VACANT LANDS PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AND

IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 6731, AN ACT CONCERNING THE TREATMENT OF CERTAIN FARM LAND FOR PURPOSES OF THE ESTATE TAX

FEBRUARY 13, 2015

I am Gordon Gibson of Vernon, Legislative Liaison for the Connecticut State Grange, speaking in support of Raised Bill No. 346, An Act Concerning The Farmland Restoration and Vacant Lands Programs of the Department of Agriculture. Connecticut, and particularly the Connecticut River valley, has some of the most productive farmland in the world. I did not say in the United States, I said in the world. This is both good and bad.

Properly managed, our farmland can produce tremendous crops, but left alone and uncared for, it quickly reverts to brush and trees which require much time and money to bring back into productive agriculture. The State, along with private organizations such as Connecticut Farmland Trust, Inc., has done much to protect our diminishing farmland base from being developed into homes, stores and factories which irretrievably remove it from agriculture. However, we also need to protect our farmland from reverting back to nature.

The State owns a significant amount of farmland at places such as the University of Connecticut, Southbury Training School and the former Mansfield Training School. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection also has custody and control of significant amounts of farmland throughout the state. Our municipalities own or control significant amounts of farmland which should be protected from reverting back to nature.

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Raised Bill 346 will authorize the Department of Agriculture to prepare the restoration plans required by the Natural Resources and Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture so federal grants can be obtained to preserve our valuable farmland base.

The Grange also supports Raised Bill No.6731, An Act Concerning the Treatment of Certain Farmland for Purposes of the Estate Tax. In too many cases a family wants to preserve their farm but finds they must sell part or all of it to raise the cash necessary to pay the inheritance taxes on the farmland. Raised Bill No. 6731 would exempt the value of land classified as farmland under the "490" program from being included in a decedent's assets, thereby reducing the inheritance tax the survivors must pay. Hopefully this will eliminate the need for heirs to sell land they want to preserve just to raise the cash needed to pay the inheritance tax when the farm owner dies.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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