

Rep. Joe Courtney (CT-02) Remarks

Chairman Thompson:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of a bill that I have co-led with a bipartisan group of Members, the *Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunities Act*.

This fundamentally important legislation would provide an avenue for young and beginning farmers to secure their own land, helping to preserve agricultural operations in posterity.

The average U.S. farmer is almost 60 years old, and nearly 50% of all American farmland is on the brink of changing ownership over the next twenty years. With the average price per acre of a farm increasing with higher real estate costs, it is more important than ever that Congress act to ensure that farmland is preserved and maintained for the next generation.

Our comprehensive legislation would improve access to land, capital, markets, and technical assistance for agricultural producers. Specifically, this bill authorizes a program that would provide competitive grants to entities that are working to preserve agricultural land and that help with farm ownership transfers.

This bill would authorize \$100 million for this program, operating out of the Farm Service Agency, from 2024 through 2028. Recipients could use the funding for a variety of purposes, from down payment assistance to securing a clean title to the property, to land use planning.

Beneficiaries would range from colleges and universities, to nonprofit organizations, to states, municipalities, and tribes. And to help all types of agriculture producers, including oyster growers planting oyster seed along the Connecticut shoreline, I worked to ensure that shellfish growers could be eligible for grants from this program, too.

This bill is backed by hundreds of organizations throughout the country. In Connecticut, it is supported by the New Connecticut Farmer Alliance and spearheaded by one of my constituents, Susan Mitchell, who has served as a land advocacy fellow with the National Young Farmers Coalition and who has been sounding the alarm about the need for Congressional action to preserve and protect American farmland.

With the broad backing of this proposal by bipartisan Members and a variety of organizations, and the need across the country for agricultural land preservation, I urge you to include this proposal as part of the Farm Bill reauthorization next year.

Thank you for your consideration of my remarks and I yield the balance of my time.