

Connecticut State Grange

LEGISLATIVE POLICY GUIDE



2014

This 2014 issue of the Connecticut State Grange Legislative Policies is the statement of the Grange on legislative issues confronting the rural and suburban segments of Connecticut’s population.

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INTRODUCTION

The legislative objective of the Connecticut State Grange is to support the interests of rural and suburban Connecticut at the local and state levels of government. The Grange basis its legislative posture on 129 years of continuous concern for the problems of rural and suburban communities in a rapidly changing economic and social environment.

The Grange legislative policies originate from its members. Members propose ideas that are the basis of resolutions that are passed on from the Community Granges to the County or Pomona Granges. These resolutions are then introduced to the State Grange delegates for consideration.

The Grange is very protective of its non-partisanship in the public forum. The Grange uses this positive force in its approach to legislative matters and in the discussions of Grange legislative positions.

The Grange's emphasis is the strong support of the agricultural community, maintaining prime farmlands in Connecticut, supporting local agriculture and communities, maintaining a safe transportation network in the state, and recognizing citizen rights.

The Grange throughout the United States continues to be the voice of our rural and suburban citizens. The Grange supports policies and programs that allow each individual to pursue their interests with a minimum of restrictions while at the same time protecting the interests of the general public as consumers to ensure they are offered quality products at fair prices in a truly competitive economy.

AGRICULTURE

The Grange continues to support a strong agricultural community and related businesses. Connecticut's agricultural industry contributes \$3.5 billion annually to our economy and provides 20,000 permanent jobs.

Farm Bill

The United States Congress is currently working on the Farm Bill which will provide authority and funding for all USDA programs. Connecticut, along with the other New England states, needs to impress the Congress with the importance of our agricultural industry in terms of both production value and economic value. The Grange urges the Connecticut General Assembly to work with our Senators and Representatives to secure the best programs for Connecticut in the Federal Farm Bill.

Milk Marketing

The Grange continues to support dairy farm operations and support reevaluation of the Milk Marketing Order System to a fairer payment method and a supply-side program to include uncoupling of Class 1 Milk from the other three classes.

Land Use

The Grange supports existing legislation which prevents local zoning and planning commissions from having the authority to impose fees and restrictions on temporary protective structures for agricultural purposes.

The Grange continues to support establishment of local agricultural commissions empowered to give advice to other town boards.

Community Gardens

The Grange encourages each municipality to provide free plots of land for community gardens and provide assistance in developing these plots.

Licenses and Permits

The Grange encourages designating the Department of Agriculture to be responsible for handling all necessary state licenses and permits for farmers.

Agricultural Research

The Grange continues to support the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven, which include the Lockwood Farm in Hamden and the Valley Laboratory in Windsor and opposes any major budget cuts to these facilities.

The Grange continues to support an efficient College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Connecticut.

Utility Rates

The Grange urges the General Assembly to prohibit utility companies from charging commercial rates to family farms.

Crop Damage

The Grange asks the General Assembly to add wild turkeys to the species which may be taken under crop damage permits.

Animal Abuse

The Grange asks the State Legislature to monitor animal abuse and enact stricter penalties and to increase enforcement.

Rural Road Signs

The Grange supports legislation encouraging increased use of fixed and mobile rural road signs that warn of tractors or other slow-moving farm equipment.

FARM VIABILITY

Farmland Preservation

The preservation of prime farmland is essential to Connecticut's agriculture industry. Much has been accomplished in this area, but we are still irretrievably losing approximately eight acres to development for every acre that is preserved. The Department of

Agriculture needs to be adequately staffed to handle the State's farmland preservation program. This includes not only the appraisals, negotiations and administrative work but also the closings which are currently handled by the Office of the Attorney General.

The State of Connecticut owns much farmland which should be preserved and maintained in active crop production. The Grange is pleased that the 2013 General Assembly passed legislation to preserve much of the farmland at Southbury Training School. This should serve as a precedent and model for preserving farmland at other State facilities including the University of Connecticut, the former Mansfield Training School and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Department of Corrections.

Community Investment Act (PA 05-228)

The Grange supports the original intent of the Community Investment Act to provide funding for the preservation of farmland, open space, historic preservation and affordable housing. We anticipate the federal Farm Bill, when passed by the Congress, will contain significant reductions in grant funds available for programs and projects funded in part or whole by the Community Investment Act. With less federal funding available it is essential that the Community Investment Act funds be restricted to their original purposes and not diverted to the State's General Fund.

Bond Funds

The Grange supports bond fund authorizations and lump sum appropriations to enable the Department of Agriculture to purchase the development rights to prime agricultural land. This process has proven its worth in recent years by increasing the number of farms where development rights were purchased.

The USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) had changed its review and approval process for grants to preserve farmland. The NRCS state offices can no longer approve grant requests and all applications must be reviewed and approved in Washington before any funds can be granted. This is a long and tedious process; the net results of which is the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and other organizations in Connecticut are receiving only a small fraction of the federal funds routinely

received when approvals could be granted by the NRCS state offices. It is therefore more essential than ever before that State bond funds be made available for farmland preservation.

Other Organizations

The Grange supports the efforts of municipalities, local land trusts and the Connecticut Farmland Trust to assist the State in preserving agricultural land throughout Connecticut.

Agricultural Businesses

Connecticut's agriculture industry provides 20,000 permanent jobs, mostly for low and moderate income wage earners. The Grange encourages the State to include agriculture in various programs to create more jobs for low and moderate income wage earners.

Many people want to purchase or start new farms today but lack the necessary skills and/or financial backing to accomplish their objectives. At the same time many consumers want fresh locally grown food products. The Grange therefore supports programs to help new farmers get started to satisfy both of these groups.

Financial Solvency of Farms

Low Interest Loans

The State and the municipalities provide incentives to attract various businesses to locate in Connecticut. The Grange urges the General Assembly to authorize a low interest loan program to enable farmers to borrow funds to keep their farms solvent.

Farm Debt

Natural disasters occasionally destroy farmers' crops and lands. As a result, farmers are often forced to file for bankruptcy or sell their farms to meet their financial obligations, resulting in the loss of farmland. The Grange urges the General Assembly to authorize a program to postpone the repayment of farm debts following a natural disaster.

Farm Succession

Upon the death of a farm principal, high estate and succession

taxes impose a burdensome financial drain on the heirs to the point where, in many cases, the farm is forced to go out of business permanently. The Grange seeks to resolve this problem through financial relief where needed.

The Grange urges financial relief to heirs upon the death of a farm principal.

CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGY

The Grange supports a strong and viable Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. We urge the Governor and General Assembly to restore the budget and authorize the hiring of sufficient personnel to enable the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to fulfill its mission of protecting and preserving the quality of the environment and natural resources and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation throughout Connecticut.

Open Space

Roadside Open Space

The Grange recommends modifying existing statutes to protect and preserve vegetation and open space along our state highways. The Grange further recommends the formation of a cooperative effort involving state and local government as well as private interests working together to sustain and improve open space and vegetation along both state highways and local roads.

490 Program

The Grange supports the right of the local community to be given the right of first refusal of land that has been designated open space under the “490 Program” when the owner of said land decides to place it on the market at a later date.

Open Space Easement

The Connecticut State Grange believes that open space easements given to or purchased by land trusts for preservation purposes should be protected from takings by the towns through eminent domain when the purpose of the taking is to allow private development.

Landfill and Brownfields Reuse

The Grange urges the Connecticut General Assembly to enact legislation enabling and encouraging municipalities to convert landfills and other land awaiting rehabilitation, such as brownfields, to regulated ATV trails, and that this enabling legislation also should exempt municipalities from liability arising from misuse of these trails.

Water

The Grange opposes any further diversion of Farmington River water until a full Environmental Study is performed and the results presented to each of the area towns. It also urges that the Management Board of the MDC should be increased to include all towns where MDC reservoirs are located.

Pesticides, Herbicides and Fertilizers

Farmer's Liability

The Grange supports legislation that will relieve the farmer from liability for use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers that were used in government-approved applications.

Education

The Grange urges the development of educational programs and literature to inform and educate the public concerning the dangers of using pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers, particularly in excess of recommended amounts.

Sale of Invasive Species

The Grange urges the Connecticut General Assembly to increase funding to the Department of Energy and Environment and Protection specifically earmarked for enforcement of laws banning sale of invasive plant species. We urge that significant monetary fines or penalties to be imposed on any business which is found to have such plants for sale. We recommend that all businesses selling plants receive and be required to acknowledge receipt of a list of invasive plant species along with a copy of the state law forbidding the sale of such plants.

Energy

Replenishable Energy

We reaffirm our encouragement of developing replenishable fuels and developing hydroelectric sources of electricity in and for Connecticut.

Fuel Efficiency

The Grange supports legislation that would raise the standard for gasoline consumption to at least 45 miles per gallon for passenger cars and to at least 34 miles per gallon for sport utility vehicles and light trucks. Both for reasons of fuel efficiency and because ethanol at present requires more energy per gallon to produce than the energy actually contained in each gallon therein, the Grange opposes selling gasoline containing a higher percentage of ethanol than the present E-10.

SAFETY

DUI Penalties

The Grange urges that the present DUI laws in Connecticut be strengthened by increasing the time for mandatory Ignition Interlock systems after the second offence and considering lifetime previous offences, not just offences during the previous 10 years when sentencing. We also urge improving the system of reciprocity between states for sharing information on these offences.

Texting While Driving

Texting while driving is responsible for approximately 3,000 deaths a year nationwide as well as multiple injuries. Connecticut has already recognized this and has imposed fines for texting while operating a motor vehicle. The Grange feels that texting while driving should be considered as reckless driving and encourages the General Assembly to strengthen its present laws to a definition of reckless driving, citing that it endangers others and is a conscious disregard/indifference to others.

Minimum speed limits on highways

Drivers using our Interstate highways are not always accelerating to the speed of other vehicles on the highway, creating a hazard to themselves and to other vehicles. The Grange recommends that, in those areas where the posted maximum speed is 65 miles per hour, the minimum speed should be increased to 50 miles per hour.

Pedestrian Crosswalks

The Grange recommends that both state and local traffic authorities mark additional crosswalks in high pedestrian traffic areas and place warning signs for both motorists and pedestrians near buildings that children frequent, such as schools, libraries and community centers. We urge a strong enforcement of the use of crosswalks in these areas to reduce the rising number of pedestrian accidents.

Pedestrian Crosswalk Standards

The Grange requests the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration to establish and promulgate standards for the minimum walk light time, type of visual image, and audible sound levels for all controlled crosswalks.

Bicycle Safety

Rear View Mirrors for Bicycles

A rear view mirror on the bicycle or on the bicyclist's helmet would allow the bicyclist to see traffic approaching from the rear. The Grange urges the General Assembly to require the use of rear view mirrors by bicyclists who ride our local and state roads.

Bicycle Safety on Rural Roads

The Grange encourages state and local agencies to develop a campaign to educate the public on safer bicycle driving practices and techniques and bicycle safety awareness for both motor vehicles operators and bicycle riders.

Vehicle Safety Inspections

The Grange urges the General Assembly to adopt legislation making vehicle safety inspection mandatory on vehicles five years or older and inspected every five years to ensure that the vehicle is safe to operate on the highways.

Motor Homes

The Grange supports specific operator license categories for motor homes and travel trailers, taking into account the various sizes and weights of these vehicles.

Stacking of Products in Retail Locations

The Grange urges the passage of legislation which would mandate that shelves being stacked where the public is in some danger be limited to a reasonable height. The shelves containing high stacked goods should be secured by gates that would prevent large articles from falling from these shelves.

Safety in the Workplace

The Grange urges a greater effort be made for safety in the workplace, with an emphasis on farm safety, as farming is second only to mining as the most hazardous occupation in the United States.

EDUCATION

ECS Formulas

The Grange supports the establishment of a Blue Ribbon Commission, created by the General Assembly, to do an in-depth study of the Educational Cost Sharing Formula to guarantee a more favorable minimum amount per student for each city and town.

Agricultural Education

Considering the success of the Agriscience School program, despite inadequate funding, the Grange encourages the General Assembly to restore to 95% the State reimbursement grants given to host school districts for cost of Agriscience programs and to reduce the gap between what the State pays for technical school and the

Agriscience schools with a suggested target of 50% of the tuition paid by the sending towns. We also urge greater State assistance in adequate training and recruitment of new ag-science teachers to meet the unfulfilled demand of students wanting to attend Agriscience schools.

Basic Agricultural Education for Elementary and Middle School

The Grange supports the establishment of programs inserted into existing elementary and middle school curricula which would teach about the agricultural production of plant and animal food.

Connecticut Technical Schools

The Grange supports the continuation of the State-Run Technical High School system as it currently exists.

Board of Regents

The Grange desires that the General Assembly mandate that the membership of the Board of Regents for Higher Education more closely reflect its own regulations in which it is stated that: “The board shall reflect the state’s geographic, racial and ethnic diversity”. At present there is a lack of geographic diversity on the board.

School Lunch Programs

The Grange supports school lunch programs and, in those geographic areas where needed, school breakfast programs.

The Grange supports local farm to school lunch programs to ensure that children have ample fresh local food in their diets.

After School Programs

The Grange supports after-school programs which will enhance the total educational experience by encouraging students to pursue self-directed education, motivated by their natural curiosity.

Special Needs Funding

The Grange urges the General Assembly to relieve the financial burden on towns of State-mandated special education programs that are outside the normal school curriculum by providing state funding for them.

English as Official Language

The Grange continues to urge the General Assembly to declare English as the official language of the state. At the same time, we encourage multilingual capability.

Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children

The Grange urges that deaf and hearing-impaired children be provided with an education in which teachers and all other personnel understand the unique nature of challenges associated with deafness and are specifically trained to work with deaf and hearing-impaired children. We further urge that teachers and all others who have frequent contact with hearing impaired children be fluent in American Sign Language (ASL).

Southbury Training School

We urge the State of Connecticut to continue maintaining Southbury Training School as an option for those persons for whom it provides the most appropriate environment.

Lollypop as State Candy

The Grange urges the General Assembly to designate the Lollypop, invented in New Haven in 1908, as the State Candy

JUSTICE

Fraud

Fraud in Public Assistance Programs

Fraud is known to exist in the various public assistance programs. We urge the legislature to mandate a standard system of identification for all public assistance programs to minimize this fraud.

Medicare Fraud

The Grange supports significant financial penalties for Medicare fraud and the establishment of procedures to assist in funding the Medicare fraud investigation unit. The Grange urges that all healthcare providers who defraud the Medicare system be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Elder Abuse

It is reported that 26% of all fraud is committed against the elder population. The Grange supports increasing the penalties for crimes involving elder fraud and abuse as well as broadening the definition of ‘elder abuse’.

Protection of Property Owners

The Grange has long held the belief that everyone should be able to make the greatest legal use of their property with the minimum restrictions and intrusions by all levels of government. The Grange believes that all people should be responsible for their own actions. The Grange urges legislation to protect property owners from liability claims by trespassers.

Hate Crimes against Homeless

The Grange supports legislation to add homeless to the hate-crime reporting and enforcement as homeless persons find themselves the target of violent crimes.

Prosecution of Juveniles

The Grange urges the enforcement of juveniles as adults when they commit felonies.

Risk Reduction Earned Credit

The Grange supports the repeal of the ‘Risk Reduction Earned Credit’ program that allows inmates in State Prisons to earn credits from their sentence for good conduct and/or participating in approved activities. If this is not repealed, the Grange recommends that this program exclude any person convicted of a Class A Felony or who has three or more felony convictions.

Death Penalty

The Grange supports the repeal of the current “Life Imprisonment without Parole” and to reinstate the sentence of Death for those heinous crimes previously covered under the old Death Penalty.

TAXATION

Federal Tax

The Grange urges the General Assembly to petition the United States Congress to correct an inequity in the federal tax code and allow both state income and sales taxes to be deducted for federal tax purposes.

490 Program

The Grange continues to support the “490 Program” requiring municipalities to assess farm, forest and open space land for its value in use rather than its highest and best use value.

Native American Land Tax

The Grange urges legislation mandating that taxes on land purchased by Native American tribes remain on the tax rolls.

Sales Tax on Clothing and Shoes

The Grange encourages restoring the tax exemption on purchases of clothing and shoes.

Alternative Funding

The Grange urges the General Assembly to search for alternative sources of income in order to decrease the excessive reliance on property taxes as the primary source of income.

TRANSPORTATION

Improvement of Interstate Highways

The Grange supports the much needed improvements to interstate highways, making them safer to travel.

Rest Areas

The Grange urges the State of Connecticut and Department of Transportation to keep rest stops on limited access highways open to give drivers a place to rest or sleep before continuing their journey.

High Occupancy Lanes

The Grange encourage allowing the use of high occupancy lanes

to all drivers regardless of number of occupants during off-peak hours.

Mass Transit

The Grange supports the concept of mass transit which reduces congestion on highways and reduces environmental pollutants.

Effects of Construction on the Environment

The Grange supports the requirements that the Department of Transportation give priority consideration to the effects of proposed construction on the environment on any highway construction. It recommends that this consideration be extended to both agricultural land and production.

Truck Weigh Stations

The Grange urges that existing weigh stations along highways be open for both weight and inspection on a regular basis.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Health Insurance

The Grange urges legislation for insurance coverage for hearing aids through Medicare and Medicaid systems.

The Grange urges legislation to recognize teeth as a legitimate part of the body requiring the same level of care and coverage as other parts of the body by health insurers including prosthetics,(dentures, implants, crowns, and bridgework). Dentists should be treated the as same other medical specialists by both the government and insurance carriers and be compensated at the same rate.

Healthcare Employees

The Grange urges legislation requiring at least 75 hours of training for home healthcare aides.

The Grange urges the passage of legislation requiring that both healthcare employees and prospective employees be screened for illegal drugs and misuse of legal drugs. Employees within these systems should be random tested every six months by their employer.

Handicapped Accessibility in Buildings

Often time the entrances into medical and other buildings, identified as handicapped accessible, have items restricting the passage of wheelchairs, blocking handicapped buttons and back entrances. The Grange urges officials in charge of medical buildings, hotels and inns listed as handicapped accessible to enforce handicapped accessibility regulations.

Limiting use of Animals in Testing

The Grange urges legislation to limit the use of small animals for testing by pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and detergent industries.

Blood Donors

The Grange urges legislation permitting 16-year-olds to be donors, providing they get written parental permission.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND RIGHTS

Security for Seniors

The Grange encourages legislation to provide improved supervision and security to our senior citizens especially in subsidized housing complexes.

Advertising during Family Programming

The Grange encourages television program sponsors who advertise male and female products purchased only by prescription be scheduled at times other than periods of family programs.

Made in America

The Grange supports a definition of "Made in America" to mean all parts of a product have been fabricated and assembled within the United States. When components are manufactured in foreign countries for final assembly in the United States, the Grange recommends the item be labeled as "Assembled in the U.S.A. from Foreign Parts."

Handicapped Parking

The Grange supports stronger penalties for violations of

handicapped parking regulations and stricter enforcement of existing laws. We also encourage that handicapped parking spots be kept clear of debris and snow.

Territorial rating on Auto Insurance

Currently people living in highly populated areas are paying higher rates due to their added accident exposure. The Grange favors the continuation of territorial ratings.

Home Addresses

The Grange supports legislation limiting the release of home addresses by State Agencies.

Bankruptcy and Severance Pay for Employees

The Grange supports legislation making severance pay mandatory for all employees with ten or more years of service with any company declaring bankruptcy.

Uninsured Motorists

The Grange recommends that the Department of Motor Vehicles be empowered to seize and impound uninsured motor vehicles until the owner secures insurance coverage meeting the statutory minimum requirements.

Universal Designs for Consumer Products

The Grange encourages manufactures of food and health products to apply concepts of universal design for packaging and labeling to make the opening of the containers less stressful and make labeling on the containers and directions for use more readable without magnification.

Credit Card Surcharges and Convenience Fees

Connecticut adds a surcharge or convenience fee when people pay obligations to the State and allows municipalities to do the same when people pay taxes and other obligations to the municipalities. On the other hand, retail stores are not allowed to add surcharges or convenience fees for the use of credit cards or give discounts for cash payments. The Grange therefore urges the Connecticut

General Assembly to eliminate surcharges and convenience fees levied when payments to the State and municipalities are made by means of a credit card.

LEGISLATION

Funding of Public Works

The condition of public works throughout our nation has deteriorated to the point where many are of critical concern for both safety and capacity. Funds such as taxes, tolls and admissions generated by the use of these public works projects, have often been diverted into the State's General Fund and then appropriated for purposes other than those for which they were originally intended. The Grange opposes the diversion of funds from their original intended purposes and urges the General Assembly to restore income from all funds and programs to their original intended uses.

Notice of Public Meetings

Notices of public meetings have been published in the newspapers ever since newspapers became generally available to the public. Recently, municipalities have proposed eliminating of these public notices as a means to save money, claiming that notices may now be given by posting them on the municipality's web site. The Grange agrees that all public notices may be posted on the municipality's web site at virtually no cost, but there are still many people who do not have access to a computer where they can take the time to read these notices. The Grange therefore opposed the elimination of notices of public meetings being posted in the local newspapers.

English as Primary Language on Ballots

The Grange encourages the printing of only English on voting ballots as that is the predominant language in this state.

Campaign Limits for Federal Political Offices

Connecticut's limits on the time and money allowed for political campaigns for state offices work well. The Grange believes similar limits on the time and funding for campaigns for federal offices should be established. The Grange, being non partisan, encourages

the General Assembly to urge the Congress to establish legislation limiting the time and money allowed for political campaigns for federal offices using Connecticut's existing legislation as a guide.

Recall of State Officials

Elected officials at all levels of government need to set an outstanding level of honesty and integrity in all phases of their lives while holding public office. Under current law, there is no process for recalling an elected official until the end of their term when they may be voted out of office. The Grange urges the General Assembly to establish a process, if necessary by an amendment to the State constitution, whereby any elected public official may be recalled and replaced when they fail to uphold the honesty and integrity of their office.

Senatorial Mid-Term Vacancies

The Grange supports passage of an amendment to the United States Constitution which would require Senatorial mid-term vacancies to be filled by special elections instead of appointments.

General Assembly working Reasonable Hours

Our State legislators often work many long and hard hours to create and pass legislation. It is not unusual for sessions of the Connecticut General Assembly to continue past midnight, particularly towards the end of each session. The Grange urges our legislators to work reasonable hours and not push for voting on important issues at unreasonable hours when all are tired from their long hours.

Germane Amendments on Bills

The Grange urges limits on amendments accepted on the floor of the Senate and House to matters that are closely related to the original bill and which will not change the original intent of the proposed legislation.

Connecticut State Grange



A part of the National Grange

*American Values,
Hometown Roots*

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