



January 31, 2017

54 Portsmouth Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Tel. 603.224.9945

Fax 603.228.0423

info@forestsociety.org

www.forestsociety.org

The Honorable Gary Daniels, Chairman  
Senate Finance Committee  
State House, Room 103  
107 North Main Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Senator Daniels:

Thank you for this opportunity to express the Forest Society's support for SB97, a bill to appropriate money to the New Hampshire Agricultural Lands Preservation Program. In addition to my role at the Forest Society, I also recently served on the Land Conservation Commission. One of the priority issues the Commission discussed, and on which we achieved a consensus opinion, was on the need to fund the Agriculture Lands Preservation Program.

As we learned on the Commission, farmland is under great development pressure. For example, from 1982 to 2007, one out of four acres of the state's prime farmland was converted to development. In addition, we also learned that thirty percent of the State's principal farm operators are age 65 or older and that the majority of these senior farmers do not have a young farmer under age 45 working with them. What this means is that the future of those farms is uncertain. If the outlook for that farm is uncertain so is the outlook for the land on which sits the farm.

This is the key point we want to emphasize: While farming played a significant part in New Hampshire's history, funding the ALPP is not intended to celebrate our past; it is meant to strengthen the future. The value of New Hampshire's agricultural industry is approximately \$850 million. This includes \$479 million in direct sales of agricultural and other horticultural products and services and \$372 million in direct spending by agriculture related tourists. In total, these farmers oversee 470,000 acres of land. However, the American Farmland Trust estimates that one-third of New Hampshire farmers are likely to exit farming over the next 10-20 years, mostly because of their current ages. In order to insure the 158,404 acres and \$628 million in land and agricultural activities they manage remain in productive use, it will be important farmers have access to dedicated farmland protection funding.

Thank you for again for this opportunity. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Matt Leahy, Public Policy Manager

Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests