



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Rhode Island

Serving Farmers, Gardeners and Consumers with Education & Outreach

April 2nd, 2024

To the Members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

NOFA/RI is an organization of farmers, gardeners and consumers working to promote organic farming and land care practices.

We are writing in opposition to H7618, The Forest Parity Act.

We are opposed to H7618 because it seeks to impose an artificial parity between farming and forestry. The two industries and the impact they have on the land and on the planet are both profound, but they are not the same. We believe that it is not safe to assume society will benefit if the policies that were designed to help farmers and farming be applied wholesale to the forestry industry.

Below, please find a list of some of the provisions we oppose.

2-27.1-3. Purpose.

Farm Forest Parity: Farms and Forests are not the same. A farm is an economic unit created by people. Whereas a forest is a complex ecological system in which trees are the dominant life-form. Reducing a forest to an economic unit intrinsically takes value away from all of the other services forests provide society. Because of this, we do not see parity between the agricultural and timber industries.

2-27.1-2. Legislative findings.

Farm Forest Open Space Act: We find it ill conceived that this Act - an act that was designed to “prevent the forced conversion of farm, forest, and open space land to more intensive uses as the result of economic pressures caused by the assessment for purposes of property taxation” - is being referenced as a reason to support more intensive use of forests. The new language states that “production of forest products” is not given the same benefits, including protections from taxation, and protections as agriculture.” This Act, however, has nothing to do with other benefits and protections farmers enjoy. It benefits all large land owners equally.

2-27.1-5. Declaration of policies

Right to Farm Act: Our understanding of Nuisances, within the context of the ‘Right to Farm’ Act was that it was many years in the making and addressed specific issues that farmers were facing - stinky animals, early morning tractor usage... If neighbors have problems with timber harvesting, why not let people give voice to their concerns, and let the courts decide if those concerns are valid or nuisance, and then, after considerable time, introduce a ‘Right to Log’ Act.



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44-27-1. Legislative declaration.

Happiness of the Inhabitants “That it is in the public interest to encourage the preservation of farm, forest, and open space land in order to maintain a readily available source of food, and farm and forest products close to the metropolitan areas of the state, to conserve the state’s natural resources, and to provide for the welfare and happiness of the inhabitants of the state.” We think this changes the intent of the clause. It also doesn’t include other forest benefits like biodiversity, carbon sequestering, recreation... Including just one ‘benefit’ that forests (those complex ecological systems in which trees are the dominant life-form) provide seems unfair to the other benefits.

44-18-30. Gross receipts exempt from sales and use taxes.

Small Farms: If this bill does pass, we hope that the definition of how many employees constitutes small is lowered to be more in line with what constitutes a small farm. As written, this bill applies to “businesses that employ no more than three hundred (300) employees.”

Respectfully,

The Rhode Island Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association