

Mike and Polly Hutchison
Robin Hollow Farm
1057 Gilbert Stuart Rd.
Saunderstown, RI 02874

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

We are long time farmers here in Rhode Island for over 36 years each. We have contributed to the Agriculture Council, the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, RINLA, NOFA/Rhode Island, and numerous other organizations in the Agricultural space. We appreciate all of our beautiful forests here in Rhode Island, but we feel strongly that they are NOT the same as a farm.

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

We are opposed to H7618 because it seeks to create a 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 these two industries.

2-27.1-2. Legislative findings.

Farm Forest Open Space Act: I find it ill conceived that the Farm Forest Open Space 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 that is being proposed states that "production of forest products, are not given the same benefits, including protections from taxation, and protections as agriculture". This makes no sense, as the Farm

Forest Open Space Act has nothing to do with other benefits and protections farmers enjoy. The Act benefits all large land owners equally.

2-27.1-5. Declaration of policies

Right to Farm Act: My 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... Transferring this Act as is towards the timber industry as is makes no sense. 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.

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. Because the primary focus of this clause is about preservation, it seems a bit forward to add only one benefit (forest products) that forests (those complex ecological system in which trees are the dominant life-form) provide, without listing all of the other benefits - like carbon sequestration, biodiversity, recreation...

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."

In conclusion, as farmers, we think that it unwise to use past legislation that was slowly and thoughtfully put together to benefit farmers (most of them small family farms), to now benefit the timber industry - which we see as having has more differences than commonalities with agriculture. We value the forests for so much more than the products it creates, and see this bill as potentially harming our forest environment.

Respectfully,

Mike and Polly Hutchison
401-742-4530 if you have questions.

