Department of Agriculture

Bryan P. Hurlburt, *Commissioner*
Established: 1925
Statutory Authority: CGS. Sec. 22.1
Central Office: 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103
Number of Employees: 52
Recurring operating expenses: $11,528,948
Organizational Structure: Office of the Commissioner, Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation, Bureau of Aquaculture, Bureau of Regulatory Services, with Business Office and Human Resources support from the Department of Administrative Services, and legal services provided by the Office of the Attorney General.

Mission

The Department of Agriculture's mission is to foster a healthy economic, environmental, and social climate for agriculture by developing, promoting, and regulating agricultural businesses; protecting agricultural and aquacultural resources; enforcing laws pertaining to public health, animal health and animal care; and promoting an understanding among the state's citizens of the diversity of Connecticut's agriculture, its cultural heritage, and its contribution to the state's economy.

Statutory Authority

Statutory authority for the Department of Agriculture is found in Sections 12, 22, 26 and other sections of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Public Service

The Department of Agriculture provides public benefits by empowering its three bureaus to promote and protect Connecticut Agriculture. Through the agency's Bureau of Regulatory Services, inspectors ensure domestic animals' health and wellbeing, the safety of produce and dairy products, and that local agricultural businesses are properly trained to meet food safety requirements. The Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation provides direct assistance and programs to farm operations entering, diversifying, or expanding their agricultural businesses. It makes direct positive impacts on communities through the Farmland Preservation Program, the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Farm to Chef, and Farm to School programs. The Bureau of Aquaculture oversees marine and inland aquaculture production activities, administers the state Shellfish Sanitation Program, and operates the laboratory in Milford, leasing and restoration of shellfish beds, and licensing of persons engaged in commercial harvesting of shellfish.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture continues to inform the public with direct engagement of media representatives; and local, state, and federal government officials about various aspects of

Connecticut agriculture through its Connecticut Weekly Agricultural Report, news releases, social media, small group or one-on-one meetings, and radio and television appearances.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications conducts a full range of activities that serve the Department and its stakeholders. The office manages public information, media and community relations, social media, marketing communications, emergency and crisis communications, and internal communications.

- 52 press releases and statements distributed to the media
- 1,708 media mentions generated reaching an audience of 1.6 million with a publicity value of $23.7 million based on Critical Mention analytics.
- Responded to more than 150 media inquiries with interviews or statements
- 35 press events coordinated, primarily with the Governor or Lt. Governor
- 20 industry events attended to engage with producers and share services and programs available.
- Social media growth included:
    - 10,556 followers on Facebook
    - 5,277 followers on Instagram
- The Connecticut Grown campaign, focused on consumer awareness and farmer education, had the following achievements:
    - 215 million total brand impressions through multi-media approach
    - 150 farmers registered for 3 webinars as part of CT Grown Academy
    - Established 3 CT Grown Trails for consumers to plan a day visiting CT Farms and businesses that utilize CT Grown farm products, including restaurants.

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Government Affairs is responsible for managing legislative and regulatory information and coordinates referral activities, which include development of the agency's legislative proposals and application of strategies to achieve the goals of DoAg's legislative agenda. The office tracks and analyzes legislation, oversees the development of the agency's regulations and policy, and ensures all programs and policies are implemented according to statute and in a manner that reflects the mission of the department. The office handles inquiries, requests and other related constituent services for congressional members, state legislators, state agencies, lobbyists, and members of the public.

During the 2024 legislative session, DoAg achieved the following:

- Proposed and successfully passed amendments to Public Act 24-100, An Act Concerning Certain Farming programs of the Department of Agriculture, which streamlines the process for purchase of development rights; repeals outdated and duplicative language regarding the Seafood Advisory Council and Farm to Chef programs; and requires DoAg to study the need to establish an annual harvest season.
- Proposed and successfully passed Public Act 24-69, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to Agriculture Related Statutes and to Open Space Acquisition Related Statutes, which amends the definition of grooming facilities and exemptions for commercial kennels; revises kennel licensing to reflect changes made in Public Act 23-187; allows municipalities to utilize state-issued spay/neuter vouchers for dogs prior to adoption; defines the Coggins test in statute as an official

test for equine infectious anemia; amends the minimum qualifications for state bee inspectors; and removed legislative confirmation requirements for members of the Milk Regulation Board.
- Following the 2024 legislative session, DoAg will participate in working groups addressing land access, the shortage of butchers/processing, terramation, and child nutrition.
- Worked with sponsoring legislators and partner agencies on Public Act 24-82, An Act Concerning Child And Family Nutrition, which increases accessibility and awareness of nutrition services throughout the state. This legislation requires DoAg, in partnership with the Department of Public Health and the Department of Social Services, to assess their nutrition-based programs and increase access and awareness. For DoAg this includes marketing and education of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs and requires DoAg to purchase equipment used to participate in said program.
- Received new funding of $200,000 to support nutrition initiatives, including increased support for the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, as well as $200,000 to support community food security projects in New Haven, West Haven, and Milford through reallocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION

The Bureau of Agricultural Development and Resource Conservation is comprised of three units: the Agricultural Development Unit, the Climate Smart Agriculture Unit, and the Farmland Preservation Unit. The bureau offers programs and services that assist farms with entering, diversifying, and expanding their agricultural businesses, incorporating climate smart agricultural practices, supporting the responsible dual use of agrivoltaics and administers the Farmland Preservation Program, among many others.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT

- Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
    - Transitioned the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) to an electronic platform, offering electronic benefits cards or a mobile app to replace paper checks
    - Redeemed over $600,000 of FMNP benefits in program year 2023 (FY24) to 40,122 WIC participants and more than 35,000 seniors benefitting 252 certified Connecticut farmers at 103 farmers' markets and 15 certified farm stands.
- Farm Transition Grant
    - Awarded $643,394 to 39 farms across Connecticut to support production of CT Grown poultry, crops, microgreens, fruit, cut flowers, honey, mushrooms, sheep, goats, herbs, ornamental horticulture plants, tea, hard cider, and sod.
    - 17 of the 39 grants were New Farmer Microgrants to support new and beginning farmers, the highest number to date.
- Agriculture Enhancement Grant
    - Awarded $532,165 21 municipalities, councils of government and non-profits across CT to support Youth Agricultural Education (7), improve Local Food Supply Chain (3), increase resources for Urban Agriculture (3), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (3), and Farmers' Market Promotion efforts (5).
- CT Grown for CT Kids (Farm to School)
    - Distributed more than $800,000 to 45 CT Grown for CT Kids Grant program recipients, including more than $600,000 to alliance districts and/or readiness programs

    - Awarded $2 million across 8 grant projects for the purchase of shipping container growing units for CT Grown 4 CT Kids programming through funding authorized by American Rescue Plan Act.
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
    - Engaged a land access non-profit to conduct comprehensive research and compile a report on farmland access and ownership.
    - Applied for and received $2.5 million through USDA Land Capital Market Access grant to increase land access to historically underserved producers. This four-year project includes executed agreements with three primary project partners: UConn Extension, CT Farmland Trust and American Farmland Trust.
    - Created a pilot BIPOC Apprenticeship Program with a total of 19 enrolled participants.
- Local Food Purchase Assistance (USDA funded)
    - Distributed $2.2 million for the purchase of CT Grown food products from 131 producers
    - 30 socially disadvantaged producers included in program
    - More than 500 distribution locations through the 8 subrecipient organizations
- Organic Market Development Program (USDA funded)
    - Received $263,743 to foster a three-year partnership between CT DoAg, UConn Extension and CT National Organic Farms Association (CT NOFA) to enhance the market for CT Grown certified organic products.
- Organic Cost-Share Program (USDA funded)
    - Awarded $35,100 in grant funding to 52 certified organic producers and processors to cover a percentage of their annual certification costs.
        - 35 certified organic farms
        - 17 certified organic processors
- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
    - Applied for and received $405,000 from U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund three projects enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops.
- Farmer Stress Relief and Mental Health
    - Maintained CTFarmStressRelief.org to offer resources to Connecticut producers with more than 630 visits.
    - Extended the AgriStress Helpline
        - Fielded more than 25 calls from CT farmers offering mental health and stress services
- Farm to Chef
    - Hosted a Farm to Chef Week kickoff event at the Old State House Farmers' Market
    - Published lists of CT restaurants sourcing CT Grown food products on CTFarmtoChef.com
    - Coordinated with University of Connecticut SeaGrant to design and implement survey on oyster shell recycling to restaurant owners
    - Attended CT Restaurant Association's Golf Classic to conduct outreach to chefs on programs available
- Ag Directional Signage
    - Received and approved for installation 2 applications in two districts
    - Worked with CT Department of Transportation to develop updated commodity logos for multiple agricultural products
- ConnecticutGrownStore.com
    - Fulfilled 240 orders, an increase of 24% over last year

    - Distributed 417 point of purchase cards to farmers at no cost
- Agency Website: The importance of an updated, relevant website as the agency's information source to the industry and consumers is critical. In FY2024 the following occurred to ensure this effort was adequately maintained:
    - Updated or created more than 400 pages on the CTGrown.gov website
    - Created a Grants tab on the landing page to assist prospective grantees
    - Updated five Boards, Councils and Commissions pages with same template for consistency and easier navigation
    - Updated six grant pages to utilize a more user-friendly template
- Boards Councils and Commissions: The bureau works with four statutorily authorized boards and councils to have industry representations to the agency and to advance the industries of focus. These include:
    - Farm Wine Development Council: Provided staffing/administrative support to the Connecticut Farm Wine Development Council to deliver one educational symposium, integrate a hybrid Passport to CT Wine Country program with a digital app and paper passport booklet resulting in 29,225 users (nearly 20% increase over FY2023) and supported coordination of 13 farm wineries participation in CT Building at Big E.
    - Connecticut Milk Promotion Board: Provided staffing/administrative support to the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board to deliver more than $330,000 in programming and marketing, including farm-to-school grants; partnerships between health professionals and nutrition educators; farmer engagement grants; crisis training for dairy farmers; social media ambassadors training; sponsorship of Connecticut Dairy Day at the Hartford Yard Goats and provide milk samples from local farmers at the event; support farmer engagement for on farm events and provide promotional items with the CT Dairy branding; provide tools to dairy farmers to engage consumers on social media; and connect with consumers at the Big E.
    - Connecticut Food Policy Council: Provided staffing/ administrative support to the CT Food Policy Council, bringing together council members representing state agencies, agricultural organizations, anti-hunger organizations appointees from the general assembly, and members of the general public. The council convened to discuss food policy and practices, available resources, current initiatives, and information sharing.
    - Connecticut Apple Marketing Board: Provided staffing/administrative support to the Connecticut Apple Marketing Board, retooled the statute language to establish the Apple Marketing Advisory Board, replacing the Apple Marketing Board.

CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE UNIT

Through Public Act 22-118 the agency was allocated a total of $14 million to support climate-smart agriculture practices for farmers in Connecticut to mitigate the impacts of climate change. This included $7 million for the Climate Smart Agriculture & Forestry Grant and updating the Farmland Restoration Grant Program to change the name to the Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency program authorizing grants to support implementation of climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices.

The following were achieved during fiscal year 2024:

- Awarded $1.4 million in grant funding to 20 agricultural producers through the Farmland Restoration, Climate Resiliency & Preparedness Grant to increase long-term climate resiliency of farming operations and decrease farm vulnerability to extreme weather events.

- Contracted with three environmental firms to develop comprehensive Farmland Restoration and Climate Resiliency Plans applicable to the agricultural producer's entire farm.
- Facilitated the disbursement of over $4 million in sub-grant funding through collaboration with the 6 Climate Smart Ag & Forestry Grant recipients to 83 entities to invest in climate smart practices.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION UNIT

As of June 30, 2024, the program has preserved 49,798 acres on 435 farm parcels since 1980. The long-term goal is to preserve 130,000 acres, with at least 85,000 of prime, statewide, or locally-important farmland soils.

During FY2024:

- 21 farm parcels were permanently protected in fiscal year 2023-2024
- 1,336 acres were permanently protected
- Leveraged $4.4 million in federal contributions through the USDA's Agricultural Lands Easement Program, with federal and local sources providing 50% of the total costs of acquiring these PDR easements
- Went from 290 to 435 PDR agricultural easements within 10 years, from 2014 to 2024 (a 50% increase)
- CT FarmLink - Supported the CT FarmLink program through continued agreements with program partners, CT Farmland Trust and Land for Good for the implementation of the program in CT. Through partnerships, the creation of a new logo and branded materials, updated the CTFarmlink.org website with an 8% increase in pageviews and 16% increase in users; increased monthly digital newsletter open rate from 42.5% to 52.3%; published 152 new farm seeker profiles and 26 new farmland listings.
    - A total of 26 connections with suitable farmland or connections with suitable farm seekers was achieved.

BUREAU OF REGULATORY SERVICES

The Bureau of Regulatory Services is responsible for enforcing state laws and regulations and certain federal laws in fulfilling the Department's mission relative to protecting public health and safety; ensuring the safety of both plant and animal derived food products; ensuring the general health and welfare of all domestic animals including livestock and poultry; and managing emergency preparedness and response activities for animal disease outbreaks and natural disasters.

The Bureau is organized into five operational units: (1) Food Safety and Agricultural Commodities; (2) Dairy/Milk Safety; (3) Office of the State Veterinarian and Animal Health; (4) State Animal Control; and (5) Licensing and Animal Population Control Program. Although each unit has separate and distinct responsibilities, certain situations and conditions necessitate collaboration and cooperation between staff of the various units.

The Bureau continues to secure non-state funding to enhance and support programmatic activities. The Bureau has multi-year cooperative agreements with the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to implement state programs to enforce (1) the Produce Safety Rule of the Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) and (2) the FDA's Animal Feed Regulatory Program Standards (AFRPS). The

Bureau continued its yearly cooperative agreements with the USDA's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services (APHIS, VS) fund activities (1) relative to reportable poultry and livestock disease surveillance and (2) animal disease traceability.

FOOD SAFETY & AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES UNIT

- The Produce Safety team completed year three of five in the second cooperative agreement with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Year three activities included: inspecting fruit and vegetable growers; standard operating procedures development; maintaining the farm registration and mobile inspection systems; and training new staff members while maintaining and focusing on our project plan.
    - 446 total produce farms in Connecticut, including:
        - 26 total covered farms, including:
            - 19 large covered farms
            - 3 small covered farms
            - 4 very small covered farms
        - 153 qualified exempt farms
        - 266 farms not covered based on produce sales less than $25,000
        - 83 Connecticut fruit and vegetable farms have registered through the state's E-License system, which is also linked to the mobile inspection program.
    - Conducted inspections at 8 farms for Connecticut Good Agricultural Practices (cGAP), a voluntary food safety audit for produce growers.
    - Provided funding to UConn Extension to provide Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training Course, which had 36 farmers enrolled.
    - Attended 8 outreach events to connect with growers on the various programs available.
- The Animal Feed Program is in year four of the five-year FDA Animal Feed Regulatory Program Standards (AFRPS) Maintenance Grants.
    - 62 registered commercial animal feed manufacturers are located in Connecticut and 5 routine inspections were conducted.
    - 118 routine samples were collected by animal feed inspectors for a sample analysis conducted by Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.
    - 7 FDA contracted inspections were conducted for BSE Feed Inspections and Veterinary Feed Directive Inspections.
    - 5 consumer complaints regarding animal feed were received and inspectors conducted investigations.
    - 14 animal feed label compliance inspections were conducted finding 113 unregistered products being distributed in Connecticut. There are 16,459 registered animal feed product labels registered.
    - Attended five outreach events.
- 371 Fertilizer companies sell 4,917 different fertilizer products in Connecticut. A total of 41 samples were collected for routine sample analysis to ensure the guaranteed analysis was accurate.
- 345 vegetable seed samples were collected for routine sample analysis to ensure that the germination percentages are above the minimum requirement for each vegetable kind.
    - 11 grass/forage seed samples were collected
    - 86 seed companies hold a seed labelers license in CT.

- The Hemp Program consists of 59 licensed hemp producers with a total of 23 acres of hemp planted for the 2023 growing season. Only 16 acres were harvested due to severe weather conditions.
    - 96 hemp samples were collected to determine that the THC concentration was below 0.3% THC.
- The Shell Egg Inspection Program added a new egg grading plant, bringing the number of egg grading plants up to 3 farms who have more than 200 birds but less than 3,000 birds producing eggs.
- 3 farms are registered in the poultry slaughter programs for those with less than 5,000 turkeys or 20,000 poultry of all species in a calendar year. These facilities receive annual facility inspections and hazard analysis critical control point paperwork inspection.

DAIRY UNIT

- Collected and analyzed the following:
    - 1,700 samples of processed/manufactured milk, milk products and cheese
    - 200 samples of raw milk to ensure compliance with state and federal milk safety regulations and detect the presence of animal drug residues. The retail raw milk samples are also tested for the presence of human pathogens.
    - 90 water samples collected for testing from dairy production and processing facilities
    - 15 milk samples collected for vitamin analysis
- The following inspections, evaluations or audits were conducted:
    - 170 Grade A Dairy Farm routine inspections
    - 50 Retail Raw Milk Farm inspections
    - 95 routine Milk/ Cheese Plant inspections
    - 90 Pasteurizer Equipment tests
    - 20 Bulk Milk Tanker inspections
    - 15 milk plant samplers evaluated
    - 30 milk hauler samplers evaluated
    - 130 Special inspections of dairy producers and manufacturers (inspection or quality violation follow-up)
    - 5 Milk Plant listing audits
    - 4 Farm bulk tank unit (BTU) audits
- Issued the following orders or warnings:
    - 1 Milk Plant delisted
    - 1 Dairy Farm Interstate Milk Shipper delisted
    - 25 stop sale orders to milk producers and milk processors for product quality violations
    - 20 warning letters were issued for violations of milk quality standards or inspectional standards.
- Certified a State Rating Officer for conducting dairy plant audits
- Developed online sample records for monitoring quality of finished products
- Supplied all dairy producers with PPE for H5N1
- Received grant funding from Association of Food and Drug Officials to facilitate training and purchase equipment needed to implement the Grade “A” milk safety program.

OFFICE OF THE STATE VETERINARIAN AND ANIMAL HEALTH UNIT

With USDA cooperative agreement funding support, the Bureau continued animal disease surveillance and outreach activities for Avian Influenza, Scrapie, and other reportable animal diseases; continued

implementation of the National Animal Disease Traceability Program; and partially funded two positions associated with the cooperative agreement programs. The Bureau provided funding to the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (CVMDL) at the University of Connecticut to conduct essential diagnostic services; to meet animal disease program surveillance goals; to assist in animal disease investigations; and to provide test data to support disease-free status certifications such as U.S Pullorum-Typhoid Clean State. State animal health surveillance information is coordinated by the State Veterinarian and shared with USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services through quarterly accomplishment reports and participation in the National Animal Health Reporting System (NAHRS) and the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN).

Also, with USDA Veterinary Services cooperative agreement funding support, the unit continued its activities with Animal Disease Traceability, Official Animal Identification requirements and monitoring and enforcing compliance with state and federal laws relative to livestock and poultry interstate movement:

- Livestock and Equine Interstate Movement - processed 7,764 Interstate Certificates of Veterinary Inspection for livestock and equine animals moving into and out of this state.
- Gathered and Submitted 1,905 Brucellosis samples.
- Gathered and submitted Porcine Pseudorabies samples resulting in 609 samples submitted to CVMDL.
- Tuberculosis tests for cattle and goats totaled 7,261.
- Official Animal Identification devices issued (pursuant to USDA Animal Disease Traceability Rule): 4,358 RFID (radio frequency identification devices), 800 NUES (metal) ear tags issued directly to CT licensed livestock producers and licensed, accredited, category II veterinarians.
- Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) Tests - processed 532
- Responded to 17 reports of sick or dead domestic poultry.
- Updated standard operating procedures for Retail Poultry dealers.
- Restarted the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Surveillance testing program.

STATE ANIMAL CONTROL UNIT

During fiscal year 2024, the State Animal Control Unit was comprised of 8 sworn State Animal Control Officers (SACO) (1 supervisor and 7 SACO's). At the end of FY24 there were 3 open SACO positions.

The unit performs routine and unannounced inspections of Department of Agriculture licensed and regulated facilities. These include commercial kennels, grooming facilities, pet shops, dog training facilities, animal shelter facilities, animal importers, and municipal dog pounds. The unit is also responsible for conducting criminal investigations pertaining to animal cruelty. The state is divided into seven territories; each officer is assigned a territory encompassing approximately 25 to 30 towns, each residing in their designated area. The unit is responsible for training new animal control officers within Connecticut. Additionally, the Chief State Animal Control Officer is the liaison between the Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff and municipal animal control officers regarding reporting suspected animal abuse.

In FY24, the Animal Control Unit performed:

- 1,266 inspections of pet facilities, including:
    - 625 grooming facilities
    - 259 commercial kennels
    - 185 dog training facilities

    - 125 pet shops
    - 57 municipal dog pounds
    - 15 animal shelter facilities
- Processed 51 rabies cases in which humans or domestic animals were exposed to a rabid animal
- Conducted 443 formal investigations which required documentation in a formal report through the e-License investigative report module.
- Handled more than 3,000 calls for service/complaints
- Issued:
    - 39 written warnings
    - 12 infractions
    - 1 misdemeanor summons
    - 1 arrest
- Received 94 reports from Department of Children & Families reporting suspected animal harm, neglect, or cruel treatment
- Submitted 93 reports to Department of Children & Families received from various Animal Control Officers under the current cross-reporting statues
- Conducted the 10th annual Animal Control Officer Training Program, an annual instructional training program for animal control officers, which resulted in:
    - 25 certificates of completion issued to Animal Control Officers who completed 80 hours of instruction following a curriculum as mandated by Conn. General Statutes 22-328.
- Trained 54 animal control officers on statutes related to animal importation
- Reached over 200 Animal Control Officers and Department of Children & Families Social Workers through participation in training on the link between animal and human abuse.

LICENSING UNIT

The Licensing Unit is responsible for the intake and processing of more than 40 different license types, all of which have transitioned to the enterprise eLicense system. Total licensing fees collected for FY24 were $2,092,997.80 of which 86% of the payments were made online. A total of 4,026 licenses were issued.

DoAg Licenses for FY24

Credential Type	Active, and In-Renewal
ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER	254
ANIMAL IMPORTER	224
ANIMAL SHELTER FACILITY	15
BULK MILK TANKER	18
CERVIDAE HERDS	11
COMMERCIAL ANIMAL FEED MANUFACTURER	62
CHEESE MANUFACTURER	20

COMMERCIAL KENNEL	251
COMMERCIAL FEED	654
COMMERCIAL FERTILIZER	371
COMMISSION SALES STABLE	1
CONNECTICUT FARM WINERY, BREWERY AND CIDERY	24
CT GROWN MANUFACTURER FOR ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR	8
EGG GRADING PLANT	6
EQUINE AUCTION	1
GROOMING FACILITY	615
FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWER	183
HEMP PRODUCER	59
LIMING MATERIALS	35
LIVE POULTRY DEALER	76
LIVESTOCK DEALER/BROKER	23
MAPLE SYRUP & HONEY PRODUCER	61
MILK DEALER	89
MILK EXAMINER	187
MILK LABORATORY	10
MILK PRODUCER	89
MILK SUB-DEALER	101
PET SHOP	83
POULTRY MORTALITY DISPOSAL	8
POULTRY SLAUGHTER FACILITY	3
RAW MILK CHEESE MANUFACTURER	5
RETAIL DAIRY STORE	2602
RETAIL RAW MILK PRODUCER	13

SOIL AMENDMENTS	301
SEED LABELER	86
SWINE GARBAGE FEEDER	3
SWINE GROWERS	8
TRAINING FACILITY	168
TOTAL	**6753**

ANIMAL POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAM

The Department's Animal Population Control Program (APCP) continues to increase the level of immunization against infectious animal diseases by providing sterilization and vaccination benefits for dogs and cats to (1) Connecticut residents for dogs and cats adopted from municipal pounds; (2) to low-income residents for dogs and cats that they own; and (3) to non-profit organizations engaged in activities aimed at reducing the population of feral cats.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the APCP provided vouchers for 4,967 animals (1,808 dogs and 3,139 cats) from municipal impound facilities, pets owned by low-income CT residents and feral cats from non-profit organizations. 3,344 of the 4,967 vouchers issued were redeemed for a 68% overall sterilization rate for intact dogs and cats adopted from municipal impound facilities, issued to low-income residents and awarded to non-profit feral cat groups cats from non-profit organizations.

BUREAU OF AQUACULTURE

The Department's Bureau of Aquaculture is the designated State Shellfish Authority, regulates the shellfish industry, and is responsible for shellfish sanitation in all commercial and recreational areas statewide. The bureau is responsible for classifying and managing shellfish growing areas; conducting shoreline surveys to identify pollution sources; collecting routine water quality samples; licensing and inspecting shellfish companies; and controlling for bacteria, *Vibrio* bacteria, viruses, biotoxins, and poisonous and deleterious substances that can cause human illness. The laboratory analyzes the samples to support the program and monitor shellfish diseases. Bureau of Aquaculture is the lead on aquaculture development, the liaison between state and federal permitting agencies, and assists industry members in completing the Joint Agency Aquaculture Permit.

- Public Act 21-24 enabled the Commissioner of Agriculture to contract for the use of a shell recovery vessel to collect and deposit shell on shellfish beds. Additionally, under such program, the department may receive and deposit on shellfish beds cultch from oyster shell recycling programs administered or authorized by the department. The legislature authorized $100,000 federal ARPA funds for the purchase of shell for cultch.
- Streamlined routine work through the implementation of Dial My Calls notification system to notify harvesters of growing area closures and reopening's and implementation of an online shellfish landing reporting system to eliminate data entry time for required reports to ISSC.

- Successfully addressed two program deficiencies prior to the issuance of the final Growing Area PEER and took corrective action to address two and partially addressed one new or emerging concern identified in the Growing Area PEER.
- Completed three comprehensive Sanitary Survey reports for the Towns of Darien, Branford, and Stonington, these are required every 12 years for towns with active shellfish harvesting and are essential to ensure shellfish growing areas are appropriately classified and reassessing and identifying new pollution sources.
- Created a web page to announce the small harvester lease initiative to support the establishment and equitable growth of small shellfish operations by making access to leased grounds more affordable and obtainable.
- Applied for, received, and administered multiple Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) grants for the shellfish and dairy programs, including:
    - Received $5,775.95 through the Shellfish Equipment grant, which was used to purchase safety equipment for field staff and additional phytoplankton and laboratory supplies.
    - Received $21,808.55 through the Grade "A" Milk equipment grant, which was used to purchase safety and personal protective equipment for the dairy field inspectors, a certified thermometer to allow inspectors to verify the accuracy of facility thermometers, and a teslong borescope to investigate supply lines used to transport milk back to the plant.
    - Received $29,428.50 through the Shellfish Training grant to fund multiple staff to attend national conferences and trainings through the end of 2024. Four staff members attended FDA trainings, and three staff members attended the Northeast Aquaculture Conference & Exposition/Milford Aquaculture Seminar and the National Shellfisheries Association meetings. Used these funds to host the Northeast Shellfish Sanitation Association (NESSA) meeting for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.
    - Received up to $23,657 from the Milk Training Grant to allow staff to attend FDA training courses and meetings.
- Two staff members attended FD245 Shellfish Plant Standardization, which is required before Analysts can conduct plant inspections. The course reviews the requirements of plant standardization, including public health aspects, plant premises, water supply and plumbing, food and non-food contact surfaces, sanitation, and records. Following the absence of federal training opportunities during the pandemic, this course was critical in increasing the number of available inspectors due to the large volume of work that must be completed in a short amount of time, biannually.
- Two staff members attended FD248 Shellfish Risk Assessment Risk Management (RARM). The course reviewed essential principles of the RARM requirements, conducting illness investigations following foodborne outbreaks, conducting Vibrio risk assessments and differentiating illnesses and outbreaks, and the process of traceback to identify implicated product in an illness investigation.
- Hosted the 2024 Northeast Shellfish Sanitation Association annual meeting for the first time in 5 years, a regional convening of state regulators, industry members and FDA.
- Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) has been installed and maintained on 120 vessels operating under seed transplant licenses or the Combined Harvest and Relay Shellstock Shipper 1 license. The VMS system is integrated into the GIS mapping data layer along with the shellfish licenses, enabling the Bureau to observe the activities of each shellfish vessel in real-time and capturing historical movement data. VMS has been crucial in aiding the Bureau with meeting NSSP compliance requirements.

- In FY 2024, CORR (Collective Oyster Recycling and Restoration), a non-profit, became the first statewide shell recycling program in Connecticut. In its inception year, CORR recovered 350,000 pounds of shell, of which 120,000 pounds of cured shell was planted in Long Island Sound in June, with the financial assistance and collaboration of funding from CT Sea Grant. CORR transported the properly cured shell to the BUREAU office in Milford and loaded it onto three Industry member's vessels. The industry washed the shell overboard on an enhancement project area within the 3,500-acre Bridgeport-Stratford designated natural oyster seed bed. CT Sea Grant also funded the purchase of mature oysters to be placed on top of the CORR planted shell. A project survey and assessment will occur the last week of August to evaluate recruitment success.

LABORATORY

- Joseph DeCrescenzo serves as the Dairy Laboratory Evaluation Officer (LEO) for the State of Connecticut and is responsible for evaluating all Appendix N Facilities and Certified Dairy Laboratories along with analysts performing milk laboratory test methods in accordance with the requirements of the Grade "A" Pasteurized Milk Ordinance.
- On a bi-annual basis, the LEO schedules and performs laboratory evaluations of both FDA certified appendix-n screening facilities and certified laboratories. There are a total of 2 certified laboratories and 11 screening facilities evaluated. Half of these facilities were evaluated in 2024. In addition, the LEO continues to speak with both new farms and new dairy processing plants about becoming an FDA certified Grade A facility.
- The LEO also organizes proficiency testing for the labs and certifies all the analysts before coming online to perform the procedures, which includes administering written and practical exams. The LEO also assists new labs and certified facilities develop and fine-tune all quality control/quality assurance operating procedures at their facility. Connecticut has a total of 68 certified analysts that are evaluated every two years. In 2024, 6 new analysts became certified to process dairy samples. In December of 2023, antibiotic splits for all Grade A facilities were distributed at no cost to the dairy plants.
- The LEO visits intra-state farms to help educate the farms about the necessity of antibiotic screening. The LEO makes and organizes split samples for these facilities to participate in to effectively measure their efficiency in processing samples for antibiotic detection.
- The LEO attended the 2024 Western Milk Seminar in Denver, Colorado to maintain his certification as the state LEO. This is required once every three years.
- Laboratory staff successfully participated in the 2023 NELEOM lab proficiencies and the 2024 FDA shellfish proficiency. Unknown samples are sent to the laboratory to measure its efficiency.
- Completed a year of oyster disease monitoring through the 2023 Fall Survey which includes collecting samples, sending samples for testing, and interpreting results. Recent disease data, including this year's work, was presented at regional and national conferences to stakeholders including government, industry, and academic interests. Also prepared to return the State's shellfish pathology program back to in-house testing in FY25. This included performing maintenance on, repairing, and/or replacing several specialized pieces of scientific equipment, developing user protocols, and optimizing workflows in the laboratory. Additionally, this work brought up to $9,000 from USDA to the State for diagnostic work involving farmed shellfish. Bringing back this capability increases the ability to respond quickly to inquiries, monitor shellfish health, and serve the industry.

End Report