

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 15, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) expand the Urban County Committees (UCOC) Urban Service Centers to include a center in Connecticut.

Connecticut is a densely populated state with a thriving urban agriculture sector. Approximately 80% of Connecticut's population lives in or near an urban area, and with 738 people per square mile, the state ranks 4<sup>th</sup> nationwide in overall population density. This population density is not concentrated in a single large city, but instead is spread out over a number of small cities, including Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, Waterbury, Enfield, Norwich, and others. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Connecticut has 17 urban areas, 9 urbanized areas, and 8 urban clusters. While USDA has already identified several large cities for new Urban Service Centers, no center has been identified that could serve the southern New England region generally. Adding a center in Connecticut that could serve people throughout the state would be value-additive to the portfolio of centers throughout the country.

Urban farming has grown significantly in Connecticut over the past decade. Since 2020, the state of Connecticut has received seven grants through the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production program, which have helped to support the development of an Urban Agriculture Master Plan in New Haven; the expansion of growing and greenhouse spaces that serve beginning and underemployed farmers in Hartford; the planning for a new small business service center focused on agriculture and food businesses in Thompson; the design of a greenhouse for hydroponic crops in Waterbury; and a new Urban Roots gardening program at the Chrysalis Center in Hartford.

These Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production grants have been transformational for communities in our state, but a need for technical assistance and federal support still remains. Our urban farmers report challenges accessing assistance through traditional USDA channels like the Farm Service Agency or Natural Resource Conservation Service offices. Additionally, because urban farms are often very small operations, urban farmers frequently need technical assistance to complete projects. Opening an Urban Service Center would support urban farmers throughout the state, helping them receive better access to USDA staff and desperately-needed targeted support.

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Thank you for your consideration of this request. We share the goals of the agency to support all types of agricultural producers in the country, including our region. In Connecticut, urban agriculture is serving the nutritional needs of some of the poorest communities in our state and is helping to provide fresh produce to families and individuals living in food deserts. However, this expansion needs comprehensive support in order to retain these new farming enterprises. For these reasons, we urge USDA to open and maintain an Urban Service Center in Connecticut to serve urban producers from every corner of our state and the southern New England region as a whole.

Sincerely,



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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



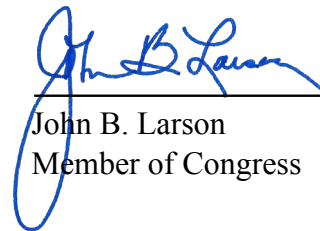
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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



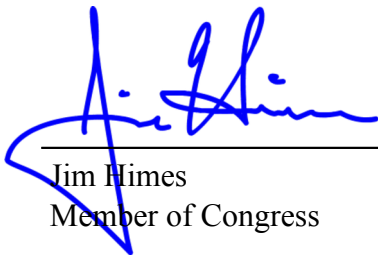
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Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress



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John B. Larson  
Member of Congress



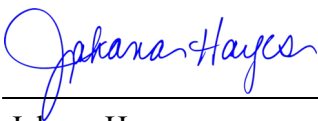
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Jim Himes  
Member of Congress



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Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress



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Jahana Hayes  
Member of Congress

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