

June 8, 2021

To the Zoning Commissioners,

Dishonest property owners in our area are exploiting the State of Connecticut farm status law, Public Act 490, to avoid paying property and other taxes. The tax-paying citizens and municipal revenues in towns with these fraudulent farms are the losers. As is the idea of equal treatment under law.

Public Act 490 is intended to encourage agriculture and preserve qualified forest land and open space through tax exemptions that provide help against the pressures of development. It has succeeded in helping maintain the rural character of many towns in the state. A state that grows its own food will help itself sustain a diversified economy, as well as provide the economic independence of locally available food. Farmers should get benefits from these strengths they add to our state through their livelihood, and the state rightly recognizes this.

When properties qualify as a farm, the owners are entitled to a 50% tax abatement of the property tax owed. They are also exempt from the first \$100,000.00 of assessed value from personal property taxes, such as buildings and machinery. For these benefits farmers need to show gross receipts of a minimum of \$2,500.00 each year. For authentic farmers, these exemptions make sense.

But unscrupulous property owners are taking advantage of farm status to avoid paying taxes, and even to avoid zoning and wetland regulations.

Here's a description of one such "farm" in town. The property has about 6 acres planted to white clover ("for pollinators"), three ducks ("livestock"), about a dozen blueberry bushes ("orchard"), about a dozen maple trees, just planted, each about 3-4 inches in diameter, ("maple syrup"), and a 20' by 20' garden ("crop"). That constitutes the "farm." The two barns built before the town decided on whether or not the property qualified for "farm" status exceeded permissible size according to zoning regulations, but were built anyway. Land was cleared to the river's edge and no silt fences were erected when the land was cleared, both of which are wetland regulation violations.

There are other such "farms" in town. How is this allowed?

Our town commissioners are devoted, well-meaning people who give generously of their time and labor in the many aspects of their work, and we are fortunate to have them. They work to uphold town regulations for all of us. They face pressure from dishonest property owners trying to fraudulently claim farm exemptions, but the commissioners need to uphold town regulations.

We need to support our commissioners for their dedication and their work protecting the residents and town regulations from exploitation. This starts by ensuring town regulations are upheld.

Without enforcement, our towns' regulations will become just another example of unequal treatment under the law.

Hugh Rogers
Washington, CT

