



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

Nourishing people, land, and justice through organic agriculture.



January 11, 2024

Testimony to House Agriculture, Food Resiliency & Forestry Committee

Submitted by Maddie Kempner, NOFA-VT policy director

NOFA-VT is grateful to the members of this committee for their support of organic dairy producers, and for championing organic dairy relief during the 2023 legislative session. We are also deeply grateful to the staff at the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets for administering the program and getting these much-needed funds out to farmers.

To ensure that all eligible farms can benefit from this successful program, NOFA-VT is requesting that the committee include \$252,203 for the Vermont Organic Dairy Relief Program in your Budget Adjustment Act memo.

It is our understanding that the intent of the program was to provide relief grants to all eligible farms. Due to a miscalculation in the amount of funding needed, the program ran out of funds prematurely and several farms did not receive payment, or received partial payment.

NOFA-VT is calling for an additional appropriation of \$252,203 to allow AAFM to distribute grants to the remaining five farms. In addition to the four farms who have not received any payment through the program, one farmer received a partial payment equivalent to about 10% of what they would have received if the program funds had not run out prematurely.

Our understanding is that the farm in question was in fact deemed eligible by AAFM at the time of their initial application, and would have received full funding through the program had the funds not run out. To our knowledge, no other farm received a partial payment through the program and the farm in question was considered fully eligible. If the farm in question was in fact considered fully eligible at the time of the original, partial payment, they should receive their full payment alongside the remaining four farms who received no payment.

Additional considerations for the committee in its decision on this matter:

- The farmer who has since stopped shipping milk may have made a different business decision had they received, or known they were going to receive, a full payment through the program.
- Though it's a low number, there are examples of other farms who received full payments through the program and have since stopped shipping milk.

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We also want to provide answers to some additional questions that were asked by committee members during testimony, including:

- Total number of organic dairies that stopped shipping certified organic milk in 2023: 16
- Total number of organic dairies certified by Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF) at the end of 2022: 141
- Total number of organic dairies certified by Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF) at the end of 2023: 125

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