

Hidden Leaf Homestead Testimony for  
Senate Agriculture Committee Meeting  
February 8, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard today. My name is Myra Adams and I am a Licensed Tier 1 Outdoor Cannabis Cultivator operating under the name Hidden Leaf Homestead. Without going into too much detail I will give you a little background on how I came to be here.

My husband is a disabled veteran and he was in desperate need of better VA medical care than the state we were living in could provide. Cannabis was illegal there and being a former Corrections Specialist for the Marine Corp Military Police, he was incredibly conflicted. He felt he was a criminal, buying cannabis on the black market and relying on its benefits, just to get through each day.

After a lot of research and recommendations we chose to move to Vermont. Although the cost of living was much higher here the sacrifice seemed worth it to obtain what we felt was freedom in a state that put its people first and made laws based on common sense rather than idealistic beliefs. Although recreational cannabis had not been legalized yet, it didn't carry the same stigma in VT and word was that cannabis law was continuing to change for the better. A medical cannabis card was not a viable option for my husband due to the negative consequences that come with being a registered medical cannabis patient.

I was already working on establishing a produce garden and we decided to also grow our own cannabis plants. We added chickens to the mix and our little homestead adventure began. When recreational grow licenses were made available to apply for in 2022 I was excited about the opportunity and immediately started work on my application. VT's focus was to support small growers and I felt like I'd fit perfectly into that category. The money I could make from cannabis sales could help expand the number of fruits and vegetables I wanted to be able to grow and potentially offer to our community. I also thought I would then, with a license, be able to grow enough to keep Matt supplied without having to buy more because his consumption far outpaced what we could personally, legally, produce with such a short outdoor season. We do not have the space to grow indoors nor the funds to increase our electric bill.

Little did I know the entire process was not going to be as easy as it seemed to be on the surface nor would it be as affordable as I thought. At every turn there was road block after road block. For the sake of time I won't go into all of them. The issue I would like to focus on and the point of me speaking with you today is to bring attention to the conflicts between Vermont Cannabis Law and Agricultural Law.

After receiving my license I began the work to clear what little usable land area we have for farming. Our lot size is an acre, but the only suitable place for growing crops is an area of roughly 3,000 square feet. With a Tier 1 license I can use 1,000

square feet for cannabis and the rest for other food bearing plants and trees. I obtained a loan through VSECU to purchase a greenhouse. Our property had severe drainage issues that impacted much of our land, even up to the foundation of our house. We needed to bring in an excavation crew for a drainage solution and to create a level area for our 720 square foot greenhouse. I received permission from the town to proceed and no permits were required.

In October of 2022, one of our neighbors complained to the town that we were interfering with wetlands. The town zoning admin e-mailed me an informational brochure about wetlands and told me whom to contact with the state. Although our property was not listed on the government wetlands map, I wanted to make sure that we were not violating any laws. I wanted to do things correctly, but I was also fearful of the astronomical fines if there was a reason we were found to be in violation.

Work had already started when I heard from the State Wetlands Ecologist. She wanted to do a site visit and came out in November of 2022. I explained that a town road culvert that drains onto our property is completely rusted out. You could actually see where water was seeping into the ground and draining across the property rather than being diverted into the stream. The stream for the diverted water was also quite shallow and could not contain all of the water when it rained heavily. The drainage issues we were having nearer to our house was from a new deep well drilled which required the extension of our driveway and changed the path of water runoff. All the sediment and clay drilled out was left behind causing water to settle, rather than drain. The trifecta was the cattails, which didn't appear until after we had sand brought in for a small pool pad. The standing water and presence of cattails "screamed wetlands," but I knew it was not because I had seen the changes to the land occur over a very short period of time with pictures of the area before and after each project took place. The fact that trees and stumps had been cleared before her arrival didn't help much because it made the ground muddy with puddles of standing water. I thought with the pictures and the explanation for the plants and hydrology present that there wouldn't be any concern. I was wrong.

The state wetlands ecologist declared most of our property to be Class II wetlands and a small area behind our house (that we knew was wetland because it was very obvious) as a Class I. She said that we would need to hire a wetlands engineer to complete a delineation and assist with the complicated permitting process. We were told that all work needed to cease until a permit was granted, which wouldn't be possible to obtain until the end of the following year. The delineation could not be done until spring. My plans came to a grinding halt and all the money I had spent so far was for nothing. The greenhouse I was making payments on, still packed up in boxes on pallets in our driveway would remain there for at least another year.

In January of 2023 I reached out to Otter Creek Engineering and one of their engineers was scheduled to visit our site in May. I sent all of the information I had provided the state ecologist as well as the state findings. Between the delineation

and permitting application the estimate was around \$6,000. \$6,000 so that I could farm less than 3,000 square feet of my own property. Property that I already pay taxes on. And I held a license that had so far cost me \$2,100 between the application fee, the license fee, the local town fee, and the background check fee. Plus \$3,000 I had purchased for product liability insurance with no chance of having any product to sell for at least another year. That's over \$11,000. And doesn't include the cost of the greenhouse I received no government assistance to purchase, or any of the excavation work, nor the actual costs of farming. I was already in deep with nothing to show for it which ended up costing me my mental health, which manifested into physical health problems (resulting in a visit to the ER), and in turn causing a significant strain on my marriage.

In May the engineer arrived and shortly after she exited her vehicle and took a glance over the property she said that it was a Class III wetland at most, if it was even a wetland at all. But, she still needed to complete the delineation, which included soil samples, and then she would know for sure. Afterward she said that she could not complete the permitting process because the area in question is NOT a wetland. I then waited over month for the state wetlands ecologist and our hired engineer to complete a third site visit together. The final determination was that it was NOT a wetland. However, the state ecologist said that she considered it a developing wetland and would not grant us the normal 5 year determination. She stipulated that we had to have the work done by the end of the year. If not, we would have to start the delineation process over again in 2024 and lose another year. I can't begin to explain how much relief, anger, and urgency I felt all at the same time. I had to come up with a lot of money in a very short period of time and find an available excavation crew that wasn't already booked for the remainder of the year that could get the work done before the snow started falling and the ground froze. My husband did not want to contribute any of his money for anything remotely related to Hidden Leaf Homestead in fear of losing his VA benefits. We've seen in the news what happens to families and farms receiving federal benefits when they get a license to grow cannabis. It's no secret that a large percentage of veterans consume cannabis. But, I've kept my husband as far removed as possible from the business of production as a precautionary measure.

I didn't sit idly hoping plan A would work out. I was frantically searching for a plan B because nothing was going as expected. I was talking to anyone who would listen trying to figure out what to do if I couldn't get the work done in time. It was suggested that if I had a farm determination letter from the VT Department of Agriculture, then the VT Department of Environmental Conservation would not be able to prevent me from continuing as planned. But, when I tried to get the Farm Determination letter I did not meet the minimum farm size requirements, or the generated income requirement that would exempt me from the farm size requirement. But, I couldn't generate the agricultural income without the access to farm the land in the first place. I was stuck in an awful Catch-22. It was recommended that I reach out to the CCB for assistance and they said that my license should serve in place of the farm determination letter. But, the VT

Department of Environmental Conservation said that they would not accept my license as a farm determination because they follow the Federal guidelines for agriculture, which excludes cannabis.

Plan A, thankfully, managed to work out. But, I still need to achieve a successful grow season. I will have been licensed for two years and haven't sold a spec of cannabis flower. Two years and I'll be late to the game in a market that is already becoming over saturated. No time to build my brand along side everyone else. I have no time to make mistakes and work out the kinks. I've got to get it right and do it very well the first time to be successful and make this struggle worth it.

I feel what I went through was completely unnecessary and to be honest, a bit cruel. I don't want anyone else to have to go through this. I ask that you please do what you can to recognize cannabis growers as farmers and **commit to fairness across all state agencies**. Don't just use meaningful words and phrases like "social equity" and "economic empowerment". Show us what they mean.

Thank you.