Testimony on H.586
Tim Camisa
March 12, 2014

Good morning. My name is Tim Camisa. Thank you for inviting me here to speak with you today.

I am the CEO of Vermont Organics Reclamation, which is in St. Albans, a short drive from St. Albans Bay. Vermont Organics recovers, reuses, and exports excess phosphorous – a concept that the state should consider as it moves forward in this process.

But more on that in a minute.

First, I want to tell you about a black and white photo that hangs from a filing cabinet in my office. It's a picture of me, swinging my racket during The Green Bay Classic – a tennis tournament held on St. Albans bay, in July, when "green" is the color of the water along the shore.

What's jarring about that photo, however, is that it was taken 35 years ago. And although The Green Bay Classic is long gone, we could still hold it today.

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Jump ahead to summer 2001: I am at my father's lakeside house on St. Albans Bay, with my children. It's hot. They're sweltering. They're young. They want to be in the water.

"I'm sorry, but you can't go in the lake," my father says. My kids are confused. "Come see why," Dad says.

The water along his property – and along all the properties near his – looks as though someone dumped buckets of green and blue paint into it. Toxic, blue-green algae blooms are the cause. Sorry, kids. No swimming allowed – even if this *is* Lake Champlain.

If you have children or grandchildren, you can probably imagine how the rest of *that* day went.

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I studied math and physics at the University of Vermont. Buckminster Fuller is my hero. So it stands to reason that, after this incident at my father's home, I would spend the next year analyzing nearly 50 Lake Champlain water quality reports that the state had commissioned over decades.

This research pointed to many sources of pollution-causing runoff, but the most prevalent then – and the most dominant today, according to the research we've all seen – was agricultural runoff.

Clearly, the data has consistently shown that although manure is an asset, it's also a problem. Excess phosphorous is a problem. We all know it.

That's when it hit me: "Why can't we remove the phosphorous, and other excess nutrients in manure, and stop them from even reaching runoff in the first place? Why not recover it? Why not reuse it? Why not help farmers earn extra money, while we help our watersheds?"

I saw environmental and economic opportunity in the byproduct of a dairy cow. How "Vermont" is that?

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After years of design, research and raising capital – some of which included a six-figure state and federal grant – the result was Vermont Organics. My business partner, Mike Rooney, and I have created a revolutionary manure management system

that captures and recycles the excess phosphorous and other nutrients in cow manure.

We purchase this manure from local farmers and, along with other organic materials – such as coffee skins and coconut – create a line of Vermont-brand, green-industry soil amendments. These products contain more organic matter than others in our market.

And we try to save the lake in the process.

Vermont Organics also has mobile capability. With a trailer-driven, mobile unit, our company could remove 150 to 200 yards of solids per day from a single farm. With an estimated one-half pound of phosphorous in a single yard of solids, Vermont Organics could remove 75 to 100 pounds of phosphorous a day, from that single farm.

Therefore, if Vermont Organics runs its mobile processing unit from April 1 to Dec. 1 in a given year, over six days per week, it would remove 16,000 to 22,000 pounds of phosphorous from 25 to 40 participating farms.

This mobile processing equipment has a seven-year lifespan, and it requires regular maintenance.

Vermont Organics pays a farmer $6 to $8 per yard for his solids. This process comes at no cost to the farmer, and it can be applied to small and large farms, with no investment required on behalf of the farmer.

But there's more.

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Most commercial soils contain about 80 grams of phosphorous and the same amount of peat, per bag. When Vermonters buy these products, they are importing unwanted pollutants into our watersheds.

Our soils are peat-free.

Vermont Organics detracts from harvesting peat, because it is a stable carbon, and, through harvesting peat, there is emission of greenhouse gases. Peat and other materials like it should stay in the ground, where they belong.

This is our ultimate goal at Vermont Organics: to take volatile solids, gather and make them stable – so that they won't degrade – and keep them out of the atmosphere. We have created an unprecedented way to protect earth, air and water.

I could talk all day about the concepts we're exploring and developing at Vermont Organics, but, today, we are focusing on the water.
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Currently, Vermont Organics manufactures six soil products, including one called "Raised Bed Recharge," which is an entirely new product on the market that is catching momentum with the fast-growing raised-bed garden industry.

One of our national accounts is Home Depot, where we just started selling products online. Initially, our customers have hailed from California, Florida, and Alabama, to name just a few.

These purchases point to another aspect of Vermont Organics. We have created a phosphorous export program. We give the nutrients we don't want in our watersheds to growers in areas of the U.S. where soil is not as rich.

While devising a plan for the EPA, we should remember that other people in other regions of the U.S. need the excess nutrients that we don't want.

So…Vermont Organics offers:

•a free cleanup program for farmers, and a way to help alleviate their worries over frustrating and costly nutrient management plans;

•a phosphorous recovery, reuse, and export program;

•a Vermont-brand, green industry, environmentally friendly product;

•mobile capability, to reduce our carbon footprint;

•and jobs.

We. Are. Creating. Jobs. In. Vermont.

And there is ample opportunity for more...
…with the right line of thinking.

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Over the past year, we have ramped up production at Vermont Organics. At the same time, we are receiving more publicity and playing host to many guests that are interested in learning more about our process, our products, and the benefits of both. We can make connections to the increased frequency of these events and last year's

announcement from the EPA about a new TMDL for Lake Champlain.

The visitors to our facility have ranged from school and government officials to researchers and representatives from the Conservation Law Foundation. (And any of you are welcome. Anytime.)

I am clearly paraphrasing, here, but when people come see our innovations, and they hear about the current crisis facing Lake Champlain – because it *is* a crisis – they always ask me the same thing.

"Why doesn't anyone jump on this? It can help."

Unfortunately, I never have an answer. Then I find myself wishing I did. Then I find myself wondering the same thing.

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When I read H.586, I had the same reaction that the EPA had to the state's draft plan for cleaning the lake.

"It's a valiant effort. But give me more. And give me something different, so that this process gives me hope."

I testified at two lake-related hearings the EPA and state held late last year, in St. Albans and Burlington. At those hearing, officials presented data, pie charts and analysis that clearly showed the prevalent source of pollutant-filled runoff. The problem is clear.

However, when I read H.586, I do not see that the solutions listed equal the primary problem presented at those December hearings. New ideas seem to target other source areas, where the pollution contribution is not as significant, while there is a rehashing of old ideas to address the obvious, age-old conundrum: agricultural runoff.

Why do we still talk so much about holding back the water and the runoff in it? These methods are important – don't get me wrong – but they need augmentation…something else. The data shows that. The EPA is asking us for that.

I also don't agree with the proposal in H.586 to relax the winter spreading ban. Put simply: this is a bad idea. Rather than tell you why, I would instead urge you to look outside, as you drive home today. Think of how this winter has transpired – through ice storms, freezes and thaws, and now the real potential for heavy spring flooding. Then consider what this

winter means for polluted runoff in Vermont this year. And what that means for the lake this summer.

(And just as a quick aside: two years ago, I offered my mobile processing capabilities to the state agriculture department, to help offset the need for winter spreading between Dec. 15 and April 15.)

Now, speaking of the weather, I was disappointed that the state's draft plan to the EPA did not address runoff as it relates to climate change. A watershed group leader told me that she watched one of her organization's grant-funded projects get washed away in a single storm during the heavy rains of last May and June. That's just *one* grant getting flushed downstream. Where else is this happening in Vermont?

Climate change is not only a factor, here; it's a priority.

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As the state proceeds to create a plan with the EPA, and to hone and adopt H.586, there must be a component that addresses phosphorous recovery, and its potential reuses.

In a March 6 story published in Vermont Digger, Gov. Peter Shumlin said he would not pledge any new state money to this issue this year. He has also told his administration that he would not spend a dime until he saw a plan that could work.

“We’ve spent a lot of loot over the last 10, 20 years in Vermont on this one,” Shumlin said in the article. “And the results have been pretty paltry.”

I would urge the governor and his administration to truly consider why that is.

Instead of creating solutions with costs in mind first, and where proposed revenue streams don’t directly address the main source of pollutants, we should work together and steer at least *part* of this conversation toward phosphorous reclamation.

Why would we talk about raising more fees and taxes, when we could be create a group of people to look further at reclamation and its benefits? Can we reuse phosphorous? Can this help the lake? And can it economically help Vermont?

The answer is sitting in front of you – offering himself and his business as a part of your lake clean

up plan. Let Vermont Organics be a part of your solution.

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Before I close, I'd like to thank the Conservation Law Foundation for suing the EPA and starting this vital conversation. On the other side of this same coin, I never want to see the Conservation Law Foundation sue the EPA over Lake Champlain again.

I also want to tell you about a phone call I received last summer, from a Michigan businessman who works in the dairy industry.

"What do the farmers pay for your service?" he asked.

"Pay?" I said. "I pay the farmer."

He was shocked. "You pay the farmer? Out here, the farmer would pay us. They want this stuff gone."

If Vermont Organics were based in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, where there are phosphorous trading programs, I speculate that farmers would knock on my door every single day.

Vermont Organics is open to visitors any time. Or, anyone can reach me at 802-528-8512, which is our number in St. Albans. Also, visit our Facebook page and our Web site: www.vermontorganics.com.

Thank you once again for your time and interest, and for inviting me here today. I appreciate it and am grateful to be here.

I will gladly field any questions or comments.

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