

Testimony prepared by Melinda Hinsdale, Steeple Ridge Farm
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My name is Melinda Hinsdale. I own and operate Steeple Ridge Farm in Charlotte, Vermont. I have run a successful horse farming business since graduating from UVM in 1983. There are several factors getting in the way of continuing to have a successful horse farming business in today's Vermont business environment. Some of the factors negatively impacting successful horse farming in Vermont are property taxes, payroll taxes, and insurance rates including health insurance and worker's compensation. The factor I would like to address today is property tax.

The farm I own and operate in Charlotte, Vermont was formerly owned by a farmer who raised hay, hogs and replacement heifers. The farm and its buildings were in current use. I have turned the same barns into housing for horses, added additional barn space, and an indoor arena. The land on the farm has been kept open and falls into 3 categories; pasture land for horse grazing and turn out, riding areas, and hay fields. I am a full time horse farmer making 100% of my income on my farm. More than 50% of the combined incomes in my household are made from income from the farm. My farm land is in current use, but my buildings are not eligible under the present guidelines. I have been at my current location in Charlotte for 17 years. Prior to this location I operated my horse farming business in Ferrisburgh, Vermont. The Ferrisburgh property was a working dairy farm that went out of business. I turned this 200 acre dairy farm into a horse farm by converting the cow barn into stabling for horses. The land was kept open with pastures for grazing and turn out, trails for riding through the woods and enough hay fields to make hay for the horses on the property and sell extra hay to other area farmers. The land was in Current Use, but the buildings were not.

Over the past 30 years I've been in business I have taken note of how many dairy farms in Chittenden and Addison County have gone out of business. Some have been broken up into housing developments. Some have been turned into organic vegetable farms or other alternative farms. Many have been transformed from housing cows to housing horses. If the purpose of the Current Use Program is to keep Vermont land open and scenic, horse farmers are accomplishing this. If the purpose of the Current Use Program is to give aide and incentive to farmers to

help them keep their farms so Vermont can remain rural and scenic, only part of this mission is being accomplished. Horse Farmers deserve to be treated the same as other farmers and have their buildings accepted into Current Use. The Equine industry has been granted Agricultural status except for Current Use. With the rising costs of feed, labor, insurance, fuel, etc. horse farmers are struggling. I have seen many ups and downs in the horse industry in the past 30 years. I have always been able to see my way through the rough times. However, the present business climate in Vermont has too many strikes against the horse industry and I am now seeing horse farmers going out of business. Without equal treatment under our tax laws, I foresee a decline of the horse industry here in Vermont. I urge you to consider allowing full time horse farmers, like myself, who feed and care for animals 365 days of the year, put up hay from their fields, and toil to keep Vermont land open, the opportunity to count all income made on the farm whether it be from boarding, lessons, breeding, training, or horse sales, to be agricultural income and allow buildings to be placed in the Current Use Program. Please, give horse farmers the same consideration as all other farmers.

Respectfully Submitted,
Melinda Hinsdale