



FARMER COALITION INC.

Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition, Inc.

*Farmers working together for a clean Lake Champlain
and thriving agriculture in Vermont.*

February 13, 2015

To: Vermont State Legislature, Montpelier, Vermont
From: Members of Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition
RE: H.35 An act relating to Improving the Quality of State Waters

Dear Committee Chairs and Committee Members,

On behalf of the agricultural membership of the Vermont based Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition, we would like to respond to several items that are proposed in House Bill H.35 Draft No. 1.3. As a farmer-based group dedicated to clean water and viable farms, this issue and bill are very important to us.

Sec. 4. Revision to the AAPs

We support the changes to the AAPs that would bring all farms under equitable rules, would improve water quality within the state and would implement a small farm certification program. We also support the existing MFO and LFO permits and regulations for medium and large farms. However, the definition of a small farm needs to be defined, possibly similar to the definition found within Pennsylvania's Nutrient Management Act (Act 38) or that of Maine's Nutrient Management Law (7:4201 et seq.) and associated Nutrient Management Rules (01-001 Chapter 565).

Sec. 8. Agricultural Water Quality Training for Farmers

We feel that the initial training requirements and periodic training updates for all farmers who spread manure/compost or fertilizer, cultivate land for annual crop production, or raise livestock should be the same regardless of size or type, and are supportive of this type of training. We do not support the language requiring this training to fall within the conditions of a large farm permit, medium farm permit, or small farm certification.

Sec. 9. Certification of Custom Applicators

We agree with this level of certification for manure applicators. Utilizing a system for licensing that is similar to the pesticide applicator license already administered by VAAFM would be a logical way to implement such a certification. This would include an initial training and assessment of knowledge followed by continued education and certification requirements. An employer could hold the license (for five years pending continued education) and their employees could operate under that license. A training developed by UVM Extension and delivered to manure applicators in January 2012 has already been developed and could be used for this purpose.

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Funding Strategies

CVFC supports increasing the number of staff and farmer assistance opportunities through the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets to improve water quality in Lake Champlain and across the state. We know this is vital to ensure a quicker response to obvious and repeated violations of the AAPs. We understand that the amount needed to meet the staffing and grant requirements of the Agency of Agriculture is \$1.2 Million. In that light, we feel strongly that a large portion of that funding should come from within the agricultural community. One idea we have to raise funds is to assess a fee based on bag and bulk feed for all domesticated livestock including, but not limited to cows, horses, llamas, chickens, sheep, swine, etc. We are open to any ideas that help the agriculture industry in Vermont equitably share in this cost, enabling all farms to contribute in a scale-appropriate way.

We are engaging our members in increasing awareness of all matters related to improved water quality management on the farm, improved soil health leading to improved crop yields, access to available funding to assist in water quality practices implementation, and public and government relations outreach. Our three-pronged mission aims to educate and inform farmers, legislators, and the public.

If you have any questions please contact us in Middlebury at (802) 388-4946 x 348 or email info@champlainvalleyfarmercoalition.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Kemp".

Brian Kemp
President, Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition