

**February 3, 2015**

**Testimony of Andrea Stander, Executive Director of Rural Vermont  
Before the Senate & House Agriculture Committees**

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Committee. My remarks will be brief because I want to yield this chair quickly to the farmer members of Rural Vermont who have traveled here today, in some cases from quite far away, to share their stories and concerns with you.

Last spring, this Committee helped to pass a small amendment to VT's raw milk law allowing registered Tier II raw milk producers to begin delivering their milk to existing customers at farmers' markets. Although this was a modest change in the law, it represented an important expansion of economic opportunity for some family farms that are working hard to develop their businesses and provide good food to their communities.

Just before last year's amendment was scheduled to go into effect on July 1st, Rural Vermont learned through one of our farmer members, that the VT Agency of Agriculture was planning to make a significant and burdensome change to their internal enforcement policy for a provision of the raw milk law that involves the required bi-monthly milk quality testing. To make a long story short, this change in policy, which the Agency said was prompted by testimony during the 2014 legislative session and pressure from legislators, created no improvement to public health or food safety and had the effect of negating any economic benefits that the Tier II producers might have gained through the farmers' market delivery amendment. The proof of this is the following numbers:

Throughout the five years that the current raw milk law has been on the books, there have been no instances of illnesses or other problems involving Tier II raw milk producers in VT. Last January, there were two registered Tier II raw milk producers – the same number that had existed for almost 5 years. By May, there were four farms that had met the rigorous requirements to become registered Tier II producers and by July, when the farmers' market delivery amendment went in to effect, there were eight registered Tier II producers. Sadly, by this past December, following months of effort by Rural Vermont and its members to persuade the Agency to rescind their new policy, there were only 5 Tier II producers remaining and now there are at least two more who are considering abandoning their Tier II status because it is just not economically viable.

Before you hear the testimony of these farmers who have been directly affected, I want to leave you with two questions: Is it good public policy for the state that is held up nationally as a leader in developing and promoting healthy local food to be discriminating against some of its most dedicated farmers? And why is the Agency of Agriculture devoting its limited financial and human resources to discriminating against raw milk producers and driving them out of business?

And I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.