



Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

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Introduction

As a result of Act 64—the Vermont Clean Water Act—signed into law in June 2015, the Agency of Agriculture was tasked with updating the Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs) to further reduce the impact of agriculture on water quality across the state. The Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) are an updated version of the AAPs, the rules which regulate farms in order to protect water quality, re-written to a higher level of performance.

The public meetings and public comment period held in 2015 and 2016 are not required by law, however this informal process was conducted by the VAAFM to ensure rule development which will provide a realistic, workable framework for agricultural management in our state that effectively protects Vermont's lakes and rivers. To date, there has been significant and sustained public engagement in the RAP drafting process—over 1400 individuals have attended the 70 stakeholder meetings VAAFM has held since October, 2015 to discuss the draft rules in detail and solicit feedback on the provisions and process.

Narrative Timeline

Act 64 of 2015 was signed into law on June 16, 2015.

VAAFM reviewed the Final Report of the Agricultural Working Group (December, 2013), a Partnership of VAAFM, VTDEC, NRCS facilitated by EMC and the CBI with participation by Farmers and Agricultural Stakeholders over a period of two years to inform writing the first draft of the RAPs.

VAAFM wrote a first draft of the RAPs from July, 2015 to October, 2015.

VAAFM released the first draft of the RAPs for public review on October 20, 2015.

VAAFM held a public comment period from October 20, 2015 to December 18, 2015.

VAAFM initiated a process of engagement with stakeholders surrounding the revising of the RAPs in a process not required by APA or other law to ensure farmer voices were continued to be heard in this process and VAAFM could work to write a more effective rule which meets the intent of Act 64 while enabling farms from all sectors to continue to engage in farm management which protects and improves water quality throughout the state.

During this public comment period, VAAFM engaged in a process of outreach, education and engagement with constituents to present, discuss and reflect on the first draft of the RAPs.

During the public comment period of October 20, 2015 to December 18, 2015, VAAFM held 31 meetings to engage with stakeholders directly regarding the RAP Rule Revision process and the first draft of the RAPs

The public meetings and public comment period held in 2015 are not required by law, however this informal process was conducted by the VAAFM to ensure rule development which will provide a realistic, workable framework for agricultural management in our state that effectively protects Vermont's lakes and rivers. The first draft public comment period opened on October 20, 2015, and ended on December 18, 2015. During this period, 10 public meetings were held throughout Vermont – the first on November 12, 2015, at the St. Albans Historical Society and the last on December 10, 2016, at the Chandler Music Hall in Randolph.

10 Public Meetings were held in:

St. Albans, Enosburg, Middlebury, Rutland, White River Junction, Brattleboro, St. Johnsbury, Newport, Montpelier

Twenty-one small focus group meetings were also held throughout the state with various stakeholders. Since the close of the first public comment period, the Agency has spent nine weeks to thoroughly review and consider all public comment.

21 stakeholder meetings included members of:

St Albans Coop RAP Presentation, NOFA-VT Presentation & Discussion, Farmers Watershed Alliance RAP Meeting, RAP Presentation and Discussion @ VGFA Annual Meeting, VACD Annual Meeting, CLF, Sierra Club, VNRC, LCC, Vermont Conservation Voters, Lintilliac Foundation, PMNRCD area farmers, RAP Presentation @ Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, Meeting with NOFA-VT & Rural Vermont & others, VVBGA Annual meeting--presentation on draft RAPs, Legislators-H35 Implementation Group, WRNRCD Organized a farmer group to discuss RAPs, WRNRCD & CTRWFA organized a meeting to discuss RAPs, Vermont Planners Association presentation on draft RAPs, Chittenden County Regional Planner Meeting and RAP presentation, Two Rivers Ottauquechee RPC RAP Presentation and Discussion

At the end of the December 18, 2018 comment period, over 800 people attended more than 30 meetings across the state to voice their opinions, and 169 Vermonters submitted written comments.

169 Vermonters submitted 468 pages of written comment, available on our water quality website. http://agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/ag/files/pdf/water_quality/RAP/Draft1-RAP-Public-Comments-Recieved.pdf

VAAFM then engaged in a nine-week process, from December 18, 2015 to February 23, 2016, of reviewing, coding, incorporating and responding to public comment.

During this nine-week revision process, VAAFM engaged in 17 outreach meetings with over 250 stakeholders to discuss comment received regarding the first draft public comment period of the RAPs.

VAAFM met with these stakeholder groups:

Champlain Valley Farmers Coalition (CVFC), VT Food Funders Network, Windham Regional Planning Commission Meeting, CT River Farmers Watershed Alliance Meeting, VT Livestock and Grazing Conference, VT Horse Council Annual Meeting, VT Fresh Network, Rutland Regional Planning Commission, NOFA-VT Organic Farmer Meeting @ farmshow, VBPA Annual Meeting @ farm show, VAAFM Dairy Update, VT Sheep and Goat Association Annual Meeting, Farm Show

Outreach Table on RAPs / Act 64, NRCS Planner Meeting, Orleans County Advisory Board Meeting, UVM No-Till Conference, Addison County Road Foreman Meeting

Based on comment received, VAAFM rewrote the RAPs to try to bring more clarity and readability to the rules, based on public comment.

VAAFM released the second draft of the RAPs on February 23, 2016 and has been engaged in a continued process of public outreach and discussion to review 2nd draft of RAPs.

Along with the second draft of the RAPs, VAAFM released a responsiveness summary highlighting 30 responses to public comments received.

http://agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/ag/files/pdf/water_quality/RAP/RAP-Draft-1-Responsiveness-Summary-02252016.pdf

Since the release of the second draft of the RAPs, VAAFM has held 21 meetings with stakeholder groups where over 350 individuals have participated in the meetings.

VAAFM has met with these stakeholder groups since February 23, 2016:

S. Windsor RPC, Conservation Coalition Mtg (CLF), Agronomy+ Discussion, Bob White Systems RAP Meeting, Rural Vermont, Caledonia County NRCD Farmer Meeting, Rutland + Bennington NRCD Horse Meeting, CVFC, White River NRCD, Vermont Legislature, VT Organic Dairy Conference, VBPA RAP Meeting, Christmas Tree Growers Association Annual Meeting, CT River Farmers Watershed Alliance, ACORN Small Farm Grower Meeting, A1 Pesticide Applicator Meeting, Farm Bureau, Caledonia County NRCD Farmer Meeting, VVBGA, Windham County NRCD Farmer Meeting #1, Windham County NRCD Farmer Meeting #2; UVM Extension

March 24, 2016, after one month of public meetings and comment, VAAFM is in the process of reviewing and responding to public comment while making revisions to the second draft RAPs in anticipation of filing a rule in April, 2016.