

2018 Farm Bill Testimony, 20 April, 2017  
Senate and House Agriculture Committees  
Montpelier, VT  
Michael Bald, Founder / Owner of *Got Weeds?*

Thank you for the opportunity to share my input.

I'll mention that I have no direct financial stake in the passage of a 2018 National Farm Bill; I simply depend like everyone else on a healthy agricultural system with clean water.

I do not farm, and I was once informed that weed control challenges are not an agricultural issue; I am still working to figure that out.

My background:

BS in Biology, University of Notre Dame, 1988

US Army Corps of Engineers, 1988 – 1992

Sole founder and proprietor of *Got Weeds?* Since 2011 the company has focused on invasive species management alternatives for organic landowners, farmers, and growers. I use no herbicides; I succeed by transitioning landscapes and working to build healthy, functional soil. My message is simple: Stewardship = Presence.

I rehabilitate landscapes, manage apple trees, and train others on natural resource stewardship.

Farming, and agriculture, and land management in general is a dynamic scenario.

The land is ever-shifting, moody, and unique different with every step; it is the “place” where agriculture happens, and it is truly dynamic.

The weather is dynamic year to year, as are other environmental conditions, and as are the seeds we sow. There exists a constant of unpredictability.

This dynamic activity on a dynamic landscape is managed by people and animals, who are also dynamic components of the equation. People come and go, the available labor pool is consistently a moving target.

It is quite difficult therefore, to neatly define and easily quantify agriculture or land management. Boxes tend to be simply too rigid for such a dynamic activity / occupation.

I want to emphasize that the Farm Bill should be in place to serve agriculture and the nutritional needs of the population. Agriculture should frame the Farm Bill, and should not trickle down from it as a secondary by-product of bureaucracy.

My issues:

1. Water quality is not the goal we need to focus on. Clean water comes from functional, healthy soil. That process works only in one direction. Water flows over, through and within soil, and therefore is cleaned and rejuvenated before it reaches water bodies. We need to focus our energies on soil.
2. Federal agencies and the Farm Bill suffer from a total lack of integration. We seek to understand the needs of pollinators, yet we focus on a single family of pesticide contaminants. The impact of glyphosate on pollinators is equally as devastating as the impact of neo-nicotinoids, yet glyphosate was ignored in the meetings held by the Pollinator Protection Committee. I questioned this, and even my question failed to be

included in the meeting notes. I find that disturbing. Within the state legislature, we hold totally separate hearings on topics that need to be seen as a system with an appreciation of cumulative effects. Atrazine hearings take place totally separate from the conversation on invasive species and the conversation on pollinators.

3. Continuing with the glyphosate theme and the lack of integration, herbicides got no mention at all in the 2016-2020 Vermont Cancer Plan. That's odd, since glyphosate was found in 2015 to be a probable carcinogen. Atrazine is a known endocrine disruptor. How is it that the state medical community completely disregards our state's annual use of synthetic chemicals? Stovepipe thinking is one possible culprit.
4. A final example of the disjointed approach to land management is our annual burning of 40,000 piles of unwanted vegetation. Why do we burn future soil? Are we that clueless? Decomposition and soil structure are fairly simple concepts; is it patience we lack? Can we learn to stop burning off a useful resource?
5. An argument against any Farm Bill is the automatic 30% overhead that program administration brings. I came to know this figure during my years in the Forest Service.
6. We need land Stewardship. We need to support companies and individuals that do the right thing because it's simply the right thing. King Arthur Flour is a brilliant example, walking the talk to show their commitment as a Certified B Corporation.
7. Vermont needs more people who are willing to work and to serve as mentors and role models. Young people have no one demonstrating what hard work looks like, and nature is almost viewed with fear and distrust. We are disconnected from Work and Nature, two notions that are highly restorative and rehabilitative for people in pain / depression.
8. I see The Farm Bill clinging to ideas and beliefs that are beyond outdated. River corridors are assessed for the "navigability" status as if a log drive might take place tomorrow. There's a sense of "let's work with what we have", which is just an easy out.
9. My needs are a cure or vaccine for Lyme disease, vaccines against the mosquito-borne diseases, and some kind of fix to the insane cost of Workman's Compensation. I don't care where the funding for these concerns comes from; I just need them addressed. We need a state pool to assure that everyone is covered to some extent by Workman's Comp. Otherwise people like me will lose a month of income when we eventually come down with Lyme or some other illness.
10. I find the EQIP program to be plagued by shortcomings and misguided policy adaptations. Perhaps this is a conversation for another day, but I see periodically how dis-functional the program is. This is real time, with real people, but I do not see the agency looking for real improvements. Rather than upgrade the program, the goal is to make agriculture fit into the box and pursue participation rather than outcomes.
11. Vermont should look to creativity and innovation rather than The Farm Bill to resolve its issues with invasive species. There are six economic uses for Japanese knotweed, which is found in virtually every corner of the state. Think of the \$\$ that could generate.

Committee members should feel welcome to join me anytime on an invasive species management site. I can be found in numerous towns statewide and at workshop events, and am happy to converse further as we work.

Thank you.

