

May 3, 2018

House Committee on Judiciary  
Vermont General Assembly  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633

**Re: S.260— A Farmer in Support of Citizen Right of Action**

Dear House Committee on Judiciary:

I am writing to you as a citizen who has not previously made a habit contributing my thoughts on the various legislative tasks before the House and Senate. My name is Annie Hopper, and I own, manage, and operate ScuttleShip Farm in Panton. We are a pasture-based livestock farm specializing in grassfed lamb as well as chicken, turkey, eggs, and a handful of vegetables that we sell out of our honor-system farmstand as well as in storefronts around the state. I currently tend a flock of 100 sheep on the shores of Lake Champlain, grazing fields that have been in agriculture since 1765 when they were settled and cleared by the Ferris family.

I entered the world of agriculture after studying at Middlebury College and falling in love with Vermont for both its commitment to community and its natural beauty. After much careful consideration and discussion, my fiancé and I made the decision to start our life here in Addison County. When I founded my farm, I returned to a trade that has been in my family for generations until my grandfather finally sold his ranch when I was three. We did not happen upon farming, we deliberately chose it as an occupation and a lifestyle full of highs, lows, and uncertainty. Similarly, we chose to move to—and stay in—Vermont as an informed decision for the future of our agricultural business and our family.

**I have invested time, money, and my future into farming, and I am writing to urge the House Committee on Judiciary to respect my hard work and investment by supporting the citizen right of action provision in S. 260, an act relating to funding the cleanup of State waters.**

The way I see it, a citizen right of action will protect farmers in two very important ways: first, it will ensure those of us who work our tails off to manage our farms in accordance with Vermont's water quality efforts are not unfairly competing in the same market as those who fail to reform their practices. It is clear to me that there are large gaps in enforcement of the Required Agricultural Practices, and when compliance is no more than a suggestion, who gets ahead?

Not all farmers are struggling to comply - I would argue that some of the most profitable and beloved family farms are already on the track to compliance. Responsible farming practices cost money, but the dividends of investing in the

health of both the environment and the community far outweigh the expense. I sincerely hope Vermont does not turn its back on these farms by further enabling those who are unwilling to comply with the law.

Second, the citizen right of action will provide access to justice for all Vermonters and begin to repair agriculture's reputation. In addition to farming, I have the debatable honor of serving in Panton's town government. Our town may only have around 600 residents, but I have been approached by numerous neighbors begging for some recourse against foaming water, festering beaches, and indifference to the so-called *Required Agricultural Practices*. They ask me if the town can do something, if the state can do something, if anyone can do anything.

Such a feeling of unrepresented helplessness is sad to behold in such a small and tightly-knit state as Vermont. I have watched as our community has further polarized itself. I have watched as the muttered thoughts turn from wishing certain farms would take greater care in their practices to wishing all dairy farms would just disappear. This would be a sad future in Vermont, but I fear, if we do not uphold the law, Vermonters will turn their backs on farming. We are failing our citizens if we do not provide recourse when our state agencies fail to faithfully uphold the laws enacted by our Legislature. We are failing our farmers if we continue to shelter those not willing to comply with the law.

**Please support a citizen right of action.** This is not new regulation. This is not new taxation. This is merely the assurance of Vermont to Vermonters that it stands by its laws and policies in a time of great collective need. Let us not be left unprotected and unrepresented. Let the state's agencies serve all Vermonters equally as their mission statements proudly proclaim; let us all be accountable.

Respectfully,  
Anna Hopper  
Panton, VT