Testimony on S.260

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Westfield, VT
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Dear Chairman Deen and Committee Members,

Thank you for your interest in S.260. I hope the Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife Committee can consider the following:

Projects eligible for funding:
• Include projects for priority funding if they help the state meet other mandates and goals, such as:
- Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Climate change adaptation
- Farm viability
- Stormwater management
- Identified in Tactical Basin Plans

Healthy Soil = Clean Water

When we take care of soil, we improve and maintain water quality. If the bill includes a list of priority projects, consider adding the following to the list of funding eligible projects and technologies

- heat recovery from composting on farms*
- dairy farm transition to grass-fed (assumes most water quality issues on farms are related to growing corn)
- composting at regional and local scale (also supports demand for compost to meet new rules in the Vermont Stormwater Management Manual).
- infiltrate more stormwater higher up in the watershed through changes to municipal building codes and stormwater ordinances.

*Compost alters nutrient availability in the soil, and provides water quality benefits, along with increased carbon sequestration and profitability from: improved soil health from additional organic matter (compost) that builds soil structure and reduces erosion, helping farmers achieve RAP goals; reduces the need for commercial fertilizer; produces plants more resistant to disease and weather extremes. There is growing interest from farmers, especially for composting systems designed to also capture heat (compost heat recovery http://agrilabtech.com. Helping farmers make this transition is good for water quality, and agriculture.

• Act 64 did not include a definition of 'community-based' in referencing methane digesters eligible for funding. Add a definition of 'community-based digesters' in S.260.

About digesters:
A digester does not alter nutrients. What goes in, comes out - unless the digestate is subject to further treatment such as precipitating out phosphorous. A digester that mixes municipal wastewater with food scraps and manure results in digestate that must be treated as bio-solids, and a market found for the material. These additional and not insignificant costs, raise public good issues. Do they offer the best 'bang for the buck' to justify public funding for this approach to nutrient management? What is the market for this material? Will Vermont farmers and gardeners want it? For more information about biosolids permitting and management contact Ernie Kelley in DEC Waste Management Division: ernie.kelley@vermont.gov

Thank you for considering these concerns and recommended changes to S.260.