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**Act No. 129 (H.656). Agriculture; livestock transport; feral swine; hemp; apiaries; local food; water quality**

**An act relating to miscellaneous agricultural subjects**

The act amends or adds multiple agricultural laws. The act prohibits the distribution of commercial feed labeled as bait for deer. It amends recordkeeping and animal identification requirements for transport of livestock by livestock dealers, transporters, or packers. It also requires a person operating a captive deer facility to pay the costs of chronic wasting disease testing. The act also removes rabbits from the definition of livestock subject to mandatory slaughter inspection.

The act amends multiple provisions regarding the operation of apiaries. Apiary owners are required to notify the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM) of the detection of American foulbrood in an apiary as soon as practicable. Apiaries are required to be inspected once each summer prior to sale of bees, instead of twice a summer. The act also requires a person importing bees into the State to provide an approved import permit and a certificate of inspection to AAFM not less than 10 days prior to delivery.

The act recodifies the existing Seeding and Filter Strip Program and the Farm Agronomic Practices Program under the statutory subchapter for agricultural water quality financing. The act exempts from custom applicator certification a farmer applying manure or agricultural waste to fields of another farmer, provided that total annual volume applied is less than 50 percent of the annual manure or agricultural waste generated on the farm where the manure is spread. AAFM is authorized to require persons transporting non-sewage waste to a farm for deposit into a manure pit or methane digester to report on the composition and volume of material transported.

The act amends the definition of local food under the consumer protection act to clarify when a food product may be labeled or advertised as “local” or any similar term. The act clarifies that when AAFM inspects weights and scales, the owner of the device subject to inspection shall make it available to the Agency. The act gives AAFM administrative penalty authority for violation of weights and measures requirements. The act amends the definition of “farm operations” eligible for participation in the Vermont Agricultural Credit Program to include agritourism.

The act authorizes the Department of Fish and Wildlife and AAFM to remove or destroy feral swine. The act defines what constitutes feral swine, which

includes a free-roaming domestic pig outside of an enclosure for more than 96 hours. Destruction of feral swine would not constitute animal cruelty if the swine is killed or destroyed according to the requirements established in the act.

The act extends for one year the duration of the Ecosystems Working Group and renames it as the Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group. The act provides that AAFM will regulate cultivation of hemp during the 2020 growing season under the federal law authoring state pilot programs and not under a U.S. Department of Agriculture interim rule for the cultivation of hemp. In addition, the act establishes standards for the labeling and sale of hemp seed in the State.

The act clarifies the corporate authority of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board by providing that it has the authority of a nonprofit corporation. The act repeals the sunset on the Rural Economic Development Initiative. The Department of Financial Regulation (DFR) is required to submit to the General Assembly an assessment of the long-term sustainability of Vermont dairy farming under the federal milk market order pricing system. After receipt of the DFR assessment, the Committee on Committees and the Speaker of the House shall appoint a task force to implement DFR's recommendations. The act also requires the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation to testify to the General Assembly regarding the status of forest carbon sequestration programs and projects in the State.

Multiple effective dates, beginning on July 1, 2020.