

Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets Overview – January 2019 House Agriculture & Forestry Committee

It may not stick out, but the work of the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets touches your life several times per day.

That glass of milk you had this morning may have been inspected by one of our employees. It could have been at the farm where farmers are routinely inspected for proper sanitation...or it could have been one of our inspectors at the plant where the milk was bottled.

Last year the Agency visited 1900 dairy farms for inspections...farms and also had 409 dairy plant inspections.

That gas you put in your car—The Agency of Agriculture made sure you got what you were paying for. Our consumer assurance division inspects gas pumps. If you bought something at Dollar General or maybe a grocery store, our inspectors made sure the price in the aisle matched what was registered at the check-out line.

The health and safety of our livestock is part of the Agency. Our animal health division tracks the transport of animals in and out of our borders-making sure diseases are not spread.

We also monitor that pest or bug that may spread disease. We survey ticks—an important function to control the spread of Lyme disease. There are 14 species of ticks in Vermont. 56% of the ticks we sampled were carrying Lyme disease.

The Agency also played a role in detecting and monitoring the Emerald Ash Borer. We know it's in at least 6 towns We also monitor the mosquito population, some areas in Addison and Rutland Counties have districts where we support their control methods.

The Agency also works to improve our rural economy. We manage the Working Lands programs. With the oversight of a board, we provide grants to companies that tie their work back to the land. It may be a special piece of equipment that helps someone who works in the forestry or food arena. We invested in 21 agriculture projects last year...and 7 forestry projects totaling \$783,000...Since 2012, \$26 million invested, creating 474 jobs. Making sure our working landscape is working is important to our mission.

We are making progress on improving our waterways. Farmers are working hard to improve their on-farm practices; through education, outreach and technical assistance there were 366 events centered around improving water quality. Our water quality workers are on farms. We completed 652 inspections last year...we referred 32 cases to ANR for possible action and 7 cases ended up at the Attorney General's office...We spent nearly 3000 hours just on farms last year with inspection and enforcement.

We are spending dollars to help with best management practices. 3.2 million dollars spent by the state on farmer financial assistance...farmers spent nearly 1 million dollars themselves...They are improving their soil health.....thousands of acres now not being tilled and farmers planting cover crops to keep the soil in place....

We are investing in our food and beverage companies. We promote agricultural products, investing in business plans and connecting Vermont businesses to markets outside our borders. We are investing in fairs and field days, specialty crops, and trade shows, so small companies can get in front of the major food buyers.

With the help of our partners, we are investing in farm to school programs. 33 schools....200,000 dollars also we are reaching younger people by investing in childcare centers with farm to school.

Making sure our produce is safe is also part of our mission. Under the food safety moderation act, we are visiting farms and making sure their practices are safe. We have nearly 190 farms enrolled in the Vermont program. We are training growers as to best practices and providing grant funds, so farmers can purchase the best possible equipment to help ensure their produce is safe.

The state's new ag & environmental lab is nearing complete. Irene wiped out the old lab and we've had temporary space at UVM and Berlin but next month a new lab at Vermont Tech comes on line. This is an important resource which helps our farmers and public with health and safety,

We lead the nation in maple production. We produce 50 percent of the maple in the United States, last year producing nearly 2 million gallons of maple syrup. We were awarded a USDA grant to help market and promote maple across the United States.

Your early leadership on hemp is paying off. You will hear more about this crop during the session. Last year we had 461 registered growers, nearly 33 hundred acres planted. It is now legal in the United States. We are now building a program that will focus on quality, much as we do with our cheese, craft beer and spirits...the Vermont brand is strong...and there is no reason hemp can't lead the nation in quality as well...we will set up testing in the field and at the processing plant...The Agency is co-hosting a major conference with UVM Extension on February 8th. We are seeing people move to Vermont to work in this field. We believe this program can play a role in recruiting people to live here and contribute to our rural economy. The Governor supports this and is behind this.

This is just a high-level overview. We are small but play an important role in your everyday life.