

To: House Agriculture and Forestry Committee

RE: Right-to-Farm

David Lane, SVP of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) and Corporate Initiatives for Farm Credit East. Also, owner of Snow Farm Vineyard in South Hero where we grow grapes, produce craft wine and sell directly to consumers on the farm I grew up on.

It is an honor and I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this joint committee hearing on S.268 the right-to-farm bill. Vermont has a long history of appreciation of and support for its agricultural industry. Each year the state invests millions of dollars into the agricultural sector for economic development, environmental practices, and land conservation. These investments leverage additional private investments in robust economic activity, environmental stewardship initiatives, a beautiful working landscape, and strong food security for our state. Protecting these public and private investments is critical to the continued success of our agricultural industry and to the environmental gains we have made in areas such as water quality.

It is important to understand that businesses invest capital when there is a reasonable anticipated financial return, stability in their business model and the stability in the overall social and economic environment of the industry. S.268 can provide that stability by reducing the risk of a frivolous lawsuit that will consume resources such as capital and time that no business can afford.

Vermont agriculture and its rural landscape has changed dramatically in my lifetime and the change has been accelerating in recent years. When I was growing up a farm mostly consisted of land, equipment, machinery, for me cows and labor. Today, in addition to the traditional investments, the farmer invests in environmental improvements, stays abreast of changing regulations, manages production to meet demand, adapts production practices and product quality to meet consumer preference, navigates human resource needs and operates in a more urbanized rural environment. Farmers are also experiencing increased pressure on available land and land values from individuals seeking rural lifestyles. And finally, agriculture is transforming in the state with more value-added production and direct to consumer sales on the farm. This is the case of our winery where we employed 51 individuals and accommodated thousands for customers last year.

When you travel around the state viewing the open landscape, enjoy recreation or sit down to a locally grown meal you can appreciate the non-monetized benefits of a strong agricultural industry and economy. It is an industry like no other on which other industries rely on for an unmatched quality of life that bring customers and employees to the state.

Updating the Right-to-Farm legislation to meet the changing conditions of the agricultural industry, to protect the state and private investments and to ensure a continue quality of life in the state for its citizens is vital. I commend your forethought in for taking this on now while we continue to have a strong industry. I am happy to answer any questions and again thank you for allowing me to speak before this joint committee.