

Testimony on H.434, An act relating to establishing the Agricultural Innovation Board

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.434, relating to establishing an Agricultural Innovation Board. We have also appreciated the opportunity to discuss this concept previously with members of AAFM staff and other partners.

Overall, we support the creation of the Agricultural Innovation Board as a framework for more inclusive, systems-based conversations about the use of and reliance on pesticides and other chemical inputs in farming systems. Our hope is that this Board will be structured and facilitated in such a way that fosters meaningful conversations among people from all communities impacted by pesticide and fertilizer use on farms.

General Comments:

Some charges assigned to this Board are too broad.

- See recommended strike-outs below, including removing language about implementation of PES & Climate Council recommendations.
- However, this Board could be charged with reviewing existing studies and recommendations as they relate to pesticide and fertilizer use. These could include the following:
 - Pollinator Protection Committee Report (2017)
 - Farm to Plate Strategic Plan (2021)
 - Vermont Ag & Food Systems Plan (2020)
 - AAFM Report on Farming Practices (2019)
 - Exploration of Future of Vermont Ag (2018)

Need to maintain strong oversight of non-agricultural pesticide applications under this framework.

- Authority/oversight should at the very least be shared between AAFM and ANR, including designating people to serve in various seats.
- Board is very heavy on agricultural expertise. What happens to oversight of non-agricultural pesticide applications (including commercial, residential, forestry sectors)? If this Board is to address those, the membership needs to reflect that.

All impacted communities need to be included.

- Board needs to more explicitly include expertise around deleterious impacts of pesticides on human health and the environment. These are "impacted communities" in addition to farmers.
- See suggested changes to Board membership below.

Recommendations:

Strike lines 7-11, pg. 1 (from Statement of purpose):

- ~~The Agricultural Innovation Board would make recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly for prioritizing and coordinating the implementation of the recommendations of the Soil Health and Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group, the Vermont Climate Council, and other relevant recommendations.~~

Strike § 4964 section (a)(1):

- ~~Review and make recommendations for prioritizing and coordinating the implementation of the recommendations of the Soil Health and Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group, the Vermont Climate Council, and other relevant recommendations.~~
- Many of the recommendations from these groups will likely be outside of the scope of this Board and will require separate implementation processes and a different set of expertise. This Board should focus on pesticide use and potentially other agricultural inputs.

Strike § 4964 section (a)(9):

- ~~Explore developing standards for a Vermont Agricultural Marketing program the sets standards for carbon capture, plastics use, and organic product selection.~~
- These charges are beyond the scope of this Board if it is to be focused on pesticide and fertilizer use. Other entities already exist to set standards/assess products for use organic production, including the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI). Vermont Organic Farmers, the certification program of NOFA-VT, also has staff to assist farmers with organic materials selection.
- In addition, carbon capture on farms is being addressed by the Soil Health & Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group, and likely the Agriculture & Ecosystems Subcommittee of the Climate Council.

Strike § 4964 section (b)(1):

- ~~(L) a member of the public knowledgeable in agricultural water management;~~
- ~~(M) a representative from an organization involved in land conservation;~~
- Replace these with:
 - a member of the public knowledgeable about human health impacts of pesticides
 - a representative of VT Fish & Wildlife
 - a member of the public knowledgeable about wildlife and pollinator impacts of pesticides

Add to § 4964 section (c)(1):

- (C) reduce use of and reliance on synthetic nitrogen fertilizers.
- This should be included in the report since it is mentioned in both the statement of purpose and section (a)(2) as a charge of the Board.

- Synthetic nitrogen fertilizers are widely recognized as contributing significantly to agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Nitrous oxide is 265 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

General comment on section (c)(3):

- We strongly support the idea of this Board surveying or otherwise conducting public outreach to the farming community. However, the language here is vague.
- We recommend adding language specifying that they survey (or otherwise conduct outreach to) farmers regarding current climatic, pest and disease pressures, and other production challenges related to the use of pesticides and fertilizers.