

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you this morning concerning H.434, the bill creating the Agricultural Innovation Board (AIB). I want to start by saying that I think the idea of having an advisory board working to research, advocate for and incentivize innovative agriculture is an excellent one. I agree with everyone who has talked about how this could really help to move the state forward and keep agriculture viable into the future.

What concerns me though, is the broad scope of the mandate, not only does this board advocate for innovative agriculture, but also helps to regulate pesticide use statewide. This is inappropriate duty for an innovation board. In particular I am concerned that the Vermont Pesticide Advisory Council is being abolished. While I do have concerns about the ineffectiveness of VPAC over the years, abolishing it is not the answer. Rather, it needs to be strengthened if we are going to fulfill the long-time statewide goal to use pesticides as little as possible in Vermont, and to use them wisely. With a Board having a mandate to both advocate for innovate for agriculture and also advise on pesticide use, I'm afraid the pesticide issues will take a back seat to the more "popular" issue of innovations in agriculture.

Some of the VPAC duties have been incorporated into the AIB, but the necessary expertise in pesticide issues is not included in the board membership. This board is designed to address and incentivize innovative agricultural practices and that is what they should be tasked with. It makes sense that the AIB could make recommendations to reduce the use of and risk from AGRICULTURAL pesticide use, but the incorporation of statewide pesticide regulatory issues makes no sense, except to dilute the emphasis on pesticide reduction and safety statewide. This wipes away all that the Senate did last year to pass S. 180, strengthening VPAC.

As written, the AIB would be tasked with making recommendations to the Secretary of AAFM on:

- the hazardous effects to the environment of treated seeds,
- acceptable products and methods for mosquito control
- regulation of pesticides which are deemed "particularly toxic or hazardous"

These are statewide issues of concern to all Vermonters, not just the agricultural community and they should be addressed by a statewide board with expertise in the health of Vermonters and the environmental consequences of pesticide use, as S. 180 proposed. **This AIB membership should not be making these recommendations.** They **SHOULD** be advocating for and incentivizing innovative agriculture as the board name states.

At a time when pesticide use in agriculture is increasing, not decreasing, and when pesticides are being found in some of our streams at levels toxic to aquatic life, **NOW IS NOT THE TIME** to be eliminating the VPAC and replacing it with a board whose name, mandate, and membership concerns agricultural innovation.

Below are two ideas on how you could move forward to make this a truly excellent bill:

PROPOSAL NUMBER 1: DO NOT ELIMINATE VPAC, MAKE THE AIB A TRUE AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION BOARD

This would remove the regulatory aspects of pesticide management from the AIB and leaves them within VPAC. VPAC then could and should be strengthened along the lines of the bill you passed last year S.180.

Specifically, I would like to suggest the following changes to H.434:

- 1) p. 1, line 6, strike out "to replace the Pesticide Advisory Council"
- 2) p. 2 line 18, remove sec. 4964(4),
- 3) p. 4 line 14, change to "soil scientist with experience in agricultural systems"
- 4) p. 5 line 1, change to "member of the public knowledgeable in water quality issues or the environmental consequence of pesticide use"

- 5) p. 6 line 9 and 10, omit all mention of eliminating or repealing the Pesticide Advisory Council.
- 6) Omit Sections 3,4,5,6 which replace VPAC with AIB in statute.

In short, create the AIB but DO NOT eliminate VPAC.

PROPOSAL NUMBER 2: CREATE AIB MEMBERSHIP WITH EXPERTISE IN BOTH THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY AND PESTICIDES.

If you feel you must eliminate VPAC and leave the regulatory aspects of pesticide use within the AIB, then the board MUST be truly representative, with membership balanced between those with agricultural expertise and those with knowledge of the overall issue of pesticide use and risks. The AIB as proposed, has appropriate membership to discuss innovative ag, and the re-vamped membership of VPAC under your bill from last year S.180 has the appropriate membership to discuss all aspects of pesticide use. Below is a comparison.

<u>AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION BOARD</u>
A) the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or designee
B) a member of the farming community who practices organic agriculture
C) a member from the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture
D) the Director of VAAFM Agrichemical Program or designee
E) the Director of VAAFM Water Quality Program or designee
F) the Commissioner of Health or designee
G) the Secretary of Natural Resources or designee
H) a soil biologist or certified crop consultant
I) a member of the public representing the dairy industry in Vermont
J) a member of the public representing fruit and vegetable production in Vermont
K) a member of the public representing grass-based, non-dairy livestock farming in Vermont
L) a member of the public knowledgeable in agricultural water management
M) a representative from an organization involved in land conservation
N) a representative from an environmental advocacy organization

<u>S. 180 VPAC</u>
(1) Commissioner of VTDEC or designee
(2) Secretary of VAAFM or designee
(3) Commissioner of Health or designee
(4) Representative with expertise in agronomy, entomology, or plant pathology
(5) Representative from UVM Ag Experiment Station with expertise in pesticide research
(6) Two representatives appointed by the Governor, one with experience in commercial agriculture, the other with experience in environmental or public health
(7) Representative with expertise in farming
(8) Representative with expertise in environmental pollutants from UVM Rubenstein School
(9) Representative with expertise in "Integrated Pest Management"

In the proposed list below, I have included the best of both the AIB and S.180 memberships into a hybrid board which would have the expertise to discuss innovative agriculture, wise use of pesticides as well as other ag chemicals (such as fertilizers and ag plastics). The name has been changed to reflect that this is NOT (just) an ag innovation board, I am concerned that if you have a board with the name AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION BOARD and the membership with knowledge and expertise in innovative agriculture, that is what they will spend their time doing, at the expense of the other charge they have. Without a broad knowledge of pesticide issues on the board it will be extremely difficult to have discussions of broad policy questions concerning overall pesticide use in Vermont.

“AGRICULTURAL POLICY BOARD”

- SECRETARY OF AAFM or designee
- SECRETARY OF ANR or designee
- COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH or designee
- THREE REPRESENTATIVES APPOINTED BY THE GOVERNOR WITH EXPERIENCE IN OR KNOWLEDGE OF:
 - COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE OR CROP CONSULTANCY
 - ENVIRONMENTAL OR PUBLIC HEALTH
 - ORGANIC FARMING PRACTICES
- REPRESENTATIVE WITH EXPERTISE IN AGRONOMY, ENTOMOLOGY, PLANT PATHOLOGY OR SOIL SCIENCE
- REPRESENTATIVE FROM UVM OR OTHER PUBLIC INSTITUTION WITH EXPERTISE IN USE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF PESTICIDES
- REPRESENTATIVE WITH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN VERMONT
- REPRESENTATIVE WITH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCTION IN VERMONT
- REPRESENTATIVE WITH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN GRASS BASED NON-DAIRY LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION IN VERMONT
- REPRESENTATIVE WITH EXPERTISE IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION FROM UVM
- REPRESENTATIVE WITH EXPERTISE IN “INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT”

Thank you for listening, and I'd be happy to discuss any of this in more detail if you have questions.

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