

February 23, 2024

Representative David Durfee
Chair, Vermont House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency and Forestry
115 State Street, Room 49
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Chairman Durfee and members of the Committee:

On behalf of Dairy Farmers of America and the Cooperative's nearly 300 farmer-owners in the state of Vermont, I write to express concern of the impact that H. 706 as currently written, which would ban the use of neonicotinoid treated seeds and pesticides, would have on dairy farms across the state.

I am a 6th generation dairy farmer and currently work alongside my two brothers Lawrence and Michael, and our sons and nephews. Our dairies are located in Sheldon, Fairfax, Fletcher and Fairfield. I am extremely proud of my industry and am delighted that there will be a 7th generation who will continue our long and proud history of dairy farming. I want to ensure our next generation has the tools they will need to be successful in the face of the many challenges that are before dairy farmers around the country – but also take advantage of the advancements.

Having farmed for my entire life, I have seen firsthand the positive impact that technology and innovation have brought to our industry. Being able to use treated seeds that have been available has been crucial to the success of our corn crops and bottom line. We have to contend with many factors to assure strong crop yields, including weather, limited growing windows and of course, the myriad of pests including corn maggot that can decimate a crop. Using treated seeds allows farms to decrease their pesticide use, which benefits the environment and helps to defray costs.

Having choices of seed varieties so we can grow high-quality, highly digestible crops with a maximum yield per acre are paramount to our success. This is also a key metric in our sustainability efforts to be more efficient on our dairies while importing less concentrates to balance our rations.

The dairy industry has been under tremendous margin stress the last few years as we produce milk in a global economy. The one advantage Vermont dairies have over western counterparts is our ability to grow the crops needed to feed our herd. This technology is an important part of our farm's success and there are very few, if any, other options.

Preventing Vermont's farmers from using the same proven technology as other farmers around the country puts us at a competitive disadvantage. As a dairy farmer, I want what is best for the environment and like many of my colleagues that you have heard from recently, employ practices such as minimizing till cover crops and using no-till where is applicable and cover cropping for soil health. U.S. dairy has set a goal to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050 and my cooperative, DFA is providing tools, resources and opportunities for Vermont dairy farmers to accelerate the adoption of practices that will help the dairy sector to continue to be a climate solution. As a leader in the Cooperative, am excited to be a part of this.



Please reconsider the impact of this bill on Vermont farmers and the environment. If I can provide more information about the impact of this legislation or more about DFA's footprint in Vermont, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Harold J. Howrigan, Jr.

