



Fairmont Farm & Market

Farming For Future Generations

February 18, 2024

To: Rep. David Durfee; Chair House Agriculture Committee

Cc: House Committee on Agriculture

From: Tucker Purchase; Partner

Thank you for letting me share my thoughts and concerns on H.706. I am the owner and operator of Fairmont Farm in East Montpelier and Craftsbury, Vermont. We milk 1,450 cows, crop 3,700 acres, and ship 126,000lbs. of milk to Cabot. The milk we produce is equivalent to 12,600 pounds of cheese and would feed 130,000 people their daily serving of cheese. We employ 25 full time people and in 2023 we employed 18 part-time people on payroll and 4 seasonal (cropping).

I hope the timeline relating to our cropping will be helpful to the committee so they can better understand crop management. Of note, every farm is different with different challenges, equipment, soil, and climate. Therefore, it is hard to say something that works on one farm would also work on mine. The committee has been talking about Quebec, which we understand, but it is not the same as farming here. There is a completely different way of farming there, especially in regulations and the price for milk.

Annual Timeline:

- September 15th – goal date, chop corn and start cover cropping.
 - spread manure to empty pits.
- Early December - we buy our corn-decide what varieties.
 - Based on the genetics of the seed, growing degree days, best prices, and which companies.
- In the springtime - based on our weather, we can adjust our seed orders.
 - Seed companies are currently very flexible and work hard to help us get the best seed into the ground to increase yield.
- April 1st – Manure spreading season starts.
 - We spread 10 million gallons over 1,700 acres.
 - There is a very short window to spread that much manure.
- April 25th—Goal day to start planting.
 - This can be difficult in rainy conditions.
- May 20th – Goal for 1st cut begins.

We invest in corn to plant in 2024 and to feed in 2025. As an example, this is like your retirement investment account, you spread out risk and diversify your portfolio, based on age and risk or locations/climate. You invest in different stocks or buy different seeds. Seed companies are currently very flexible and work hard to help us get the best seed into the ground to increase yield. Much like you would rebalance your portfolio (once or twice a year your financial advisor calls you or they call based on a market change). My worry is that the 4 seed companies I buy from are not going to have availability for the untreated seeds that I rely on. They might have some available but I'm not sure it will be the seeds that are best for me.

We have heard from some shifts in practices in Quebec recently, like the need for crop rotations to break pest cycles, as well as waiting longer than usual in the spring to plant. This is not an option for us, the cost of rotating crops is huge, lower yield in first year grass is a huge issue.

In 2023, we lost 50% of our corn crop in Washington County for the first time ever. My crop insurance paid \$54,123, however, there was no place to buy corn silage that is affordable. We used beet pulp, cotton seed, and wet brew to extend our forages. There was an *added* cost of \$1,640 cost *per day* to feed my animals, which is \$50,000 a month.

There are many factors that go into making milk, cow comfort, reproduction, herd health & management. However, in my mind, the most important thing is forage quality and treated seeds are a tool in my toolbox to ensure my corn comes up healthy and keeps my cows well fed and happy. Removing this tool will most likely be the difference between being a profitable farm that can continue to pay for the investments and the ability to retain our high-quality band.