

To: House General Committee

From: Ellen Howrigan

Re: Ag Exemption for S-102

Good morning Committee Members,

I am concerned with the committee's action on S-102. Agriculture should be exempt from this Bill as it will adversely affect all sectors of production agriculture. The financial margins are very tight industry wide. The prices received at the farm for dairy are set by the government milk pricing mechanism which is very complex. Maple prices are determined by our neighbors to the north in Canada. Produce, poultry, meat and other prices are largely determined by the prices of larger growers who are direct competitors in our local markets and grocery stores with our local VT growers.

I see farm financials from all sectors and in general, the margins are very tight. Imposing this regulation will have a negative consequence on our farmers and drive up the costs to them in an already tight labor market. Farms are in direct competition with many large companies for the limited labor pool in our state.

Please do not forget that most dairy farms also provide housing for their workers and the value of that has likely tripled in the last 5 years.

The grocery store shelves with abundant choices of food varieties for every pallet, diet and price point and will be adversely affected by this action.

Please do not put our VT farmers at a competitive disadvantage with regards to food supplied by other States.

The animal welfare aspect of this is a threat that is unnecessary as many of the issues are being proactively managed by other national programs such as the FARM program and by policies put in place by milk handlers.

Animals need to be fed and cared for every day – all year long. Produce needs to be picked, cleaned and packaged in a timely manner in order to get to the market when at its freshest.

I urge you to support our farms and our farmers and food producers and exempt Agriculture from S-102.

Respectfully,

Ellen Howrigan