

March 23, 2023

To: Senate Agriculture Committee

Re: Wildlife Crop Damage

Our dairy farm grows 120 acres of field corn which is a vital source of local nutrition for our 240 dairy cow herd. We utilize no till planting and cover cropping to help manage the land. Our family has been farming in the town of Corinth for over 120 years and has witnessed many changes in wildlife behavior and populations. Within the last 10 years we have seen a large increase in bear damage to standing corn. Over the past 3 years we have seen additional damage to our stored corn from turkeys and crows.

Bear Damage

While we do our best to rotate corn fields, the bears are becoming more aggressive to find it. They are creating paths to the fields crossing busy town roads and entering fields with buffers from the woods. We now just plan for a loss and plant a few extra acres of corn.

Last crop season we calculated 10 acres of crop loss which equates to over \$10,000 in lost investment. Seed \$100/acre, planting \$25/acre, crop management \$140/acre, manure \$100/acre, harvest per acre \$125/acre. \$10,800 in direct loss of that crop at average 18 tons an acre @ \$60/ton.

Wildlife damage is an insurable crop under federal crop insurance, but most farmers sign up for 50%-70% coverage levels which means at least half of an entire farm unit would have to be damaged from bears to receive any coverage. This is highly unlikely and there is no history of crop insurance paying out wildlife claims for Vermont farmers.

I have heard suggestions that farmers grow other “shorter” crops, such as sorghum, instead of corn. This is not a viable solution as sorghum is not easily grown in the Northeast and there is NO crop insurance coverage in VT so we would be subjecting our farm to all perils of loss (wind, flood, etc).

I have also heard the suggestion of electric fencing around corn fields. This is very impractical as the fences would have to easily be moved and could be harmful to other wildlife. Not to mention the eye sore of fenced in corn fields on the Vermont landscape.

Bear hunters with trained dogs are our best risk management tool.

Turkey & Crow Damage

I think everyone has noticed the increase in the turkey population. During the winter we have an average of 50 turkeys on our farm every day, well over 100 some days. The crows have pecked holes through the top of the bunk cover, allowing for easy access for turkeys to join in. The turkeys also eat right from the face of the pile and contaminate our heifer feed which is fed in front of the freestall barn. We have tried everything to deter them. Firecrackers and other loud noises might scare them off momentarily, but they are back within an hour.

We have contacted Fish & Wildlife regarding the damage. We were advised to call them if we shoot a turkey out of season so they can come investigate the damage. If our land was posted we would not be able to shoot any.

We appreciate any consideration towards wildlife crop damage and encourage continued conversations between farmers and Fish & Wildlife.

Elijah & Mary White
Fort Waite Farm
Corinth Vermont



Bear damage in field

Bear damage in field



Bear damage in field

Bear on Ag bag



Holes in corn bunk from turkeys & crows



Significant feed rot on top of pile

Turkeys in bunk over 100 at times.