

1 Introduced by Senator Starr

2 Referred to Committee on

3 Date:

4 Subject: Court procedure; agriculture; nuisance suits; agricultural activities;  
5 right-to-farm

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to amend the  
7 protection against nuisance suits for agricultural activities under the Vermont  
8 right-to-farm law by providing that an agricultural activity shall not be a  
9 nuisance or trespass when the activity has been in operation for more than one  
10 year and the activity was not a nuisance at the time the activity was initiated, or  
11 the activity complies with agricultural water quality requirements. The  
12 nuisance and trespass protection for an agricultural activity would not apply  
13 whenever a nuisance or trespass violation results from the negligent operation  
14 of an agricultural activity or from a violation of the State agricultural water  
15 quality requirements. The bill would also provide that an agricultural activity  
16 shall not lose nuisance or trespass protection due to a change of ownership or a  
17 cessation of operation of not more than five years; a change of crops produced;  
18 or a change of a farming method or conversion of a farming practice or  
19 agricultural activity to another farming method, practice, or agricultural  
20 activity on a farm.

1 An act relating to protection from nuisance suits for agricultural activities

2 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

3 Sec. 1. 12 V.S.A. chapter 195 is amended to read:

4 CHAPTER 195. NUISANCE SUITS AGAINST AGRICULTURAL  
5 ACTIVITIES

6 § 5751. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

7 The General Assembly finds that agricultural production is a major  
8 contributor to the State's economy; that agricultural lands constitute unique  
9 and irreplaceable resources of statewide importance; that the continuation of  
10 existing and the initiation of new agricultural activities preserve the landscape  
11 and environmental resources of the State, contribute to the increase of tourism,  
12 and further the economic welfare and self-sufficiency of the people of the  
13 State; and that the encouragement, development, improvement, and  
14 preservation of agriculture will result in a general benefit to the health and  
15 welfare of the people of the State. In order for the agricultural industry to  
16 survive in this State, farms will likely change, adopt new technologies, and  
17 diversify into new products, which for some farms will mean increasing in  
18 size. The General Assembly finds that agricultural activities are potentially  
19 subject to lawsuits based on the theory of nuisance, and that these suits  
20 encourage and could force the premature removal of the farmlands and other  
21 farm resources from agricultural use. It is the purpose of this chapter to protect

1 reasonable agricultural activities conducted on the farm from nuisance  
2 lawsuits.

3 § 5752. DEFINITIONS

4 ~~For the purpose of~~ As used in this chapter, “agricultural activity” means, but  
5 is not limited to:

6 (1) the cultivation or other use of land for producing food, fiber,  
7 Christmas trees, maple sap, or horticultural and orchard crops; the raising,  
8 feeding, or management of domestic animals as defined in 6 V.S.A. § 1151 or  
9 bees; the operation of greenhouses; the production of maple syrup; the on-site  
10 storage, preparation, and sale of agricultural products principally produced on  
11 the farm; and the on-site production of fuel or power from agricultural  
12 products or wastes principally produced on the farm;

13 (2) the preparation, tilling, fertilization, planting, protection, irrigation,  
14 and harvesting of crops; the composting of material principally produced by  
15 the farm or to be used at least in part on the farm; the ditching and subsurface  
16 drainage of farm fields and the construction of farm ponds; the handling of  
17 livestock wastes and by-products; and the on-site storage and application of  
18 agricultural inputs, including lime, fertilizer, and pesticides;

19 (3) “farming” as defined in 10 V.S.A. § 6001; and

20 (4) “agricultural activities” as defined in 6 V.S.A. § 4802.

1 § 5753. AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES; PROTECTION FROM  
2 NUISANCE LAWSUITS

3 ~~(a)(1) Agricultural activities shall be entitled to a rebuttable presumption~~  
4 ~~that the activity does not constitute a nuisance if the agricultural activity meets~~  
5 ~~all of the following conditions:~~

6 ~~(A) it is conducted in conformity with federal, State, and local laws~~  
7 ~~and regulations (including required agricultural practices);~~

8 ~~(B) it is consistent with good agricultural practices;~~

9 ~~(C) it is established prior to surrounding nonagricultural activities;~~

10 ~~and~~

11 ~~(D) it has not significantly changed since the commencement of the~~  
12 ~~prior surrounding nonagricultural activity.~~

13 ~~(2) The presumption that the agricultural activity does not constitute a~~  
14 ~~nuisance may be rebutted by a showing that the activity has a substantial~~  
15 ~~adverse effect on health, safety, or welfare, or has a noxious and significant~~  
16 ~~interference with the use and enjoyment of the neighboring property.~~

17 ~~(b) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of State~~  
18 ~~or local boards of health to abate nuisances affecting the public health No~~  
19 ~~agricultural activity shall be or become a nuisance or trespass when the~~  
20 ~~activity:~~

1           (A) has been in operation for more than one year and the activity was  
2           not a nuisance or trespass at the time the activity was initiated; or

3           (B) the activity complies with the requirements of 6 V.S.A. chapter  
4           215, including permit requirements or requirements of the Required  
5           Agricultural Practices.

6           (2) The nuisance and trespass protection for an agricultural activity  
7           provided for under subdivision (1) of this subsection shall not apply whenever  
8           a nuisance or trespass violation results from the negligent operation of an  
9           agricultural activity.

10       § 5754. LIBERAL CONSTRUCTION; SEVERABILITY

11           (a) This chapter is remedial in nature and shall be liberally construed to  
12           effectuate its purposes.

13           (b) An agricultural activity shall not lose the nuisance or trespass protection  
14           under section 5753 of this title due to:

15           (1) a change of ownership or a cessation of operation, in whole or in  
16           part, of not more than five years;

17           (2) a change of crops produced; or

18           (3) a change of a farming method or conversion of farming practices or  
19           agricultural activities to other farming methods, practices, or agricultural  
20           activities on a farm.

1        (c) If any provision of this chapter is held invalid, the invalidity does not  
2        affect other provisions of this chapter that can be given effect without the  
3        invalid provision, and for this purpose, the provisions of this chapter are  
4        severable.

5        Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

6        This act shall take effect on July 1, 2023.