

Hi, my name is Catie Waterman and I am a lifelong Vermonter. I grew up in South Starksboro. I started working with horses from a young age and actually fairly early on rode with Mindy Hindsdale who will speak after me!

I have a business involving the training and care of between 18-25 horses at my farm in Ferrisburgh currently. I earn all my income teaching, riding, and caring for horses.

I bought a 98.2-acre parcel of land that was leased to a dairy farmer, in current use and enrolled in the Land trust. I moved to Ferrisburgh in 2012 with the dream of finally building my own farm. We built a 14 stall Morton barn and put up a 200X 82-foot indoor arena that was canvas over steel and lacked a foundation. I had done a ton of research on the arena to find one that was affordable. It was sold to me by ClearSpan as a non-taxable building in that it lacked a foundation, was for all intents and purposes a greenhouse, and could be dismantled and sold in one day.

We moved in finally in December of 2015 and then we got the property tax bill. We had been paying \$3,500 with the land in current use and our house as our homestead and it was now \$14,000 with the farm appraised at 1.4 million. Every sq foot of my buildings including a hay storage shed, the barn, and my huge "nontaxable" indoor arena was being taxed at a commercial rate. We grieved the taxes and got them reduced. We convinced the Town that no comparable working equine farm had ever been sold for that much that was in the land trust and that my indoor was actually an eyesore that devalued my property and when I sold the property, I would take it down and resell it. Still from \$3,500 to \$12,500 was crippling. Nonetheless we forged on and I have been subsidizing equine boarding with my training and lessons. Now, however, I can't run my business at that level because of such a severe labor shortage that has only worsened since Covid. To keep the horses, they need constant care. Feeding and turning them out starts at 6:30. Then stalls need to be cleaned, feed set up, aisle swept and then the riding and teaching could begin. Then bringing the horses in, more cleaning of stalls, feeding, sweeping, and cleaning all the tack. This doesn't even take into account the mowing, pasture maintenance, fence fixing, repainting, plowing, arena maintenance on two riding arenas, etc. etc. etc. I now have downsized to 17 horses with two very part time employees and do the rest of the work myself. Often 60 hours or more a week. As I get older, I'm 43 now, and with a school aged child, this level of work is unsustainable. The last 5 months without being able to charge training board, I've lost \$3-5k/ month boarding 17 horses. If this continues, we will be forced to sell the farm or do something else. I can't keep working that hard with such a huge financial loss. This is not just my story. It is everyone in the equine industry in Vermont right now. I've developed a top reputation and have the best clients and if I can't make it work, I'm not sure who can.

Without horses here there will also be much less need for hay land and crop land. Without horses there will be even less opportunity for young people to be on the farm. We as an industry are at a serious breaking point and if we want to keep horses as part of our landscape and as a legacy for our youth, we must do something now. Having zero value buildings would be a huge first step in acknowledging that we are hardworking farmers trying to do what's best for this state I love by keeping the land open for future generations.