
From: Charles Gray <cwgray10@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 18, 2026 7:13 AM
To: Patricia Ruddy; Linda Leehman
Subject: [External] Farmer Input on Final Version of H.739 (Paraquat) – Request for Small Fruit Flexibility in Reconciliation

[External]

Dear Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees,

My name is Charles W. Gray, a strawberry/small fruit farmer in Vermont with 13 years of experience on 13 acres. I also served in the United States Marine Corps and hold a degree in petroleum engineering, which gave me extensive training in the safe handling of hazardous materials. I respectfully submit this input as the House and Senate work to finalize H.739. I support reasonable regulation of paraquat and appreciate the time-limited permit already included for apple orchards through 2030. However, small fruit crops (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and other caneberries and brambles listed on the federal label) should receive the same flexibility. Paraquat is a vital directed, shielded contact burn-down tool I use for quick weed control in row middles, pre-plant prep, and renovation. In Vermont's cool, wet climate, it is often the most reliable and timely option. Losing it without adequate transition support would increase my costs, risk crop injury, reduce yields/quality, and hurt the competitiveness of high-value small-fruit operations that support direct markets and agritourism.

Recommended language for the final bill:

- Extend the existing time-limited permit structure (with training, reporting, and Secretary approval) to small fruit through at least 2030, or
- At a minimum, direct the Agency of Agriculture to include practical, cost-effective transition support and potential cost-share assistance specifically for berry and small-fruit growers in the alternatives study.

Paraquat is already a federally restricted-use pesticide that requires certified applicators and mandatory EPA-specific training every three years. Vermont's strong existing pesticide rules, combined with my hazardous-materials background, ensure it is used responsibly and in very limited amounts. A full, immediate ban on small fruit would create unnecessary hardship without meaningfully reducing risk compared to many unregulated household chemicals. I urge you to include small fruit in the apple-orchard-style transition as you reconcile the final language. This balanced approach protects public health while supporting Vermont's working farmers. Thank you for your time and service. I am happy to answer questions or provide more details about my on-farm use.
Sincerely,

Charles W. Gray
4Corners Farm
South Newbury, Vermont]