

### **H.758 Rodenticides**

#### **House Agriculture and Food Resiliency, and Forestry Committee**

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The Vermont Chamber of Commerce represents businesses of all sizes across every sector of Vermont's economy, including a significant number of food manufacturers and restaurants, from small, family-owned producers and local eateries to nationally recognized Vermont brands. These businesses are cornerstones of our rural communities and our tourism and hospitality sectors.

We appreciate the intent behind H.758 to protect wildlife and public health. However, we are concerned that a broad prohibition on rodenticide use, outside of limited emergency procedures, could have serious unintended consequences for Vermont's food manufacturing and food service industries.

Rodent control is not optional in food production facilities or commercial kitchens, it is a fundamental component of federal and state food safety compliance. Manufacturers and restaurants alike are required to maintain rigorous pest control plans under FDA, USDA, and state health regulations, as well as third-party food safety certification standards. When rodents gain access to a facility, the consequences can be severe. Contamination may require product destruction, temporary shutdowns, costly deep sanitation, structural retrofits, and in extreme cases, facility closure. Once an infestation becomes established indoors, eliminating it without the use of rodenticides can be extremely difficult and significantly more expensive, often requiring invasive and disruptive remediation measures.

It is important to note that rodenticide use in these settings is already highly regulated. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets mandates that rodent baits, when used, must be placed in secured, tamper-resistant stations, particularly outdoors, to prevent hazards to pets and wildlife. These stations are designed with very small entry points specific to rodents and are deployed in food industries by licensed professionals trained in safe handling and compliance. The current regulatory framework reflects an effort to balance environmental protection with the necessity of maintaining sanitary food production and preparation environments.

While non-anticoagulant products under this bill remain available, these products operate differently, can be more costly, and may not provide the same long-term preventive effectiveness in commercial food production and food service settings. Removing anticoagulants from integrated pest management programs could shift facilities from preventive control toward more reactive measures. We would encourage the Committee to hear directly from licensed pest management professionals on how restricting anticoagulants could alter established food safety compliance programs.

Again, we understand the committee's intent of wanting to protect household pets and world life but many of the documented secondary exposure concerns nationally stem from improper residential use when homeowners fail to follow label requirements, rather than from licensed, commercial applications that already operate under strict compliance standards. Addressing that concern specifically, rather than this large-scale ban, would help the committee avoid these serious unintended consequences.

If food manufacturers and restaurants lose access to effective rodent control tools and rodents gain entry into production or kitchen areas, there are significant public health implications. Rodents are known carriers of pathogens such as Salmonella, Listeria, hantavirus, and leptospirosis, all of which pose serious risks in food handling and preparation settings. Preventing contamination before it occurs is far safer and more cost-effective than responding after the fact, and considering the rate at which an

infestation can grow, getting an emergency permit after an infestation has begun means it is already too late.

Other jurisdictions that have implemented broad restrictions have continued to grapple with significant urban rodent challenges. For example, Los Angeles County reported a marked increase in rat service calls and public complaints in recent years following California's phased restrictions on certain anticoagulant rodenticides. While rodent population dynamics are influenced by multiple factors, these experiences highlight the importance of ensuring that regulated commercial facilities retain effective prevention tools.

We encourage the Committee to hear directly from food safety experts, public health officials, and restaurant operators regarding how this legislation could affect compliance with food safety standards and the practical realities of preventing infestation in regulated facilities. Protecting wildlife and protecting public health should not be mutually exclusive goals, and any changes to pest management policy must carefully account for both.

Vermont's food manufacturing and hospitality sectors are already navigating rising costs, workforce shortages, and regulatory complexity. We urge careful consideration of how H.758 may impact operational viability, product safety, and public health before advancing broad restrictions that could place essential Vermont businesses at risk.