

Testimony to House Agriculture, Food Resiliency & Forestry Committee
Amanda Andrews - April 4, 2025

I'd like to thank the members of this committee for taking the time to hear my testimony. My name is Amanda Andrews, and this year I begin my 16th year running a farm business in our great state. I steward 25 acres in Plainfield- acreage that was settled in 1792 and has been in continuous agricultural production since the merino boom. I grow 7 acres of certified organic vegetables for local and regional wholesale markets and CSA. I am speaking here today to ask you to support S.60, the Farm Security Fund.

If my farm were my first born child, it would be learning to drive this year. If my farm were my first born child, you would empathize when I tell you about that first tenuous year, where I constantly wondered, "Am I doing this right? Everyone else seems to be doing this better than me!?" I recall the tumultuous second year when, when this toddling business was just finding its feet, Tropical Storm Irene inundated my rented farmland with 6 feet of water, washing away my years' work and any chance at a profitable season. More than that trauma, I remember how it hushed all the self doubt and confirmed in me the urgent importance of this work: the climate is changing, we need to develop and localize the skills our future demands: carpentry, food production, equipment repair, conflict resolution, the list goes on, and farming touches them all. I needed to protect this young enterprise. So I gave up my prime soils and took on debt to move to higher ground.

The years since then have been filled with challenges: moving a farm while operating a farm, separating from and buying out my business partner, losing 100% of my market due to pandemic shutdowns, buying the historic farm house, and having two real children of my own, but none of these challenges have slowed down my business like the last three seasons. In 2022 we had 7 weeks of drought in the height of the summer season: I lost 3/4s of an acre of carrots and had historically low yields on crops like celeriac and potatoes that need adequate water in late summer to size up. We made significant investments in irrigation and moved forward. As you all know, we wouldn't really need to break out that equipment much in the next two years.

I am on high ground. My farm does not flood, but I am located right smack in the center of the triangle created by Plainfield Village, Barre City, and Montpelier. No, my land does not flood, I made sure of that when I bought it- spending hours studying topography maps and tracing surrounding rivers. But when you get 30" of rain in 5 weeks, the result is much the same: saturated soils, rotting plants, loss of nutrients, furloughed workers, hours spent researching loans and grants, late nights spent

working the budget to see how many more hours I can pay my employees while covering insurance, mortgage, and utilities. All the while wondering, can I take another season like this? Will there be meaningful help if this happens again in 2025 or 2026?

Unfortunately, in a country that subsidizes so much agriculture at the federal level, there is little federal aid or safety net for Vermont's scale of farm. To illustrate this I'd like to share about my business' recovery. In 2023, using the formula this state provided, I calculated my crop and equipment losses from the storms to be \$84,647. On January 2, 2025 I received my NAP payment for the amount of \$1,492. I waited 542 days for a payment that didn't cover a single cost of production: not my potting soil, not my fertilizer, not my seeds, and certainly not labor, mortgage, or insurance. If that payment were divided over the days I waited, it would be \$2.75 a day. Would you bet the future of your first born on \$2.75?

I know I am but one in a long line of farmers to ask existential questions about our industry, but passage of S. 60 could mean I am one of the last. It could mean I can concentrate on keeping my employees working and teaching them to coax food from the land in these changing conditions. It means I can concentrate on adaptation practices, soil health, and stewarding my historic land at the top of my watershed.

But creation of the Farm Security Fund would do so much more than help me sleep at night. Because when you fund farms, you fund rural economies. Farms are just a pass through entity. Those dollars will keep people in good white collar jobs: our agricultural insurance agents, rural lenders, and the nonprofit and University specialists that support us. We keep the hardware store open, the seed companies going, and the local restaurant filled. Our employees are the next generation of Vermonters: in 2025, 3 of my 4 farm employees are young people who were born in Vermont, left the state, and have returned, drawn by the cultural renaissance centered on organic and regenerative agriculture. Previous farm employees have gone on to become teachers, paraeducators, commercial welders, union organizers, published authors, electrical engineers— an assistant to this very committee; the list goes on—and they're all here in Vermont. And we, the farmers ourselves, are the volunteer firefighters and EMS that show up when you call, our kids fill your rural schools, our nights are spent at school and select board meetings. Investing in your farms is investing in your watershed, in your landscape, in your rural communities. It's preserving Vermont's agricultural past and ensuring Vermont's rural future.

In closing, I am asking you to pass S.60 to create a Farm Security Fund to ensure farmers, and the communities that count on them, know that there will be support, come too much rain or too much shine. Thank you for your time.