

Testimony to House Agriculture, Food Resiliency & Forestry Committee - Hilary Martin

April 4, 2025

Thank you so much for hearing my testimony today. My name is Hilary Martin. I live and farm in Burlington. I am co-owner of Diggers Mirth Collective Farm, which has been growing vegetables in the Intervale since 1992. Our farm has six owners and additionally employs one to three people during our growing season.

I'm here today to ask you to please support S.60, the Farm Security Fund. My hope is that farmers alone aren't expected to carry the risk that extreme weather events pose. I'd like to share my story of how necessary help from the state has been for our farm in the wake of severe flooding.

All farmers are constantly dialing in our operations to respond to climate change incrementally. We experience gains and losses, and adjust as needed with new tools, new practices, new varieties. For this we don't ask for or expect assistance. Since I started farming in the Intervale in 2002, we have weathered so floods, but the floods of 2023 and 2024 were truly devastating for our farm—we had 100% crop loss just before the peak of the season, when many of our crops were just about to start fruiting and producing.

In 2023, the value of our crop loss totaled \$250,000. We received tremendous support from the State through BEGAP, a grant from NOFA-VT, and donations from our community through the Intervale Center and directly to our farm. With that support, we were able to hire back our crew, replant in the fall, and even pay ourselves wages.

We do have NAP insurance—this is the crop insurance program offered through the USDA and administered by the FSA. I have always heard about how it's really designed for large commodity farms, and our experience demonstrated that. I will note that after the flood, I spent weeks collecting data for our NAP claim. To date, we have received \$1300 from those claims - again, on a \$250,000 loss. FSA is not designed to work with farms of our scale and our level of diversification. They are understaffed and overwhelmed with work. And moving forward, it can't be possible that their capacity will increase!

We modified our farm for the 2024 season in an effort to mitigate loss from flooding, and that actually worked pretty well—when we lost everything again in the 2024 flood, our total crop loss was 40% less than the losses from 2023. We had learned a lot about how to prepare and about how to bounce back. Still, we were so lucky to receive BEGAP funding and donations through the Intervale Center. Our whole crew continued to work, we replanted, and we had an incredible fall season.

Without the relief funding that we received, we would not have been able to continue farming after 2023, certainly not after 2024. But relying on the good will of our neighbors is not sustainable insurance in the face of climate change. If we agree that farms are essential to our communities

and economies, we should institutionalize a disaster assistance program such as the Farm Security Fund to help share the risk that climate change poses to agriculture.

Again, thanks to all of you for taking the time to listen, and to think about how we can continue to develop a viable, thriving agricultural economy into our future.