



April 4, 2025

House Agriculture Committee
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-5301

To the House Agriculture Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the Farmer Security Special Fund. We are happy to hear that S.60 passed the Senate this week, and unanimously! It means a lot to us as individual farmers and farmer organizations to know our representation hears and supports us.

A standing emergency fund - one that is always ready, reliable, simple, and sufficient - is important to all farmers. We hope that the House will support this program, too.

I am the Executive Director - and farmer-member - of the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance (CRWFA). I want to speak briefly about why we support this fund.

First, who are we. We are one of three large farmer groups organized around water quality in our watersheds. We are a farmer-run organization that works to promote land stewardship for clean waterways, productive landscapes, and the economic sustainability of our agricultural community. We do this by learning together, sharing knowledge and equipment, and by working together to solve common problems.

We represent a diverse group of farmers in the Connecticut River catchment area: large and small dairies, meat and egg producers, feed and forage producers, graziers, fruit, vegetable and specialty crop producers, and more. Some of us use conventional practices, some organic, and some both. We farm on many thousands of acres along many miles of river- and stream-front in both Vermont and New Hampshire. Our members also farm up tributaries and into the high points of the watershed.

We are bound geographically. What this means is we live close by, up and down stream of each other and our communities. When one of our neighbors is facing hardship, we know about it and do what we can to help.

Farm viability as a whole starts with farm viability at the individual farm. Agriculture, of course, is one of the major industries in the state. As farmers we provide not just economic output. We also provide many services to Vermont: we manage large amounts of the landscape for function, for conservation, and for

beauty; we provide jobs and tax revenues; we provide continuity and social cohesion in our communities; and more.

Farming these days (most days!) is not easy, and there are many stresses to our businesses - we are often at the mercy of powerful market and regulatory forces beyond what our State can control; our supply chains are sometimes just as brittle as other industries; we operate within these social and economic parameters but also the variability of the weather, climate, and environment. Regardless of the particular crop or production system, farms have different levels of resilience. Some of our farms are one breakdown, or one poor season away from financial disaster, and a perfect storm of circumstances can break them at any moment. And as you know, literal storms, extreme ones, are more and more common, at a time when economic pressures can already be a great challenge.

What can we do? We can stand up a permanent fund to help farms weather such weather variability. A fund that is simple, fast, reliable, and sufficient - to effectively get farms through immediate aftermath of significant weather events and natural disasters. Such a fund will fill an important gap and help Vermont farms survive natural disasters.

Our farms support this effort. Many state and federal programs are not well-designed for farms like those in Vermont. Those that exist are slow and difficult to access. Insurance programs are not designed for many Vermont farms and are limited in scope. We can't expect the Federal government to fix these problems any time soon. The State BGAP program has certainly been beneficial, but also has shortcomings.

A broad group of farmers and organizations support this concept, and I hope it will impress you that we are in agreement on the need. We do not take it lightly to ask for special funding, especially at a time when we are all trying to tighten budgets. But we are here at this time for very real reasons and very real need. Please support and fund a Farm Security Fund.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for the work you do on our behalf. We know how challenging it can be to balance the needs of all of us in Vermont. Please consider us a resource - our farmers can offer a wide range of thoughtful ideas and insightful comments as you craft legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MS' or 'MK' with a stylized flourish.

Michael Snow
Executive Director, Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance
Post Mills Eggs and Grains, Thetford, VT