

## S.45 Right To Farm

My name is Katie Steere. Thank you for hearing my story. I am here today to ask you to vote down the proposed changes to Vermont's Right to Farm laws.

I have heard language that describes votes relating to S.45 as "with" farmers if supporting proposed changes and "against" farmers if not supporting these proposed changes. Changes that include allowance for physical invasion of property, for example a stream of polluted water running through someone's backyard, are only supporting a small number of industrial sized farms in Vermont.

I am a farmer in Randolph Center, Vermont. I raise grass-fed beef and lamb with my husband on about 100 acres of certified organic pasture. After farming on leased land for six years we were fortunate enough to purchase our farm three years ago through a USDA farm ownership loan.

In addition to raising grass-fed beef and lamb we operate two Airbnbs on our farm in order to allow us to financially support the mortgage payments, property taxes, and insurance.

These proposed changes are extremely concerning to me as a farmer who lives down the road from an industrial dairy farm.

The impact of an industrial confined animal feeding operation or CAFO on a community is vastly different from what most would consider it like to live next to a farm. The trucks are driving by every few minutes in the summer with their engine brakes blaring in both directions. When the manure is spread from the lagoon the smell is suffocating even inside our house. You can smell the farm from a quarter mile away when driving by in the summer. They are spraying toxic herbicides and pesticides all around our community.

All of these things affect our quality of life and our ability to give our guests a positive experience on our farm. Even still, I have empathy for these farmers who are trying to survive in a system that in my opinion doesn't fit or belong in Vermont. The biggest concern for me comes from the genetically modified cornfield directly uphill from one of our certified organic pastures. This cornfield contains tile drains and every spring a river runs through our field, digging an enormous ravine, and running into a spring-fed pond on our property.

We tested the water coming from this spring and it is contaminated with herbicides due to runoff from this cornfield, making it so that we are unable to use this water or this pastureland for our cows.

Under these proposed changes, our "neighbors" could pollute and damage our farm with their farming practices and leave us powerless to do anything about it. I've seen it mentioned multiple times in the articles written about this case that the affected neighbors are "outsiders" who aren't from here. What about when a farm causes damage to another farm? Should farmers in Vermont not have the right to farm organically and without chemicals that are harmful to humans and the planet alike? Should I and my future children not be able to take a swim break in our pond so that our neighbors can continue dumping toxic chemicals into our water?

It's important to note that the farms we're being asked to protect with these proposed changes are not small family farms with cows out grazing in pastures. They are industrial farms, CAFO's, where the animals never get to go outside.

A human life is a tiny flicker in the lifetime of this planet. Yet the choices we make in our lifetimes have profound impacts on the generations of people who will come after us. We need to ask ourselves what kind of Vermont we want to leave for the next generations. Do we want to leave a Vermont where children can't swim in the rivers and the lakes because they're too polluted with herbicides and other agricultural chemicals? It's not the farmers who will truly benefit from the policies that are in question today. It's the agrochemical companies and pharmaceutical companies who make billions of dollars in profit off the backs of these farmers. There are over 600,000 people living in Vermont and I'd guess that every single one of them will be affected by the ripple effects of this policy.

We all want a Vermont that is beautiful and safe to live in. We all want a Vermont where farms can thrive.

In Vermont the average acreage of a farm is 180 acres. Vermont and its beautiful green hills are not suited to the industrial monocrop farms of the midwest. Thank goodness for that because if we cover Vermont in CAFO's and pollute our soil and waters, Vermont will not be the beautiful place we currently live.

With these proposed changes we get to decide what kind of future we want for Vermont. And I hope that future includes support for diversified farms that raise nutritious food in a way that respects the planet, the humans, and the animals in our farming system.

I'm here today to ask you to vote down the proposed changes to Vermont's Right to Farm Laws because these changes will benefit a few farmers but harm countless Vermonters and Vermont's precious water resources.

Thank you for hearing my story.