

My name is Jacob Powsner and I farm with my family on a 4th generational farm in the town of Chittenden down in Rutland County. On our farm, we graze beef cattle, grow Christmas trees, harvest timber, and manage a 15,000-tap maple sugaring operation with a growing agritourism component. Maple is really how we pay our bills on the farm today. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today about the critical need to establish a Farm Security Fund.

The past two summers, we witnessed unprecedented flooding that devastated our state's agricultural communities. Raging waters destroyed crops, eroded fertile soil that took generations to build, damaged farm infrastructure, and washed away livelihoods. The flooding caused millions in damages, with some farms losing an entire season of production. As you know all too well, these extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, leaving our farmers increasingly vulnerable without adequate support systems in place. The tools such as crop insurance simply don't exist (certainly in maple) or aren't a good fit for most of our farms.

Our farmers aren't just growing food – we're stewarding the land that makes Vermont what it is. When we fail to protect our farms from climate disasters, we risk far more than a season's crop. Here's what I know is at stake:

- The economic stability of our rural communities, where farms provide essential jobs and drive local economies
- Our food security and the resilience of our local food systems
- The environmental benefits that well-managed farms provide, including flood mitigation, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration
- The preservation of our working landscapes that define Vermont's character and support our tourism industry

After the tragic flooding of 2023, like many Vermonters, we were shocked by the scale of loss. So we did what we could, on our farm, we reached out to all our customers, many of whom live all over the country, and we raised funds for the NOFA Farmer Emergency Fund. And as you know, everyone pitched in to help Vermont farms recover; FSA, the Vermont Community Foundation, the Center for Agricultural Economy, and countless Kickstarters and GoFundmes. It was a silver lining for many engulfed in the flood clouds. But in that, there's a problem. When we rely solely on private individuals and non-profits to respond, we run the risk of a recovery response that is inadequate, uneven, untimely, and inequitable.

There are, of course, better-positioned farms in any recovery; popular farms with wide audiences, bigger farms with more resources, and older farms that have learned how to navigate funding bureaucracies. I worry about the small farms, the ones that haven't ever been to an FSA office, who aren't "online" and wouldn't know how to make a GoFundMe. In 2023, NOFA raised \$1,772,860 and in 2024, NOFA raised \$358,284 for the Farmer Emergency Fund. I worry

about the sustainability of depending on non-profits for the long haul. This is why it's so crucial for a fund to be positioned in the state budget that can be equitably and efficiently administered through the Department of Ag.

The proposed Farm Security Fund isn't just about emergency response – it's an investment in Vermont's future. By helping farmers recover quickly from disasters, we:

- Maintain our agricultural infrastructure and protect generational knowledge
- Preserve local food production capacity, critical for our state's food security
- Keep our working lands in production, preventing their conversion to development
- Support the next generation of farmers who might otherwise be deterred by climate risks

We can't prevent all the disasters brought on by our changing climate, but we can choose how we respond to them. By establishing this fund, we demonstrate our commitment to agriculture as a cornerstone of Vermont's economy, environment, and identity. It's a bare minimum to protect the investment that this committee and this state has already put into viable rural economies. We can show our farmers that they're not alone in facing these challenges, and we can invest in the resilience of our entire state.

The cost of inaction – measured in lost farms, damaged communities, and weakened food security – far exceeds the investment this fund requires. I urge you to support this vital legislation and protect the future of Vermont agriculture. Most importantly, I urge you to support the language and funding scope of the bill. The policy is only impactful if given the proper tools to effect change.

Thank you all of you for listening and for your years of service to Vermont and your pivotal role in supporting agriculture here in our state.