

Good Morning,
Era MacDonald
Executive Director at The Merrymac Farm Sanctuary
Testimony H.841

My name is Era MacDonald. I am the Founder and Executive Director of The Merrymac Farm Sanctuary –that was founded in March of 2023. Our mission is to provide abandoned farm animals with permanent, healthy homes where they can live free of abuse or cruelty.

The animals we have at MMFS include horses, donkeys, cows, sheep, goats, turkeys, chickens, ducks, and rabbits. We have over 100 animals that will live permanently at MMFS for the rest of their lives.

Animals come to MMFS from homes of neglect, homes where their humans have aged out of being able to physically care for them, homes where owners are financially no longer able to care for them.

MMFS has recently become a GFAS (Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries) Accredited Farm Sanctuary in the state of Vermont. This prestigious accreditation certifies that our Sanctuary maintains high standards of animal care and daily protocols for how we run as an organization. **Humane Education** is also a key factor to our mission.

Farmed Animals are one of the most forgotten animals in the welfare world, and some of the most poorly treated. They are seen outside of the accepted “domesticated” animals, such as dogs and cats. Horses can get a touch more protection than cows, chickens or a sheep; but at the end of the day, they can all end up at the same livestock sale, heading to a meat buyer.

Thoughts on HGOMA H.841

- We are so lucky to have Lisa Milot in the state on VT and she has put together some great research from her first year here.... Where do we go from here?
- Creation of Website– such a need for information to be available to those needing it, and to begin to “track” number of what the real need in VT is.
- How do we FUND a Animal Welfare Division in VT
- Could we form a “Friends” of Animal Welfare Fund that is a Non-Profit part under our state agency? Compared to the Dept of ED???
- Why could this be good?
- Grants that could be available to help fund staffing/spay/neuter/equipment/buildings etc

Need for TRAINING in Humane Welfare

- MMFS/Humane World/Dorset Equine/HSCC (others) need to do a new training day on “what to expect at a scene and how to deal with it.” Along obviously with Lisa Milot as the legal advisor the Game Wardens need to have access to knowledge in how to body

score multiple types of animals (actually touching the animals– not driving by the road where they are housed)

-What housing requirements are expected for each species of animals. For example if you have a large group of pigs living in an open pasture what are the pigs requirements for HUMANE conditions in all four seasons.

For EXAMPLE– notebook of training materials etc



Protecting outdoor pigs in winter requires a dry, draft-free, well-ventilated shelter with abundant bedding (straw), and access to fresh, unfrozen water. Key strategies include using insulated houses or windbreaks (like straw bales), feeding more high-energy food, and ensuring shelters are positioned to avoid direct wind, such as facing south.

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- [Shelter](#)
- [Setup](#): Provide a three-sided or enclosed, insulated shelter (e.g., huts, converted sheds) to keep pigs dry and protected from wind.
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- [Bedding](#):
- Use thick layers of straw, which traps body heat better than hay. Deep bedding (1 foot or more) is ideal for insulation from the frozen ground.
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- [Water](#)
- [Access](#): Ensure pigs have unfrozen water, as they cannot eat snow to satisfy their hydration needs. Use heated waterers or check troughs daily to break ice.
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- [Nutrition](#):
- Increase feed rations during cold weather, as pigs require more energy to maintain their body temperature.

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- [Wind](#)
- [Protection](#): Use straw bales around the entrance of shelters to prevent wind and snow from entering.
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- [Location](#)
- [& Hygiene](#): Move pigs to higher, dry ground and move shelters frequently to prevent them from living in mud or manure.
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How do we as a state move FORWARD to better PROTECT animals?

-We have Lisa Milot here(very thankful for that)– so now lets have her have “rule” making AUTHORITY so she can help to better facilitate the animal welfare crisis we have in the state of VT

-We need better OVERSIGHT of backyard animal situations– we need the Agency of Agriculture to hopefully understand that there is a lot of poor animal husbandry going on within our state.

-Big Agricultural Farms have OVERSIGHT– USDA etc.

-smaller farms– no oversight???

-Why is that a problem?

-Lack of education sometimes that leads to poor care/choices for those animals or situations that could have been prevented with better information available. -Less vaccines, more potential for biosecurity issues etc...

Era MacDonald, M.S.

Executive Director