

Date: April 10, 2025

RE: Opposition to the expansion of two farms in Addison County: Vorsteveld Large Farm Operation and Gosliga Farm.

I write, as a 4th generation Vermonter. My great grandfather, grandfather, uncle and brother in law were small farmers here in Vermont. I am also a taxpayer who owns lakefront property.

Below I have stated my questions with related comments and clarifying questions. I have italicized questions so that they are easily identified.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Laurinda Poirier-Solomon
Arnold Bay Rd

How can the State, its agencies and leadership consider allowing expansion of any farm that will increase drainage of organic matter into the lake?

- Already the Lake has contamination issues as evidenced by the need for increasing amounts of chlorine in the Vergennes Panton Water District drinking water . For goodness sake, we taste chlorine every time we drink! *How much more do we need to ingest before this nonsense stops?*
- *What is the impact to our health in consuming that chlorine laden water? Or the other chemicals that come from organic matter mixing with chlorine?*
- The proof is in the pudding. The health of Lake Champlain is clearly worse off than it was 5 years ago and for sure from 20 years ago. The State is responsible here because what you all are doing, collectively or individually does not seem to have made a difference.

How can the State, its agencies and leadership consider allowing the Vorsteveld Farm an expansion when they have already been found by the courts to discharge pollutants into Arnold Bay, fail to remediate that pollution and are in contempt of court?

- This Farm has violated federal, state and local law by our state courts, our Agency of Natural Resources, and the Town of Ferrisburgh.
- They have operated illegally without the required permits under the federal Clean Water Act.
- They are bad apples and are giving farming a bad name. You know this.

How can the State trust the Vorsteveld Farm and ignore their questionable behaviors?

- If it was not for an attentive neighbor, we, the community serviced by the VPWD (Vergennes Panton Water District) would not be aware that the Vorsteveld Farm wants to put a drainage pipe down into Arnold Bay near the Treatment Plant.

Excerpts from the meeting minutes from meetings:

Feb 18th: “Hans is here to **request an easement for a drainage pipe and culvert for just tile drainage.**

Mar 18th: Hans Vorsteveld ... has spoken with an engineer regarding how the drainage pipe will be run and where it will empty. ... Jon Deming is still speaking with the State regarding the placement location of where **the line would be run next to the Treatment Plant.**

Is this process legitimate? How is it possible said Farm did not go through the state or local agencies? Is it legitimate that the VPWD take on such a request? Why would that not have been part of the “application” for expansion? Isn’t that an expansion of their permit? What is the impact on the water quality?

- The Vorsteveld's admitted to already adding to the herd which is believed to have begun in late February, early March. *How is that honoring the process? Or for that matter the very agencies and leadership that speaks on their behalf? Is this not before the formal approval of the application?*

How can the State ignore legitimate concerns of neighbors and community members, who highlight the flagrant disregard to the environmental needs of the land or lake? How can the State even consider making the right to object more difficult?

- It is time to change the narrative that characterizes neighbors, lake property owners as "wealthy, whiny complainers/ out-of-towners that do not appreciate farming?" We are indeed privileged to live by the lake. Most of us have worked 40-50 years in our respective professions to get here. AND our complaints, while they may be a *nuisance* to those having to address them, are important. We need to keep the big picture in mind here. It is about the health of Vermont Land, Lake and Public.
- We are taxpayers. We pay a lot of taxes for the privilege to live near the lake. Those taxes help support the community and the state. We also see, *and experience* on our land the negative consequences of roundup on the fields, excess cutting of trees no longer able to absorb water, excess organic matter in the lake. *How can the State continue to take our, not insignificant, tax dollars yet not heed our voice when the land and the lake suffer?*

We are a voice, a witness to when things are not working.

How can the State ignore their role in the increasing the tension between the farmers, community? Do you not realize that the result in how the State agencies work results in pitting farmers and community members against each other?

- The Farmers:
Farming is hard work. The obstacles, regulations, demands, costs, limited yields, are more than I can imagine. And yet, the impact of land / waste management has a direct impact on the Lake and surrounding properties.
Is it not frustrating and exhausting for Farmers having to deal with concerned or disgruntled neighbors?
The farmers need a voice, an agency to protect them. Yet they also need an agency that weeds out the bad apples and contain the rebels. Failure to do both - protect farmers and hold them truly accountable - pits Farmers and Communities against each other.
- The Community:
When farmers disregard regulations that lead to run off and contamination to others property or the Lake, people get angry and scared.

When the voices of the Community / Neighbors are thwarted, concerns deferred to another agency, and questions not answered directly, tension and anger rise.

Who loses? The Farmers, the taxpayers, the land and ultimately the Lake.

Do you not understand that the processes employed by the State seem to pit one agency against another while at the same time losing sight of legitimate concerns for the environment? Do you not appreciate that this process is eroding trust between communities and State agencies?

- The Public Forum is a means by which interested community members can query about a project, understand the complexity of the Farmers needs and have their questions and concerns addressed. Yet that is not what happened at the Panton Public Forum
- Said farmers were lawyered up and reportedly told that they did not need to answer any questions. Now, something is seriously wrong here. Anger, tension was palpably increasing.
- Expressed concerns about the impact of proposed expansion on runoff, the Lake, the neighboring land, was turfed to ANR. “Not my issue”. *How does that make sense? The Department of AG approves a project without accountability to the consequences? If that is so, why is not the ANR and Dept of AG jointly managing the Public Forum and managing the application?*

The consequences of this current “way of doing business”?

Tension rises. Frustration increases.

Trust in the system and our state agencies erode. Relationships deteriorate.

Farmers’ needs are lost or at the least frustrated. They feel attacked.

Neighbors’ concerns are not dealt with.

The Lake Suffers, our drinking water compromised

In conclusion

The State has a responsibility to clean up and employ proven measures to rectify the Lake Champlain BEFORE adding more to it. The Lake is already compromised. This is not a time to add to the problem before it is fixed. This is not to say never to an expansion for any farmer but to say NOT NOW.

That State has a responsibility to clean up how inter-agencies work so that the issues, the needs of Farmers, community and environment are coordinated and addressed.

Checking of the boxes in an application is not enough.

Turfing issues to another other agency can no longer be tolerated.

The State has a responsibility to hold offending farmers accountable when in violation of regulations, not just on paper but literally enforce those regulations and take effective action when ignored. And certainly it has the responsibility to deny any expansion until such Farm is proven trustworthy. This is also true for Landowners.

The State needs to change the narrative that characterizes lakeside property owners as wealthy whiny anti-farmers. This only creates increasing animosity. Nothing gets accomplished. The Lake still suffers. Relationships erode.

The State has an opportunity to redesign how Farmers and Community members work together. There is a great deal of interest from many people who own lake front property to find resolutions so sustainable, healthy farming not only survives but grows. You have the power to bridge the gap between Farmers and the community.

This issue is about the health of our Lake, our drinking water, our tourist economy and ultimately OUR Health.

Thank you for your time.