

Good morning, for the record Amber Perry, Administrator and Policy Director at the Vermont Farm Bureau. Thank you, Chair Ingalls, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak with you all this morning regarding municipal regulation of agriculture within bill S.323.

In the final days of last year's legislative session, we became aware of this issue and the last-minute efforts to address it before adjournment. At that time, it was clear that the complexity of this matter warranted more thoughtful consideration than the remaining days of session allowed. As a result, this coalition began to come together in June. I think it's worth noting that while all the organizations involved represent a wide range of perspectives, we share a common understanding of the importance of this issue and worked collaboratively to identify areas of alignment.

Our primary goal is to ensure that any legislation passed establishes clear and consistent regulatory framework. Many farms operate across municipal boundaries, and navigating different regulations from town to town could become confusing, burdensome, and time-consuming. Consistency is critical for farmers to remain compliant while continuing to operate efficiently.

At the same time, we recognize and support the right of individuals to grow their own food if they choose. Affirming and protecting that right across all types of development is essential for fostering equitable access to farming and food for all Vermonters.

As you heard in previous testimony this morning, we believe this issue can be resolved without opening the Required Agricultural Practices. Farmers are familiar with these standards and manage their operations daily in accordance with them. Amending or altering the RAPs at this time could introduce unnecessary confusion and could potentially hinder any progress. The proposed acreage language within the RAPs (pages 6-7) (at least 1 and less than 4 contiguous acres) could become confusing for farmers to follow, and would require the Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets to take on more work, do they have the capacity for that? Based on the Supreme Court ruling back in May of 2025, it was clear that the legislative intent was not portrayed, which means that any legislation put forward on this matter should be very clear and precise as to what the intent is.

As for the increase in the income threshold from \$2000.00 to \$5000.00, what was the deciding factor of \$5000? Inflation? Farmers have also been subject to paying higher costs for inputs but at the end of the day the price they are paid for their product remains the same or has decreased. It also isn't clear how many farms this increase from \$2000.00 to \$5000.00 would capture, would it be eliminating start up farms?

Another concern is the Tier 1b, or potential “growth areas.” We know farms are operating within this potential “growth areas.” I know that in my town they have deemed an area as a potential “growth area” which currently is open farmland, that is being farmed. Once agricultural land is lost to development, it is gone forever. We must be mindful of policies that protect and strengthen agriculture, rather than create additional pathways that could threaten its long-term viability. Vermont’s agricultural landscape is an invaluable resource, and it deserves thoughtful and balanced policy solutions. Again, thank you for the time this morning.

Respectfully,

Amber Perry

Administrator/Policy Director, Vermont Farm Bureau