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Rural Vermont Introduction  
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Legislative Director

Dear Senate Committee on Agriculture,

We at Rural Vermont appreciate the successful collaboration with legislators on this committee over the course of our 40 year history as a non-profit organization that advocates, organizes and educates on issues that affect the agrarian communities that feed us all.

#### Recent and pending legislation

We celebrate and thank you for last year's passage of [Act 93](#) that now allows poultry producers to sell on-farm slaughtered poultry not just as whole birds but also in parts. Rural Vermont is known for its work in favor of the on-farm slaughter of poultry and livestock for many years and we are proud to currently spearhead federal legislation with the leadership from Senator Welch and Senator Sanders and support from our Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. The Livestock Owned by Communities to Advance Local Foods Act ([LOCAL Foods Act](#)) would clarify in the Federal Meat Inspection Act that it is legal when farmers sell livestock alive and the new owners have the animal slaughtered on the farm where it was raised without inspection. We are excited that our Senators will reintroduce the LOCAL Foods Act in the new Congress and we believe this bi-partisan issue has good chances to pass with the new farm bill as its one of the few initiatives that does not involve a money request and that would simply clarify in law what is already written in USDA guidance.

#### Rural Vermont Members

In my role as Legislative Director for Rural Vermont I am monitoring much of your committee activity as we are sharing information about pending legislation with our members and strive to organize opportunities for our farmers to voice their concerns and ideas with you directly in the legislative process. For over a decade we have been collaborating with you all and NOFA-VT to have Small Farm Action Days here in the State House where farmers, activists and food enthusiasts learn about the legislative process and get a chance to speak to the agriculture committees. We hope to schedule two [Small Farm Action Days](#) this session and for your continued support to hear what concerns farmers may voice in this format. Please know me as a resource to organize for farmer input on legislation relevant to the agricultural community. Please also check-out our new [Activist Toolkit website](#).

#### Conservation

I've been representing Rural Vermont in the Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative on the Agricultural Lands Working Group this past year. The [VCSI is Vermont's 30x30/50x50 process](#) led by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Agency of Natural Resources to implement Act 59 of 2023, and act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection.

During the inventory phase of this engagement process we've been dissatisfied with the transparency of the process and its compliance with public meeting laws and Vermonts environmental justice policy. Last fall, Vermont Law School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems had one of their students research the issue who suggested that: "Act 59 implementation — now known as the Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative (VCSI) — has fallen short of compliance with the state's Open Meeting and Environmental Justice Laws." For example: "The records posted under VHCB's VCSI page are inconsistent and unorganized (...). While some of the required information is there, it appears incomplete and is not clearly presented." (*resource available upon request*)

A second memo researched where 30x30 is coming from nationally and internationally and is exploring Rural Vermont's concern that the initiative is intended to serve the development of carbon markets here in Vermont. We are part of the largest international food sovereignty movement La Via Campesina and the National Family Farmer Coalition who call carbon markets false solutions to climate change because they are designed to commodify nature and to enrich Natural Asset Companies instead of realizing the systematic changes farmers voice they need to grow more food and become better land managers. The research indicates that some states use carbon markets as a funding source, but not all states anticipate carbon markets as a source of revenue to realize 30x30 (*resource available upon request*).

Finally a third research paper looked at alternative pathways towards community resilience and biodiversity protection as permanent land conservation with easements would cost Vermont approximately a total of \$375 million over the next five years to reach the 30x30 goal (not including administrative expenses and land management costs; *resources available on request*). We at Rural Vermont stress that this pathway would contribute to the already occurring property price inflation and the in-affordability of farmland for farmers and the lack of equitable housing access so that alternatives are needed. Without going into to much or any detail of the recommendations of the research paper specifically, I do want to mention that this is the discourse Rural Vermont is seeking with our membership and allies and that we are in the process of gathering and brainstorming ideas to protect farmland from development and to make farmland affordable for a new generation of farmers who currently belong to the demographics who trend to leave the state again because of the inability to pay for the land while farming it.

We also spoke with the Governor's Future of Agriculture ([website link](#)) about this issue and are looking forward to where the work of that commission may lead this year. I also want to mention that neither of the recent land use laws that passed the legislature center the protection of farmland from development (namely the Act 250 revision in Act 181 of 2024, the River Corridor Legislation in Act 121 of 2024, the Home Act 47 of 2023, but also not the mentioned Act 59 of 2024 that centers biodiversity protection or the Global Warming Solutions Act 153 of 2020).

I have also been serving as a commissioner on the Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission for a couple of months – that is Vermont's largest Regional Planning Commission (RPC). This year will be a huge year for RPC's across the state to implement the recent land use laws mentioned and to review the relevant sections of their regional plans. I will share that TRORCs regional plan currently doesn't itemize agricultural land on its "Future Land Use" map at all (it's all a lump sum "Rural" area, link to [TRORC 2020 Regional Plan Future Land Use map](#)).

## PFAS in Biosolids/ Sludge Ban from the Land Application on Farmland

Rural Vermont recommended with the Protect Our Soils Coalition in 2023 ([public comment](#)) that the outputs from depackaging facilities that mechanically separate food packaging from outdated foods or food scraps should not be land applied on agricultural fields or used as gardening soil because of their likelihood of being contaminated with PFAS in plastic particles. In our work over the past decades on composting in general and composting food residuals specifically we've shown concern for pollutants such as micro and nanoplastics. We've been recommending the legislature to take a precautionary approach and Rural Vermont is dearly recommending in regards to the land application of sludge or biosolids on agricultural lands to take that approach as well.

We need to learn from what happened in Maine and listen to farmers like Adam Nordell who started to produce a diversity of vegetables with his family farm business until testing for PFAS helped them understand some of the health issues his family was plagued with, resulting in his farm to foreclose as his produce wasn't deemed to be safe for human consumption any more. Don't let the needs of farmers be an afterthought in this! Vermont should adopt legislation that lives up to what the [Maine legislature](#) worked out over time as farmers were already suffering some of the consequences of the existing pollution. We would support for the Vermont legislature to address the legacy contamination with sewage sludge, and/or the accumulative contaminations from industry standard equipment and supplies being used on agricultural lands, and ask to follow the Maine example and to needs to begin with provisions regarding the needed **RELIEF FOR FARMERS**, including: a fund to address PFAS contamination on farms like to provide for a families health care needs, as well as funds and technical assistance needed to relocate their farms; to buy out land, infrastructure and to compensate for the disposal of farm products. This kind of language is also included in the Senate version of the farm bill that is still in development but expected to pass in 2025 (starting on page [1352 - 1362](#)).

Thank you for your attention,

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