Jesse and Stefanie Wilbur
Lazy Dog Farm
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Orwell, VT 05760

I'm Jesse Wilbur, a 4th-generation farmer, and this is my wife Stefanie, a registered nurse and our farm's vet tech. Our family runs Lazy Dog Farm, an organic dairy in Orwell. Our three kids hope to be the 5th generation.

Thank you for taking our testimony today.

We're here to ask that you please appropriate $15.6 million in FY2027 for the Farm and Forest Operations Security Special Fund.

We've been farming here for 15 years and this year's drought was unlike any we'd ever seen. Our average summer rainfall is 3 to 5 inches a month. We didn't get six inches all summer and most of the fall.

The drought had a big impact on our farm business. We weren't able to get our cows out to pasture. The feed just didn't grow. It was about 4 inches tall when it should have been up to our knees. Normally, we get four good cuts of hay. Last summer, we only got one normal cut and half of another. We had to supplement. We used one third of winter feed this summer, and we've now spent over $50,000 on additional feed to get our cows through the impacts of the drought.

Even with that, our cows still weren't producing as much milk as they would in a normal year, when they're able to graze. We had to pay extra costs with less income. We met these costs best we can. Instead of growing our herd like we'd planned, we shrank it a bit, going from milking 50 to just over 40 head. We sold one of our two air-b-n-bs to pay for the feed. Our farm business generates $250,000 of gross income, and this percentage of loss isn't sustainable for us.

We work to buffer ourselves and our business against these impacts all the time. We've installed cattle laneways and watering systems so cows aren't trucking through fields and compacting the soil. We take care of our soil to make sure it holds onto the nutrients and water for our cows. We do our best, but we couldn't make it rain.

We weren't the only ones dealing with this. Our neighboring farms were facing the same challenges. Farmers as a whole are already facing mental health challenges. They don't like to talk about it, but dealing with the stress is a very real challenge. And we don't necessarily have access to employer-based health insurance to access mental health support.

Funding the Farm and Forest Operations Security Special Fund would take some of the bite out of this stress by supporting farmers in navigating the extreme weather events that are too big for

us to tackle alone. We hope that next year, no farmer has to face another year of extreme weather. But it would make a big difference to know that we have this support if we need it. ***Please appropriate $15.6 million in FY2027 for the Farm and Forest Operations Security Special Fund.***

Thank you.