

**May 19, 2026**

**Testimony of Mindy Hinsdale, Co-Director, Vermont Equine Industry Advocacy Group  
To the Vermont Senate Committee on Finance  
Re: H.942, Miscellaneous Agricultural Subjects (Equine Provision)**

Chair Cummings and Esteemed Members of the Senate Committee on Finance,

Thank you for your time today and for the opportunity to testify. My name is Mindy Hinsdale. I am a seventh-generation Vermonter, recently retired after 35 years owning and operating Steeple Ridge Farm, a full operating riding facility in Charlotte. It was my life's work. I currently serve as Vice President of the Chittenden County Farm Bureau and Secretary of the Green Mountain Horse Association. Today, I am testifying in my role as co-founder and co-director of the Vermont Equine Industry Advocacy Group. I would also like to introduce Heidi Krantz, who is the co-founder and co-director of the Vermont Equine Industry Advocacy Group. Heidi is here with me today and is also available to answer questions about the information I will be sharing.

This work is deeply personal to me. I have spent my life in Vermont's horse community, and I know firsthand the labor and sacrifice it takes to keep these farms going. This is how many people support themselves and their families. These farms keep land open, barns active and repaired, animals cared for, and agricultural skills alive across generations. They are part of Vermont's rural identity and economy. But across Vermont law, including Current Use eligibility, professional equine farms are still too often not recognized as real farms. That creates unfair financial treatment, and it sends the wrong message about the seriousness of these farmers and their importance to our state.

The proposal we are asking you to support is focused on working, professional horse farms that meet clear and narrow standards. Specifically, we are talking about farms with 25 or more acres, where 50 percent or more of the farmer's income comes directly from specific equine-related agricultural activities. That is a high bar, and it represents a focused universe of professional agricultural operations. For that reason, we support narrowing this language to remove the provisions for farms on less than 25 acres and the \$2,000 income threshold.

We are grateful to the Joint Fiscal Office for the time they took to analyze this issue and prepare the fiscal note. Given the lack of clear data and reporting for the equine industry, that could not have been an easy task. The fiscal note evaluated the broader language. We support narrowing that language to professional equine farms with 25 or more acres and a 50-percent-income standard, and we believe the universe of potentially eligible farms under that narrower scope is much smaller than what the fiscal note reflects.

Our organization has maintained a list of approximately 200 professional horse farms in Vermont for the past 10 years. The median size of these farms is 48 acres, with approximately half under the 25-acre threshold for Current Use. Over the past eight years, we have conducted three surveys. In our most recent survey, we sent surveys to nearly 200 farms and received 62 responses. 22 farms reported that they make 50 percent or more of their income from their

horse business, have 25 or more acres, and would therefore qualify under the narrowed language.

For most of these farms, the land is already enrolled in Current Use through existing agricultural uses such as hay production, pasture, or other qualifying farm activity. That is why our estimate focuses on the building-related impact. Our ask is not meant to open the door to a large new universe of land, but instead meant to recognize barns, stables, arenas, and related structures used in real equine farming as farm buildings when the farm meets the 25-acre Current Use standard and the 50-percent-income test.

We reviewed tax bills from professional horse farms that could potentially qualify for the farm building exemption. Because tax cards do not always separate farm buildings from other buildings, these figures are estimates. The farms we reviewed showed building-related tax amounts ranging from about \$3,100 to about \$8,300. We also reviewed several farms under \$3,000, but did not include those lower-cost examples in the overall average because including them would have lowered the estimate. We wanted to avoid understating the potential impact.

The average building-related tax amount we arrived at was \$5,634 per farm. Using that average, the estimated aggregate impact would be approximately \$563,000 if 100 farms qualified. Even if all 200 farms on our professional horse farm list qualified, which is highly unlikely, the estimate would be approximately \$1.13 million. Because tax cards do not always separate farm buildings from other buildings, these figures are estimates and tend to be on the higher side.

JFO cited the 2022 federal agriculture survey, which identified roughly 1,000 Vermont farms with one or more horses. We understand why that data point was considered, especially given the lack of clear reporting for the equine industry. However, that figure captures a much broader universe than the professional equine farms this provision is intended to reach. The more relevant figure, in our view, is from the same survey, which is 135 farms with significant economic impact to the State. That is much closer to the group of working equine farms addressed by the narrowed language.

We understand that this is a difficult year to make any change that affects the Education Fund or the General Fund. But we hope the Committee will view this not only as a cost, but as an investment in Vermont, particularly rural Vermont. This is money that will stay in local communities. It will support families, employees, local businesses, and the working land these farms keep in agricultural use.

There is a stereotype that anything involving horses must be a luxury or a hobby for wealthy people, but that is not the reality of these farms. These are working agricultural operations run by people who wake at the crack of dawn, feed animals, maintain land and buildings, fix fences, put up hay, manage manure, pay vets and farriers, and try to keep their farms open in a state where that gets harder every year. The Vermonters who run these farms are struggling. I cannot overstate how difficult it has become to keep these operations going.

Please pass this critically important provision. Not only will it provide real relief on the ground, it will also send a clear and meaningful message that Vermont lawmakers recognize the contributions these farmers make to our state, that their work is valued in Montpelier, and that their elected officials care about their survival.

Thank you,

Mindy Hinsdale