



FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 14, 2022

First thing, I would like to offer apologies to Abbie Corse, whose first name I misspelled in last week's UTGD – I also moved her farm from the correct location – Whitingham – to Wilmington!! Thanks to Leon for sending me a note . . .

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

22-0543 Draft 1.1 proposes that the State pay the costs of farmers to participate in the USDA risk management programs that mitigate risks to farmers from price volatility in the milk market. This language is a direct result of discussions at the Task Force to Revitalize the Dairy Industry; representatives from AgriMark, DFA and Farm Bureau met with Senate Ag in support of the language. The payments would cover DMC, DRP and LGM programs and Senator Starr is working to include it in the Budget Adjustment so payments can go out this year. Total cost of the program to the State is estimated at \$3-\$4 million. Details as to how farms apply for these funds and who will write the checks are being worked out.

S.234 proposes to make multiple amendments to Act 250, including creating smart growth areas in designated downtowns, increased criteria for forest blocks and connecting habitats, development of roads beyond 2000 feet (excluding forestry and agriculture uses) and permitting requirements for wood products manufacturing. Presentations by Jamie Fidel from VT Natural Resources Council and Commissioner Michael Snyder, FP&R, were included in the discussion. (thanks to Jill at Morris Governmental Affairs for this update).

S.235 proposes to study the issue of how Act 250 jurisdiction should apply to agricultural businesses by the Natural Resources Board and due to the General Assembly by January 15, 2023. Nordic Farm in Addison County contacted Senator Bray to explain they are seeking ways to keep their land in tact but be able to grow businesses at the same time. These 30-35 businesses using the space at the former

dairy farm all have agricultural relationships and they are seeking support for their development in current laws. They are asking for a report with the possibility of creating Agricultural Business Innovation Zones with different levels of review within Act 250. Senator MacDonald was not supportive of the bill. Senator Bray noted the proposed study does not immediately make an outright policy change. Questions were raised regarding farm businesses and Act 250; more discussion on this will certainly follow. Vermont Farm Bureau does not have specific policy regarding this issue. If you have any suggestions, comments or concerns, please let me know at crkdbrks@aol.com. (Thanks to Jill at Morris for the coverage).

S.166 DISCUSSION IN SENATE JUDICIARY

Prior to the introduction of this bill, House Agriculture heard from staff at VAAFM (including State Vet Kristin Haas and General Counsel Steve Collier) about cows dying from broadband debris. VAAFM has been in discussion with the Jim Porter at the Department of Public Service to determine who has regulatory authority over pole attachments. There are standards that may be written into contracts for subcontractors working on broadband attachments on poles, but it is unclear who has the authority to enforce them. It also appears that if a fine is levied on a subcontractor, the money goes into the General Fund of the State of Vermont and not into a fund that could provide compensation to injured parties.

Senate Judiciary had a walk-through of the bill and appeared very supportive of the proposed language. Mr. Porter from DPS was also in favor of the language and offered one suggestion which did not change the purpose of the bill. Many thanks to Tunbridge farmers Scott and Amber Hoyt and Lauren Gitlin, who testified via zoom and told their stories very well. S.166 would require rule-making by the Public Utility Commission to define enforcement powers and possibly include bonding for subcontractors. Vermont Farm Bureau supports this language and provided testimony with emphasis on private property rights and enforcement of contract performance standards. Farm Bureau also suggested other witnesses to the committee, including Christine Hallquist from the Vermont Broadband Council and a subcontractor who is involved in broadband wire application to poles.

PLASTICS IN COMPOST

Staff from ANR and VAAFM stopped by Senate Ag to discuss an unintended consequence of the composting law passed several years ago by the Legislature. Food residuals are no longer allowed in landfills and while there is composting happening at homes and businesses, some of the packaged food waste has been going to a repackaging facility in Vermont. The plant takes food still wrapped in containers (past-

dated meats, dairy products, vegetables, etc.); some of the containers can be opened and separated from the food, but other types of wrapping (plastic trays) are more problematic and are pounded into tiny pieces along with the disposed food to create a sludge. This sludge is then trucked to three farms where it is applied to fields or added to anaerobic digesters. Unfortunately, microplastic pieces (less than 5 millimeters) have been found in the fields. There currently are no standardized sampling methods nor any data on toxicity or how the soil may be transporting these pieces of plastic. According to VAAFMs Laura DiPietro, the depackaging is regulated under Solid Waste but the resultant sludge is released from that permit; farms can take food residuals without packaging and it is an acceptable use permitted through VAAFMs.

ANR and VAAFMs are working together to find a solution, as there are questions as to which Agency has authority over parts of the process. H.501 (discussed in last week's UTGD) has been introduced in House Natural Resources and would regulate the standards of physical contaminants in soil amendments. Neither Agency is in support of this bill, since there is no current data to support standards. They asked for time to set up methodology for developing data that would be of value in writing language in the future.

S.201 LEGHOLD TRAPS

This bill was introduced in Senate Natural Resources by its sponsor, Senator McCormack, who noted that (in his opinion) catching furbearing animals is a hobby for fashion and called it "gratuitous cruelty." They are suggesting fines of between \$200-\$500 and up to 60 days in jail or both for first offense and up to a \$1000 fine and up to 6 months in jail or both for second offense. Points on trappers licenses will also be accrued. There are some exceptions specifically listed in this bill, which focuses on leghold traps. If you have any concerns on this language, please let me know. Farm Bureau will be watching and may ask you to testify via zoom on this issue.

S.151 MARKING BOUNDARIES WITH PAINT

This is actually known as the Purple Paint Law in several states and the Washington County senators who sponsored it are attempting to make it easier for disabled or elderly landowners to mark their property prohibiting hunting or fishing. The paint line would be 2 inches wide and 8 inches high, in bright purple paint. Landowners would have to notify the Town Clerk's office when the initial marks are made but not after that. Please share your thoughts on this language!!

HOUSE AGRICULTURE HEARS FROM TWO CARBON SEQUESTRATION EXPERTS

Dr. Sara Via, Professor and Climate Extension Specialist from the University of Maryland, presented a lively report on her research on carbon sequestration to House Ag. The report is available on their webpage (legislature.vermont.gov, click on Committees, click on House Ag and search for documents on January 12.)

Ali Kosilba, Climate Forester from the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, also stopped by the committee on January 13 and walked members through a variety of statistics and research about carbon sequestration in forests in Vermont. Her report is also on the House Ag webpage.

Also, members of the Vermont Climate Council gave an overview of the Plan, which includes increasing the number of electric vehicles to 43,000 by 2025 (there are currently around 5,000 in Vermont as of this date) and up to 166,000 by 2030.

Action strategies for agriculture include improved manure management and methane capture, increased use of cover crops and expanded buffers, expansion of local markets, changes to Current Use to include old forests, carbon markets and payment for ecoservices. The Council also reminded committee members that strides in water quality programs and assistance to farmers are also remedies to carbon challenges and climate change and should be promoted as such.

AGRIMARK REPRESENTATIVES MADE THE ROUNDS

Staff and farmers from AgriMark Dairy Cooperative stopped by both Agriculture Committees this week, updating members on challenges and successes they have.

Congratulations to Clara Ayer from Fairmount Farm in East Montpelier for her election to the AgriMark Board of Directors!! She recounted the multiple diversification activities taking place on their two farms but concluded with the statement that 90% of their income is still from dairy. There have been significant labor issues at the Cabot plants in Vermont, causing the company to rethink staffing and automation as well as other issues. AgriMark (as well as DFA) are very supportive of the proposal to reimburse risk management insurance premiums to farmers in Vermont

COUNTY ACTIVITIES UPCOMING

Orleans County Farm Bureau hosted a successful meeting this week and planned their Legislative Breakfast for Valentine's Day, February 14, at the Irasburg Town Hall. Local legislators will be invited, and RSVP postcards will be mailed out to members from the State office.

Addison County is also hosting a zoom meeting next week; please contact AnnaJo Smith if you'd like to attend.

Washington County holds their meetings on the first Monday of each month in Northfield; let Jackie know if you'd like to attend.

Please get your counties energized and meeting! The State office can assist you with zoom capability, and Amber Perry from East Montpelier has been hired as Field Staff for the northern portions of the state. She is working hard to increase membership and activity in each county.

That's it for this week – hunker down and be careful of those frigid temperatures this weekend. As always, please keep in touch with any of these issues – you can call Jackie at 802-426-3579 or email to crkdbrks@aol.com.

From the team – Bridget, Jill, Gerry, Tommy, Joe and Jackie