

When you call the Sergeant-at-Arms: Please leave your name & phone number

Say, "I'd like to leave a message for ___," Leave a clear message, such as:

"I do **not** support..." **OR** I am asking for your vote on ___"

Please refer to a bill number or name whenever possible.



THIS IS FOR THE USE OF FARM BUREAU MEMBERS ONLY!!

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 25, 2022

In this week's edition: On Farm Accessory Businesses, Broadband, Economic Development, Water Withdrawal, Act 250, On Farm Slaughter

H.704 ON FARM ACCESSORY BUSINESS

House Natural Resources heard testimony on the language which would allow a 1 acre development on a farm that was doing agritourism without Act 250 permits as well as requiring the farm to adhere to RAPs and excluding water when included in the calculation of an ingredient in a product produced on the farm. Beth Kennett, owner/operator of Liberty Hill Farm, testified with concerns about losing the pure definition of agritourism (which was established by Vermont years ago for the National Ag Census). Farm Bureau also testified with concerns on the unintended consequences of allowing development on a 1 acre site which would trigger stormwater regulations and permitting. We also commented on Section 3, which would exclude VTrans from having to mitigate prime ag soils under Act 250 at regional airports. Mitigation funds flow into the VT Housing and Conservation Board to conserve farmland and make it available to farmers; we feel the loss of these funds could be detrimental to the continued availability of land for farming or forestry.

S.166 BROADBAND CLEANUP

This bill will not be considered as a stand-alone but Senator Cummings, chair of Finance, has indicated language will be included in H.515 (Miscellaneous Insurance Bill) to allow for further testimony from the Department of Financial Regulation. Committee member Senator Hardy has promised to monitor the inclusion; discussion of the bill was postponed this week.

H.703 OMNIBUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BILL

On a vote of 139-0, the House unanimously approved a huge economic development bill that took over two hours to explain in detail and deal with questions. The language includes funding for a meat cutters program as well as a focus on technical and vocational education for both high school and adults. It also includes H.566, which is the study of needs and requirements for forestry which will result in recommendations to the Legislature; that piece also had a \$250,000 funding source for the VT Sustainable Jobs Fund to complete the report.

BIG BILLS IN PLAY ON THE HOUSE FLOOR

All three BIG money bills – Transportation, Capital and Appropriations – are on the schedule for debate and vote today, as the House has already called one roll call vote so members are on the record for spending the State’s money. These bills need to be voted out and over to the Senate for consideration. Undoubtedly, committees of conference will be appointed after the Senate makes changes – these are the bills that are often the last ones approved before adjournment.

SENATE AG BEGINS WALKTHROUGH OF HOUSE BILLS

H.709 (Housekeeping) and H.626 (Treated Articles) have dropped in to the Senate Agriculture Committee for consideration after being debated and passed by the House. Legislative Counsel offered an introduction of both by walking-through the language and setting up the next round of discussion.

H.466 WATER WITHDRAWAL

Senate Natural Resources now has possession of the Water Withdrawal language, which has caused major concern from farmers who irrigate crops. Several members of the study committee (which developed the bill) testified about the time they spent and the in-depth discussion of all aspects of water withdrawal in Vermont and the need for the bill. This was not how farmers reacted. No testimony was taken on this bill in House Natural Resources and the indication is that no farmers were asked to testify in front of the study committee last year. Ryan Patch, VAAFM, reported that through 2018, irrigation of crops only resulted in 4% of water usage and 1% for livestock watering. Two hundred forty-four farms on 785 acres of cropland removed around 355 million gallons of water, mainly from Chittenden, Washington and Rutland counties. Mr. Patch offered language to the committee regarding “de minimus” use of water and will provide his written suggestions to the committee. Senator Bray asked if VAAFM could pay for the cost of meters on farms and Senator Champion wondered if the State could set up a fund to help do so.

Farmers Justin Rich, Joseph Dutton and Charles Gray helped the Committee understand what was already occurring on farms and are looking forward to any compromise language that may be offered. More information on this next week, as the Committee works towards a conclusion.

S.234 – ACT 250 OFFERING

Senate Natural Resources offered S.234 on the floor this week for Second Reading, which resulted in much discussion and several amendments to be discussed today during Third Reading. This bill contains language in Section 15 requiring a Report by the Natural Resources Board on or before January 15, 2023, to address land use planning regulations for farms and On Farm Accessory Businesses. It also requires looking at adding Agricultural Business Innovation Zones with different levels of review within Act 250. This is a result of conversations with a group in Addison County that has purchased a defunct dairy farm and hopes to access agricultural exemptions under Act 250 for a “hub” of businesses that have some connection to agriculture. Farm Bureau will have to discuss policy for this in November.

ON FARM SLAUGHTER

House and Senate Agriculture Committees heard from many advocates this week in support of challenging the federal definition of on-farm slaughter, particularly in response to allowing multiple people to “own” an animal but not requiring them to be in attendance at the slaughter. VAAFM Counsel Steven Collier completed the session by reminding both Committees why the Agency was not going to change their stance on this issue, since it would challenge the ability of the State to use Federal inspectors in plants. Representative Partridge thanked all the advocates and asked Mr. Collier for further explanation of the Agency’s interpretation.

Due to crossover, this has been a pretty slow week regarding discussion of legislation, as both the Senate and the House need to debate bills out of committee, get them on the floor and vote them across to the other chamber. If a bill does not make crossover, it is usually considered “dead”, although the language can pop up as an amendment now and then.

If there is any specific bill you would like information on, please let us know at crkdbks@aol.com.

From the team – Bridget, Michael, Jill, Joe and Jackie

This weeks Under the Golden Dome was sponsored by:



Save up to 15% at IHG® Hotels & Resorts

Vermont Farm Bureau members can receive exclusive savings at select IHG® Hotels & Resorts properties including Holiday Inn®, Holiday Inn Express® and more.

Plan your getaway and **save 15%*** when you book and stay before **December 31, 2022** through our preferred partner rate.

