



For Immediate Release
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Alliance Hosts Meeting with Vermont Secretary of Agriculture

The Alliance hosted a meeting in early March with Secretary of Agriculture, Chuck Ross, to increase dialogue between the Vermont Agency of Agriculture and many different farmer and allied agricultural industry organizations about proposed changes to water quality regulations.



“An act relating to improving the quality of State waters,” referred to as H-35, includes provisions to bring approximately 4,000 Vermont farms into the focus of water quality oversight by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. There is a provision in the bill to use Vermont’s Current Use Taxation program, a system to appropriately tax farmland, as a regulatory compliance tool. The bill also includes steps to raise \$1.2 million of funding to hire new regulatory positions and increase grants to farms to implement upgrades necessary to meet water quality regulatory compliance.

The Vermont Farmers Watershed Alliance, Champlain Valley Farmers Water Coalition, Green Mountain Dairy Producers and NOFA-Vermont joined the Alliance in meeting with Ross and members of his staff. All of these organizations embrace the increased regulatory oversight proposed in H35, recognizing the need for agricultural producers to engage in water quality protection.

The foundation of Vermont’s agricultural water quality program, Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs), applies to all farms regardless of size. In 1996 and 2005 permitting requirements were developed for large and medium farms, requiring them to demonstrate compliance with the APPs. The new legislation proposes requiring all farms above a minimum threshold to certify compliance with the AAPs.

Historically Vermont has guaranteed cost share funding for any farm required to construct Best Management Practices (BMPs) to achieve regulatory compliance. Because BMPs usually require engineering and construction, they can be expensive to design and install. The new legislation proposes “decoupling” the availability of funding from the construction requirement. This has some in the farming community concerned about access to funding for the many new farms that will be required to certify compliance with Vermont’s water quality regulation.

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