

*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 18, 2022

In this week's edition: Farmworker Housing Funds, DMC reimbursement, CAFO hearing, Water fights, cannabis, conservation, on farm accessory business, water quality, housekeeping bills, leghold traps and Maple Ambassador information!

FARMWORKER HOUSING REPAIR PROGRAM APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

Anyone interested in taking out a no-interest, forgivable loan to repair or update your employee housing can apply for \$3,000 to \$30,000 in funds by contacting Charlie Glassberg at 802-810-8217 or cglassberg@getahome.org. You can complete the application form online or download the application form. You must be actively engaged in farming, have a total gross income less than \$900,000 and supply 3 years of tax returns. For information:

www.getahome.org/vermont-farmworker-housing-repair-loan-program/

The deadline for application is April 29, 2022. Please contact them today!!

DAIRY FARMERS – SIGN UP FOR DMC BY MARCH 25; STATE WILL REIMBURSE PREMIUMS UP TO \$7500

If you haven't contacted your local FSA (Farm Service Agency) to sign up for the Dairy Margin Coverage Program, please do so prior to March 25. The Governor has just signed the Budget Adjustment Act, which included \$2.6 million to provide reimbursement for the Tier 1 level premiums paid by individual dairy farmers in Vermont. The maximum level of the premium would be \$7,500; however, the reimbursement will be for the specific amount paid by the individual farmer for the coverage level desired in the program.

The application process is currently under development at the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets; however, the deadline for application is on or before July 1, 2022. Reimbursements will be made in the order received at the Agency of completed applications; after funds are exhausted, no further payments will be made unless another appropriation is made available.

This reimbursement was one of the outcomes of the Task Force to Revitalize the Dairy Industry and supported by the Legislature.

DEC TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETING ON DRAFT FOR MEDIUM CAFO

This new draft is open for formal public notice through May 10, 2022. A public hearing has been scheduled for April 26, 2022, from 6:30 to 8:30, with virtual and in-person options. (Virtual attendance is encouraged). The hearing will consist of a short introduction by the CAFO Program followed by time for comments and questions. DEC will respond in writing to everyone making comments during this period.

For more information and to read a current draft of the Medium CAFO General Permit:

<https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/CAFO>

Comments can be sent directly to Clarice.Cutler@vermont.gov using ENB ID: PN22.0009785)

WATER WITHDRAWAL – H.466

Senate Natural Resources listened to several witnesses this week highlight the inclusive process of the Study Committee last year. Unfortunately, Farm Bureau has heard from many fruit and vegetable growers in the last month indicating they have issues with the proposed language, which includes a 5,000 to 50,000 gallon/24 hour water withdrawal requirement that would include monitoring water use and possible future permitting. (House Natural Resources did not take any testimony from farmers using irrigation). We have sent a list of names with contact numbers to the committee and they will be taking up more testimony on this bill next week. This is only the second step in the process of making this bill into a law, but it is important that your voices be heard. If you would like to send comments to the committee, please let me know at crkdbrks@aol.com by Monday.

CANNABIS BILL – S.188

This language passed Third Reading on the Senate floor and is heading to the House. Senator Pearson from Senate Agriculture testified on behalf of changes he was hoping would be considered. Currently, growing cannabis is not considered a farming activity and will be under the purview of the Cannabis Board. He would like the Agency of Agriculture to be in charge of

the program, since he considers it farming. He would also like to remove the mandate of security fences around outdoor growing areas, stating this was an unnecessary cost to growers. This bill will continue to be discussed next week in House Ag.

BIODIVERSITY/CONSERVATION BILL – H.606

This language (conserving 30% of Vermont by 2030 and 50% by 2050) was debated on the House floor with questions about how it would affect Current Use and possibly shift the tax burden on to other Vermonters. There was also concern that future conservation of land could prohibit Vermont from addressing housing shortages to development. In the end, the roll call was 98-42 and Third Reading was ordered.

ON FARM ACCESSORY BUILDING/PRIME AG SOIL MITIGATION – H.704

Two drafts were combined in House Agriculture this week, after a much diluted version of H.704 was discussed and then amended by adding the exclusion from prime ag soil mitigation from VTrans/regional airports into the language. The building must be located on a tract of land devoted to farming, the farm is subject to RAPS and under the Act 250 definition of farming and the improvements do not alter more than one acre of land (including septic, water, driveway, parking and building). It would also exclude water from being included in the calculation of an ingredient in a product.

This same bill is being debated in House Natural Resources, although House Ways and Means actually has possession of the language. Members of that committee are concerned about another exemption from Act 250 and whether construction on an acre of land will trigger stormwater concerns and require permitting.

Section 3 would allow an exemption for VTrans having to pay ag soil mitigation fees for any development on regional airport lands. This was highly debated in House Agriculture but passed unanimously.

It remains to be seen how this language will move. The Agency of Agriculture has been pushing for the one acre change as well as the change in the water use calculation. Farm Bureau would like to see the agritourism and on farm business maintain the original purpose, which was to provide additional income as well as educational opportunities to farms. If anyone has any opinions on either of these issues, please let us know at crkdbrks@aol.com.

PETITION FILED TO EPA REQUESTING WATER QUALITY ISSUES GO TO ANR

The Conservation Law Foundation, Vermont Natural Resources Council and Lake Champlain Committee have jointly filed a petition requesting the EPA either force Vermont to correct its

failed administration of the Clean Water Act or step in to regulate it themselves. Currently, ANR and VAAFM both oversee clean water regulation on farms, leading to confusion and mistrust among farmers (according to these groups). The petition requests that EPA either withdraw Clean Water Act authority from Vermont or require corrective action giving ANR sole enforcement over agricultural water quality. Quotes by Lake Champlain staff indicate farmers are confused and the process is ineffective, subjecting farmers to inconsistent and unpredictable enforcement that fails to protect water quality.

Farm Bureau policy is that all enforcement issues regarding agriculture reside in the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

SENATE HOUSEKEEPING BILL – S.258

This time of year gets quite crazy for advocates trying to track bills! Even though House Ag started “walking” through S.258 to get acquainted with the language, the bill itself still has to get through Second Reading on the Senate floor and pass by Friday. The House Ag housekeeping bill is currently being discussed in Senate Agriculture; the committees are very far apart in content and undoubtedly a conference committee will be required. These are the two bills that are often used as negotiations and can be amended from either side. It may be that H.704 will be added to one of these to make it through a vote.

BECOME THE NEXT MAPLE AMBASSADOR!!

Whether the maple season is winding down or getting a second wind, it's time for young folks between the ages of 16 and 21 (as of 4/15/22) to compete for the honor of becoming the next Maple Ambassador. This position comes with the responsibility of representing all things maple at a variety of events as well as a \$2500 prize. For more information or to request an application, please contact Diane Marsh at drmarsh@myfairpoint.net or 644-2935.

BANNING LEGHOLD TRAPS – S.201

An amended draft will be discussed on the floor of the Senate today, removing the ban on use of leghold traps and requiring the Commissioner of Fish & Wildlife to develop best management practices for use of leghold traps and report back to the Legislature by January, 2023. There will also be a revision to rules on the taking of fur-bearing animals.

Your team has been following numerous bills in just about every committee; this report is just giving some of the highlights but obviously we don't write about every draft or discussion. Votes on bills not involving money have to get through both the House and Senate floors by tomorrow; next week, the "Big" bills – transportation, budget and capital – will be on the schedules and there may be little time in committees.

As soon as the smoke clears from all the Crossover activity, we'll be able to give you an update about where things stand.

If there is something you'd like specific information on, as always, please give call Kat at the office at 802-434-5646 or email crkdbirks@aol.com.

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