

# Farm Operation and Farm Structure

**Determinations** 



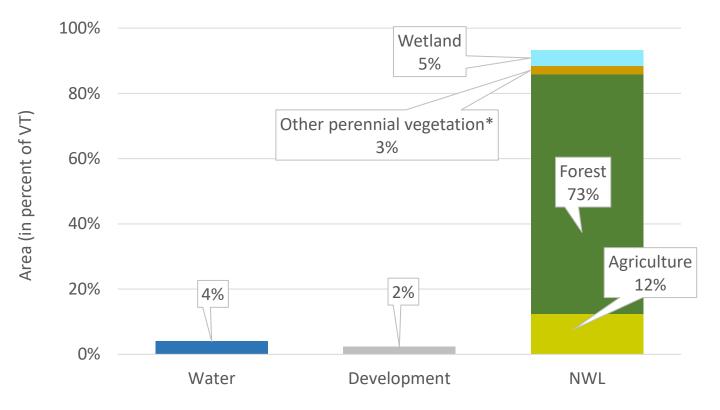


### **Outline:**

- Title 24: Section 4413(d)
- The Required Agricultural Practices
- Farm Operations
- Farm Structures
- Variances



# Natural & Working Lands (NWL) cover 94% of Vermont





Data source: 2016 National Land Cover Database; Images courtesy FPR

<sup>\*</sup>Other perennial vegetation includes grasslands, shrub/scrublands, and turf





# Authority

#### Section 4413(d) of Title 24 (Municipal and County Government)

https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24/117/04413

(d)(1)A bylaw under this chapter shall not regulate:

(A)required agricultural practices, including the construction of farm structures, as those practices are defined by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets

- (2) As used in this section:
  - (A) "Farm Structure" means a building, enclosure, or fence for housing livestock, raising horticultural or agronomic plants, or carrying out other practices associated with accepted agricultural or farming practices, including a silo, as "farming" is defined in 10 V.S.A. § 6001(22), but excludes a dwelling for human habitation.
- (3) A person shall notify a municipality of the intent to build a farm structure and shall abide by setbacks approved by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets. No municipal permit for a farm structure shall be required.



# Authority

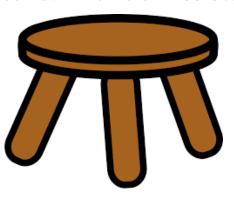
Title 6: Agriculture

**Chapter 215: Agricultural Water Quality** 

https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/06/215

#### **VT Ag Non-Point Pollution Control Program**

- Rules & Regulations
- Education & Outreach
- Technical & Financial Assistance



#### Title 6: Agriculture

Chapter 215: Agricultural Water Quality

Subchapter 1: General Provisions

§ 4801. Purpose; State policy

It is the purpose of this chapter to ensure that agricultural animal wastes do not enter the waters of this State. Therefore, it is State policy that:

(1) All farms meet certain standards in the handling and disposal of animal wastes, as provided by this chapter, and the cost of meeting these standards shall not be borne by farmers only, but rather by all members of society, who are in fact the beneficiaries. Accordingly, State and federal funds shall be made available to farms, regardless of size, to defray the major cost of complying with the requirements of this chapter. State and federal conservation programs to assist farmers should be directed to those farms that need to improve their infrastructure to prohibit direct discharges or bring existing water pollution control structures into compliance with U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) Natural Resources Conservation Service standards. Additional resources should be directed to education and technical assistance for farmers to improve the management of agricultural wastes and protect water quality.

(2) Officials who administer the provisions of this chapter:

(A) shall educate farmers and other affected citizens on requirements of this chapter through an outreach collaboration with farm associations and other community groups;

- (B) shall, in the process of rendering official decisions, afford farmers and other affected citizens an opportunity to be heard and give consideration to all interests expressed; and
- (C) may provide grants from a program established under this chapter to eligible Vermont municipalities, local or regional governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and citizen groups in order to provide direct financial assistance to farms in implementing conservation practices. (Added 2003, No. 149 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. June 3, 2004; amended 2013, No. 83, § 10, eff. June 10, 2013.)



#### VAAFM 6 V.S.A. Ch. 215 Ag Water Quality

Education & Outreach

#### 3,097 ATTENDEES

REACHED THROUGH EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

#### **249 HOURS**

OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNTIES FOR VT FARMERS

#### 111 EVENTS

EDUCATIONAL EVENTS HELD STATEWIDE AND ONLINE

#### **908 VISITS**

FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BY VAAFM STAFF AND PARTNERS



Heather Darby of UVM Extension leads a workshop on precision agriculture with a young participant

Technical & Financial Assistance

#### 43,290 ACRES

FIELD CONSERVATION PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED

#### 136 PRACTICES

STRUCTURAL CONSERVATION PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED

#### \$4.3 MILLION

STATE EXPENDITURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

#### \$3.8 MILLION

FEDERAL EXPENDITURE LEVERAGED

#### \$1.7 MILLION

INVESTED BY VERMONT FARMERS



Drilled cover crop funded though the FAP program helps reduce erosion

Inspection & Enforcement

36 LF0s 113 MF0s 256 CSF0s

NUMBERS OF REGULATED OPERATIONS

#### 64 APPLICATORS

**CERTIFIED CUSTOM MANURE APPLICATORS** 

### **2,512 ACRES**

OF PRODUCTION AREA INSPECTED BY AAFM FOR RAP, AND/OR MFO/LFO PERMIT COMPLIANCE

# 76 ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

ASSOCIATED WITH 159 ALLEGED VIOLATIONS

#### VERMONT

#### REQUIRED AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES RULE

**FOR** 

THE AGRICULTURAL NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION CONTROL PROGRAM

(Effective November 23, 2018)



### AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS WATER QUALITY DIVISION

116 STATE STREET MONTPELIER, VERMONT 05620-2901 phone: (802) 828-2431; fax (802) 828-1410 AGR.RAP@Vermont.gov

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### The Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs)

#### **Brief History**

- Accepted Agricultural Practices 1995-2016
- VAAFM was directed by the Legislature to draft the RAPs pursuant to Act 64, signed into law on June 16, 2015.
- 2016 RAPs amended per ACT 64
- 2022-2023 proposed amendments to include TSP certification

#### What changed?

- Act 64 required that the revised RAPs include requirements for:
  - small farm certification,
  - nutrient storage,
  - soil health,
  - buffer zones,
  - livestock exclusion, and
  - nutrient management.



### **Definitions**

- 2.14 Farm means a parcel or parcels of land owned, leased, or managed by a person and devoted primarily to farming, as defined in Section 2.16 of this rule, and that meets the threshold criteria as established in Section 3 of this rule, provided that the lessee controls the leased lands to the extent they would be considered as part of the lessee's own farm. Indicators of control may include whether the lessee makes day-to-day decisions concerning the cultivation or other farming-related use of the leased lands and whether the lessee manages the land for farming during the leased period
- 2.15 <u>Farm Structure</u> means a structure that is used by a person for farming, including a silo, a building to house livestock or raise horticultural or agronomic plants, or customarily used to carry out the agricultural practices defined in Section 3.2 of this rule. A farm structure includes a barnyard or waste management system, either of which is created from an assembly of materials, including the supporting fill necessary for structural integrity, but excludes a dwelling for human habitation. A farm structure also must be used by a person who can demonstrate meeting the minimum threshold criteria as found in Section 3.1 of this rule
- 2.16 <u>Farming</u> means: (a) the cultivation or other use of land for growing food, fiber, Christmas trees, maple sap, or horticultural, viticultural, and orchard crops; or (b) the raising, feeding, or management of livestock, poultry, fish, or bees; or (c) the operation of greenhouses; or (d)the production of maple syrup; or (e) the on-site storage, preparation, and sale of agricultural products principally produced on the farm; or (f) the on-site storage, preparation, production, and sale of fuel or power from agricultural products or wastes principally produced on the farm; or (g) the raising, feeding, or management of four or more equines owned or boarded by the farmer, including training, showing, and providing instruction and lessons in riding, training, and the management of equines.



# Who is regulated by the RAPs?

- Operate 4 or more acres for farming; OR
- Operate 4 or more acres for the raising of at least one of the following:

4 horses

5 cattle, cows, or bison

15 pigs/swine

15 goats

15 sheep

15 cervids (deer, elk)

50 turkeys

50 geese

100 laying hens

250 broilers, pheasant,

Chukar partridge, or

Corturnix quail

3 camelids (alpacas,

llamas)

4 ratites (emus)

30 rabbits

100 ducks

1,000 pounds cultured

trout/aquatics

Other livestock type or

combinations

- Have filed a <u>1040(F) Tax Form</u> once in the last 2 years; OR
- Earn an <u>annual gross income of more than</u>
   \$2,000 from the sale of agricultural products;
   OR
- Has an <u>approved prospective business plan</u> that describes how the farm will meet the threshold requirements of RAP Section 3.1



Photo: VAAFM



### Farm Sizes

- Small Farm Operations (SFO)
- Certified Small Farm Operations (CSFO)
  - Annually certify
  - Inspected every 7 years
- Medium Farm Operations (MFO)
  - Annually report
  - General 5-Year Permit
  - Inspected every 3 years
- Large Farm Operations (LFO)
  - Annually report
  - Individual Permit
  - Inspected every year



Photo: VAAFM



## Who is regulated by local towns/municipalities?

"Non-RAP Operations"

- Parcels smaller than 4 acres that
- Gross less than \$2,000 from Ag Sales
- Have not filed a 1040(F) once in last two years

A farm can demonstrate they are a farm that should be regulated under the RAPs by income or a prospective business plan.

Secretary can designate that a Non-RAP Operation must follow the RAPs if causing an adverse water quality impact.



Photo: https://modernfarmer.com/2014/07/raising-backyard-chickens/



# What Activities do the RAPs Regulate?

# 3.2 The agricultural practices on farms meeting the minimum threshold criteria set forth in Section 3.1 that are governed by this rule include:

- (a) the confinement, feeding, fencing, and watering of livestock;
- (b) the storage and handling of agricultural wastes principally produced on the farm;
- (c) the collection of maple sap principally produced from trees on the farm and/or production of maple syrup from sap principally produced on the farm;
- (d) the preparation, tilling, fertilization, planting, protection, irrigation, and harvesting of crops;
- (e) the ditching and subsurface drainage of farm fields and the construction of farm ponds;
- (f) the stabilization of farm fields adjacent to banks of surface water, and the establishment and maintenance of vegetated buffer zones and riparian buffer zones;
- (g) the construction and maintenance of farm structures, farm roads, and associated infrastructure;
- (h) the on-site storage, preparation, production, and sale of fuel or power from agricultural products or wastes principally produced on the farm;
- (i) the on-site storage, preparation, and sale of agricultural products principally produced on the farm from raw agricultural commodities principally produced on the farm;
- (j) the on-site storage of agricultural inputs for use on the farm including, but not limited to, lime, fertilizer, pesticides, compost and other soil amendments, and the equipment necessary for operation of the farm; and
- (k) the management of livestock mortalities produced on the farm.



# Is a farm determination required?

#### **IT DEPENDS!**

 There is no Statewide requirement that SFOs "register" with the State related to the RAP regulations

CSFOs, MFOs, and LFOs have annual certification or permitting requirements

- When asked the State can provide its opinion on whether an operation is "farming" (typically submitted by the landowner)
- Some towns have adopted guidance/practice to have farms get farm determinations

ex) Milton, Charlotte, Warren

(2) The Zoning Administrator may request that landowners provide a written determination from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets as to whether proposed land development qualifies as an exempt farm structure.

1103.B **Farm Structures.** In accordance with state statute, landowners do not need to obtain a zoning permit to build a farm structure in accordance with state regulations and the following:

- (1) Landowners must submit a zoning permit application demonstrating that proposed development qualifies as an exempt farm structure, but they do not have to pay the associated application fee.
- (2) The Administrative Officer may require landowners to provide a written determination from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets as to whether proposed development qualifies as an exempt farm structure.



## Example Farm Operations – RAP Regulated?

We have a 17-acre farm and grow fruits and vegetables, raise swine and poultry for meat production and raise goats for dairy. We grow for our own personal use and for sale. We grossed more than \$2,000 ast year from sales. We currently have 3 pigs, 12 goats, and 60 chickens."

YES, this is a farm regulated by the RAPs.

We recently bought a 3-acre farm and have started to grow flowers. We plan to sell our flowers through a summer CSA and wholesale to a local farmers market. We anticipate making over \$2,000 annually once the flowers are mature and ready to sell.

MAYBE, If the farm is seeking a farm determination for this year they would need to submit a business plan to be reviewed and approved by the Agency.

We have a 1-acre parcel in our village and have 25 laying hens and grow vegetables. We use the eggs and vegetables for our own consumption and do not sell any produce

NO, this person may be engaged in agricultural activities but does not meet the threshold requirements to be regulated by the RAPs. They need to comply with local zoning bylaws as applicable.



# Why do farms request farm determinations and farm structure determinations?

- 1. Construction of a Farm Structure
- Construction & Alternative Setbacks
- 3. Accessory On Farm Business (AOFB)
- 4. Town requested they get one
- 5. For their own records/understanding



# How do farms request farm determinations and/or structure determinations?

- 1. Landowner submits an online Farm Determination Request Form
  - 1. Farm Determination
  - 2. Farm Determination and Farm Structure Determination/Variance
  - 3. Farm Structure Determination/Variance
- 2. Provides supporting information/documents
  - 1. Business Plans
  - 2. For construction Letter informing town of proposed construction
  - 3. For construction Site plan including building location, setbacks, nearby surface waters, parcel boundaries, roads, wetlands, etc.
- 3. Agency reviews, notifies town ZA, and provides determination



### **Determination Letters**

- Description of Farm
- Farming Activities
- What Threshold Requirements are met
- Proposed construction, description of structure and proposed use
- Copy sent to town ZA



AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MA 116 State Street Montpelier, VT 05620-2901 Agriculture.vermont.gov

6/22/2022

Adam's Berry Farm Adam Hausmann (via email: adam@adamsberryfarm.com) 985 Bingham Brook Road Charlotte, VT 05445

RE: Determination of Farm Operation

Dear Adam Hausmann.

The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (the Agency) renders opinions, based on the Agency's Required Agricultural Practices Regulations (RAPs) as to whether an individual is farming, if the RAPs apply to the operation, and/or whether a structure is used for farming and is therefore considered a farm structure.

#### Farm Operation Determination

This letter is documenting that activities occurring on 20 acres of a 35 total acre farm operation, located at 985 Bingham Brook Road, Charlotte, VT, meets the definition of "farming," per the RAPs.

Section 2.14 of the RAPs in part, states "farm" means a parcel or parcels of land owned, leased, or managed by a person and devoted primarily to farming, ... and that meets the threshold criteria as established in Section 3 of the RAPs, provided that the lessee controls the leased lands to the extent they would be considered as part of the lessee's own farm.

Section 2.16 of the RAPs states "farming" means:

- the cultivation or other use of land for growing food, fiber, Christmas trees, maple sap, or horticultural, silvicultural, and orchard crops; or
- (b) the raising, feeding, or management of livestock, poultry, fish, or bees; or
- (c) the operation of greenhouses; or
- d) the production of maple syrup; or
- (e) the on-site storage, preparation, and sale of agricultural products principally produced on the farm; or
- (f) the on-site storage, preparation, production, and sale of fuel or power from agricultural products or wastes principally produced on the farm; or
- (g) the raising, feeding, or management of four or more equines owned or boarded by the farmer, including training, showing, and providing instruction and lessons in riding, training, and the management of equines.

You have described your farm operation as: A VOF certified organic berry farm established in 2001 that grows strawberries, blueberries and raspberries primarily for the wholesale market. Also operate a pick your own and attend farmers markets,, meets the above definition of farming by meeting the provisions listed below:

- (a) the cultivation or other use of land for growing food, fiber, Christmas trees, maple sap, or horticultural, viticultural, and orchard crops; or
- (e) the on-site storage, preparation, and sale of agricultural products principally produced on the farm; or



What does the determination do for a farm?

# Determines that the farm is regulated by the State Required Agricultural Practices



# What does the farm determination <u>NOT</u> do for a farm?

- A Farm Determination Letter from the Agency of Agriculture is not a "Free Pass"
- It does not exempt the Farm from compliance with any other provisions of the RAPs or any other laws or regulations.
- It does automatically exempt them from meeting local setback requirements
  - There is a Variance process for alternative setbacks
- It does not provide Tax Exemption (Department of Taxes)
- It is does not enroll the farm in Current Use



# What does the farm <u>structure</u> determination NOT do for a farm?

Does not exempt the Farm from compliance with any other provisions of the RAPs or any other laws or regulations.

Construction requirements outlined in RAP Section 9 include:

- notifying the local zoning administrator of the proposed project prior to construction (RAPs Section 9(a)(1));
- obtaining a Flood Hazard Area and River Corridor Permit from ANR if construction is in Flood Hazard Areas and River Corridors (RAPs Section 9(a)(3)); and
- obtaining authorization from ANR before commencing with land disturbance or construction activities if construction will disturb one or more acres of land (RAPs Section 9(a)(4)).

\*ACT 250

\*Wetlands (ANR)

\*Vermont Fire and Building Codes – Title 20 of the V.S.A Chapter 173

\*Solid and Hazardous Waste (ANR)

\*Wastewater Management (ANR)

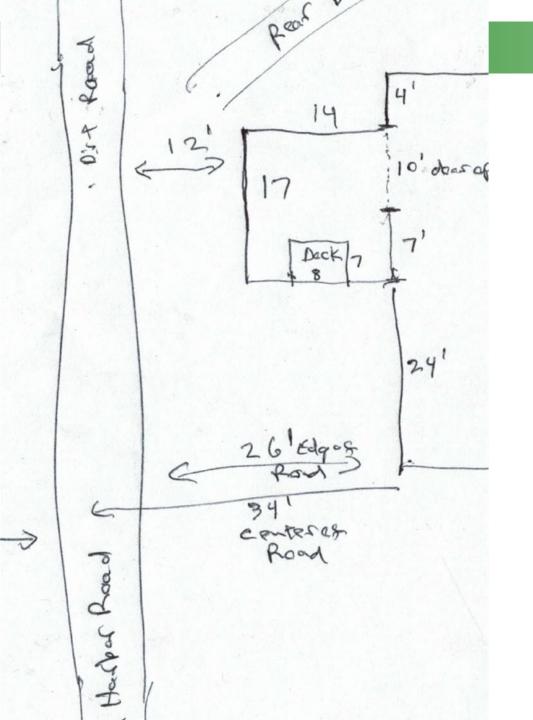
\*Alterations of Streams (ANR)



Questions?









### **RAP Variances**

- Municipal
- Field Stacking/Mortality Sites
- Equivalent NMP Standard
- Alternative Cover Cropping/FFS
- Emergency & Seasonal Spreading Exemptions
- Exceptions to the required vegetative buffer zone
- WSF/Conservation Practices





# Appendix A. Process for Obtaining a Variance Farm Structure/Municipal Setback

- 1) Farm Submits the request with the required information <a href="https://agriculture.vermont.gov/form/farm-determination-form">https://agriculture.vermont.gov/form/farm-determination-form</a>
- 2) Farm & VAAFM Contact Town ZA
- 3) VAAFM sends Public Notice/Comment period 7 business days
- 3) VAAFM Variance Review Committee
  Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of every month
- 4) VAAFM notifies Landowner & Town ZA of decision



# Criteria used to review the request from Appendix A:

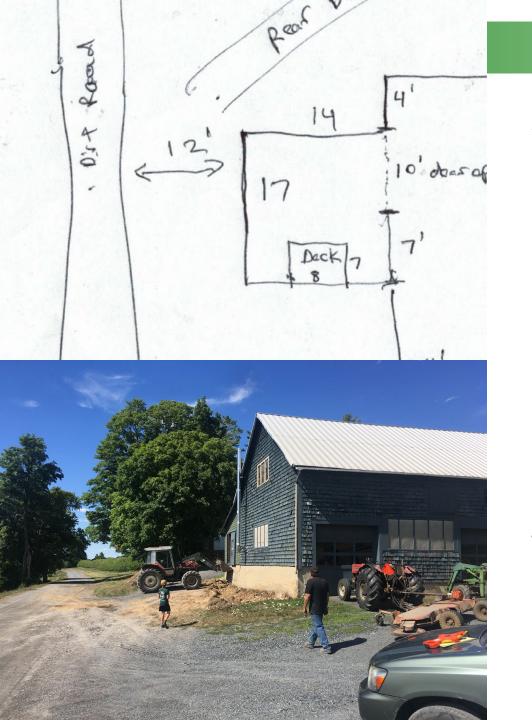
- (1) there are unique existing physical conditions or exceptional topographical or other physical constraints peculiar to the particular property that would create a hardship for the farm operation;
- (2) because of such physical conditions or constraints, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in strict conformity with the provisions of this rule and that the authorization of an alternative setback is therefore necessary to enable the reasonable operation of the farm;
- (3) the hardship has not been created by the applicant;
- (4) the alternative setback, if authorized by the Secretary, will not substantially or permanently impair the appropriate use or development of adjoining property, nor be detrimental to the public health, safety, and welfare; and
- (5) the variance, if authorized by the Secretary, will represent the minimum alternative that will afford relief and will represent the least deviation possible from this rule.





# Alternative Setback to Front Yard Setback

- Town setback is 150' from centerline of road
- Farm proposed 44' from centerline of road, congruent with the existing barn
- Request stated reasons such as topography, land grade, electricity, and ideal location as expansion of existing barn (reasonable operation of the farm)
- Review Committee approved





# Alternative Setback to Front Yard Setback

- Town setback is 65' from centerline of road
- Farm proposal a 12' from edge of road
- Town had 25' from centerline Right Of Way
- Could not grant an alternative setback as proposed due to siting in town ROW
- \* The Agency cannot approve alternate setbacks from State wetland regulations, nor approve construction within Highway rights-of-way.
- Landowner pursued variance through town process, and it was awarded by the Town





### Alternative Setback to Side Yard Setback & Surface Water Setback

- RAP and Town 50' setback from surface waters
- Town setback is 25' from property lines
- Farm proposal 8.5' from surface water
- Farm proposal 11.5' from property lines
- Total Farm Acreage: 36 acres
- Agency did not approve request as it's opinion was there were alternate locations on the 36-acre farm





# Alternative Setback to Front Yard Setback

- Town setback is 60' from centerline of road
- Farm proposal 40' from centerline of road
- Farm proposal is 10' from property line to meet property line setback requirements
- Location limited by driveway to milkhouse, proposed that new location most suitable for access for customers driving in and out, safety around traffic, congruent with existing buildings
- Agency approved the request



WATER QUALITY DIVISION

# Section 9. (b) Setbacks Approved by the Secretary

- Waste Storage in an existing production area
- Waste Storage in a new production area
- Water Quality Conservation Practice in a new or existing production area



Water Quality Division
116 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05620-2901
Phone: (802) 828-2431 Fax: (802) 828-1410
Email: AGR.WaterQuality@Vermont.gov
Web: http://agriculture.vermont.gov/fap

#### Required Agricultural Practices Rule (RAP) Variance Request Form Siting of Waste Storage Facility or Water Quality Conservation Practice

Business Name:

Owner:

Operator:

Business Mailing Address:

Physical Address of Farm Requesting a Variance:

Phone Number:

Email:

Type of Variance(s) Requested:

Construction of a Waste Storage Facility in Existing Production Area per RAP §§ 9(a)(5) and 9(b)

NOTE: If a farm is requesting an alternative setback from local zoning bylaws, the farm will need to submit a complete petition in accordance with RAP Appendix A: Process for obtaining variances.

□Construction of a Waste Storage Facility in a New Production Area per RAP §§ 9(a)(6) and 9(b)
□Construction of a Water Quality Conservation Practice per RAP §§ 9a(5)(B) and 9(a)(6)(A)(ii)

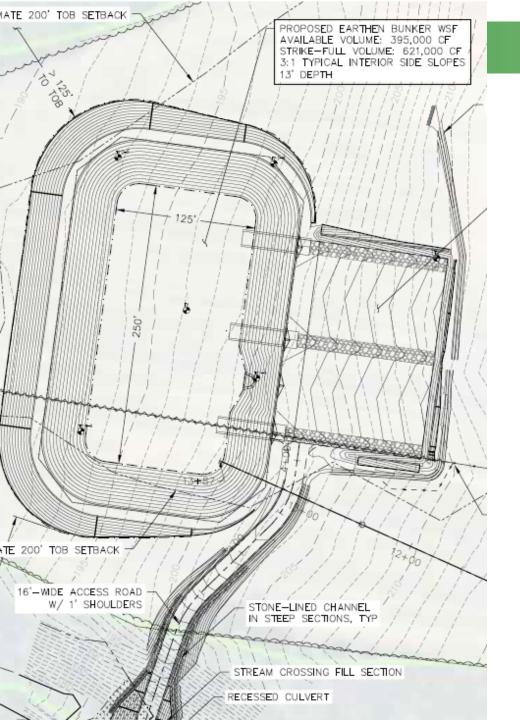
Please answer the questions below and provide a <u>site map</u> of the proposed construction project. The site map should include the proposed structure(s) and distances from property lines, public or private water supplies, and the top of the bank of any surface water.

Do unique existing physical conditions or exceptional topographical or other physical constraints peculiar to the
particular property prevent the development in accordance with this rule? Explain.



# Criteria used to review the request from Section 9 (b)

- (1) unique existing physical conditions or exceptional topographical or other physical constraints peculiar to the particular property that would prevent development in accordance with this rule;
- (2) because of such physical conditions or constraints, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in conformity with the provisions of this rule and that the approval of an alternative setback is therefore necessary to enable the reasonable operation of the farm;
- (3) the alternative setback, if approved by the Secretary, will be the site that is the best available on the farm for the purposes of protecting ground water quality or surface water quality; and
- (4) the setback, if approved by the Secretary, will represent the minimum alternative setback necessary to allow for reasonable operation of the farm.





# WSF Example

- New WSF proposed in a new production area, thus RAP required setback 200' from surface water
- Farm/Engineers proposed 125' setback from surface water
- Review committee consulted engineer, approved the request due to topographic restraints





# Barn Construction Example

- Existing production area, requiring new construction to be 50' from surface waters
- Farm proposed barn expansion within 50' surface water setback
- Review Committee consulted with farm inspector, and previous farm history.
- Variance was denied, due to an alternative location



# Accessory On Farm Business (AOFB)

- Act 143: A municipality cannot prohibit a farm from having an AOFB; May require;
  - Site Plan Review and performance standards
- VAAFM May provide "farm determination"
- TOWN provides "AOFB determination"

https://agriculture.vermont.gov/develop ment/accessory-farm-businesses

- (I) The storage, preparation, processing, and sale of qualifying products, provided that more than 50 percent of the total annual sales are from qualifying products that are principally produced on the farm at which the business is located.
- (II) Educational, recreational, or social events that feature agricultural practices or qualifying products, or both. Such events may include tours of the farm, farm stays, tastings and meals featuring qualifying products, and classes or exhibits in the preparation, processing, or harvesting of qualifying products.



### Work in Progress

- AOFB implementation & Natural Resources Board "Farming" Discussions
  - Report due to legislature January 2023
- Follow Up Visits and Check-Ins on New Farms/Prospective Business Plans
- 3) Outreach & Communications with local towns and municipalities







### Questions & Feedback?

1) How can the Agency of Agricultural aid your town in the farm operation, farm structure space?

2) What are you interested in learning more about?



### **Contact Info & Resources**

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Farm & Farm Structure Determinations, Variance Requests

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Ag WQ Specialist Supervisor
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(802)477-3263

Julia Scheier Emerging Issues Specialist Accessory On Farm Business <u>Julia.Scheier@Vermont.Gov</u> (802)522-7042

#### Links to VAAFM Web Resources

- RAPs <a href="https://agriculture.vermont.gov/rap">https://agriculture.vermont.gov/rap</a>
- Municipal Land Use Limitations https://agriculture.vermont.gov/land-use-renewable-energy/municipal-bylaw-land-use-limitations
- <u>https://agriculture.vermont.gov/water-quality/regulations/farm-definitions-and-determinations</u>
- Online Determination Form https://agriculture.vermont.gov/form/farm-determination-form
- Accessory On Farm Business (AOFB) https://agriculture.vermont.gov/development/accessor
   y-farm-businesses