

Jacques Parent Testimony
Regarding CLF Petition to Require Mandatory
Pollution Control in the Missisquoi Basin Plan
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
116 State St. Montpelier, VT 05620
July 18, 2014

I am Jacques Parent, a dairy farmer from Swanton, Vermont.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony and to participate in this public hearing process.

I operate a six-hundred and fifty cow dairy in Swanton, Vermont with my wife, three daughters and son-in-laws. Our family farm supports six families and an additional eight full time employees. The main objective of our farm is to produce a high quality product for consumers, while integrating family life and preserving Vermont's rich farming heritage and landscape.

Our farm has taken a lot of pride in producing high quality milk for the past 42 years.

As a dairy farmer we rely on and appreciate the natural land that we work. We live on this land and understand the importance of protecting natural resources.

Our farm operates under a Medium Farm Operating permit as required by the State of Vermont and is about half way through the application process for a Large Farm Operating permit. Under this permit we measure, track, record and comply with a variety of requirements, including all of the nutrients that are applied to our farm fields. This information is critical to our operation not only to remain in compliance but also to maximize the resources that we have to manage our farm.

I have a major stake in following regulations and best management practices to protect the health of our family, our cows and the environment. Quality water is essential to my dairy farm. As dairy farmers, we provide our cows with clean water, which contributes to high-quality milk.

State and local government agencies, such as the Agency of Agriculture, regularly inspect and test the water on dairy farms, including mine. In addition, our State agencies have rigorous processes for granting permits to dairy farms, for inspecting and testing water, and for recycling the manure from cows. Dairy farmers abide by clean water laws that regulate how manure is applied on cropland, so nutrients go into crops, not groundwater.

To ensure that cow manure is used properly, soil experts have identified specific amounts to apply to various crops. Following these guidelines ensures that the nutrients are used by the crops. As part of this effort we follow technically sound manure-recycling plans that are customized to our individual farms.

Our farm has taken many actions to utilize our limited resources to comply and address any areas on the farm that could negatively impact water quality.

- 1) We have discontinued the use of certain feed storage bunkers that could have generated uncaptured leachate and have also taken measures to capture leachate on the farm for all existing and new bunker silos.
- 2) We have maintained a Nutrient Management Plan for many years and follow the plan directly for appropriate nutrient application on our farm fields.
- 3) A portion of our farm fields lie along a marsh area and we are in the process of expanding our buffer strips to as much as 800' in certain higher risk areas.
- 4) We have made efforts to implement cover crops on an annual basis but unfortunately the opportunity to have a viable cover crop is very weather dependent.
- 5) In order to keep rain water out of one of our outside feeding areas, we constructed a roof to help us better manage and control the manure in that area of the farm.
- 6) In addition, when we built our milking facility we made every effort to responsibly recycle the water that we utilize on the farm.

As a dairy farmer, I support practices that make economic sense, help the environment, and are socially responsible to our communities. Contributions to the local economy by dairy farmers are measured not only in dollars and cents, but also in the well-being of the communities where we live and work.

I believe that it is critically important to continue to make strides in improving production practices that mitigate environmental impact; but also believe that dairy farms are the backbones of Vermont communities and keeping them economically viable is important. I understand that this is a delicate balance.

I believe that making it a statewide initiative to educate all dairy farmers on the accepted agricultural practices (AAP's) would be a great initiative to continue to improve our state waterways. I also believe that the best way to manage Vermont dairy farms from an environmental standpoint is to base it, in part, on weather conditions. Incorporating flexibility into some aspects of the current regulations could assist in improving water quality. For example, allowing the State to modify the manure spreading bans based on weather conditions.

Any actions that the State of Vermont considers regarding the expansion of compliance measures beyond the AAP's could put a significant financial burden on many dairies and the State cannot afford to lose additional farms.

When I started the family farm with my father in 1972 there were seven operating dairy farms on Rte 7 between Swanton Village and Canada. Today I am the only one remaining. This is a trend that needs to be recognized and curtailed, which is why I believe we need to carefully balance additional regulation with the responsible stewardship of our natural resources.

I believe that if any new expanded compliance measures are implemented, they need to be supported with sufficient financial resources to ensure that we can maintain and hopefully build upon Vermont's dairy farm base.

Dairy farmers and the State of Vermont both have integral roles in protecting the State's watersheds and agriculture as a whole. This is a delicate balance that requires continued efforts by dairy farmers coupled with realistic expectations by the State that are backed with sufficient resources for implementation.

I would again like to thank Secretary Ross for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

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