Secretary Chuck Ross
Vermont Agency of Agriculture
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August 8, 2014

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Dear Secretary Ross,

This letter is to provide you additional comments you requested from me on potential modifications to the current winter spreading ban at the recent CLF hearing on July 18; Hearing regarding CLF Petition to require mandatory pollution control in the Missisquoi Basin Plan.

In my testimony I stated:

"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."

Currently under the existing winter spreading ban, dairy farmers need to spread as much manure as possible before the winter ban starts to ensure that they have the necessary storage for winter manure and oftentimes are required to start spreading as early as possible in the spring. These actions are necessary due to the fact that there is currently limited flexibility with regards to the spreading ban dates. The issue is not that the manure pits do not provide sufficient storage but that farmers need to assume that after December 15th there is no guarantee when they can get back onto their fields. As a result of this they have to bring down the level of their manure pits to prepare in the event that they cannot get on their fields April 1st. These actions are not fundamentally the best means for farmers to manage the valuable resource that manure provides. In addition, due to unpredictable weather conditions, there are times when manure probably should not be applied when the ban is not in effect that could result in increased run-off.

I think that there could be site specific winter spreading that could allow for safe spreading during the winter months. Certified Nutrient Management plans can and should serve as the tool to develop environmentally sound strategies for winter spreading that are specific to the individual farm operation. This could be the basis for allowing more flexibility with the dates of the winter spreading ban if the farmer is doing an excellent job with his/her Certified Nutrient Management Plan and AAP's.

I believe that there are fields that are suitable for winter spreading. There may also be fields that may require some additional mitigation practices that could also be used for winter spreading.

For those farm operations that do not have certified nutrient management plans they would be required to follow the Secretary's announced winter spreading ban dates.

Sincerely,

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