

September 14, 2020

Dear Legislators,

The undersigned organizations, farmers, itinerant slaughterers and meat processing facilities urge the legislature to address the pressing issue of the lack of sufficient capacity for meat processing in the State of Vermont by increasing the allowances for animals that can be slaughtered via our [On-Farm Slaughter law](#).

As the [testimony from Ellen Kahler](#) of the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund has shown, the seasonal bottlenecks occurring in slaughterhouses have dramatically worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic - all slaughter facilities are maxed out for an extended period of time. This is due to the pandemic creating fears about food insecurity, which led to both an increase in demand for locally-produced meat and an uptick in Vermonters raising livestock.

While longer-term solutions are needed, On-Farm Slaughter is the only tool in our toolbox to immediately address this economic issue. It is a decentralized opportunity for farmers to increase direct-to-consumer relationships and sales - a pivot that opens markets, similar to the increase in CSA sales for vegetable farms when restaurants and farmers markets had to shut down. On-Farm Slaughter is part of peoples' food sovereignty¹, which currently proves to be essential for our food system's resilience.

Making On-Farm Slaughter a more viable option **for farmers and consumers by increasing the number of animals that can be processed** could significantly relieve farmers and homesteaders of the economic hardship of having to keep and feed their animals through the winter months in a year where hay harvests have been poor due to drought.

On-Farm Slaughter is a viable opportunity that unfortunately is not widely known. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets does not promote this law through outreach and education.

Livestock managers need to be aware of the requirements of the On-Farm Slaughter law: that the animals must be sold alive and not as meat after the slaughter; that farmers are allowed to organize the slaughter by arranging for an itinerant slaughterer while they are legally not allowed to perform the slaughter themselves; that carcasses can be halved and quartered and that multiple owners can share the purchase of the live animal; etc. **Legally, there is no obstacle for farmers to organize CSA's with animal shares among their members.**

Additional improvements to the commercial capacity for slaughter and meat processing must be addressed in the upcoming biennium.

To address the immediate need for additional slaughter capacity, we urge the legislature to increase the allowances for animals slaughtered via On-Farm Slaughter and to hold VAAFMM accountable for active outreach and education in this regard.

¹ **Food sovereignty** is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations
As defined by the National Family Farm Coalition

Signed,

Caroline Gordon, Legislative Director, for Rural Vermont
Maddie Kempner, Policy Director, NOFA-VT
Mary Lake, Itinerant Slaughterer, Can-Do Shearing
Justin Sauerwein, Farmer and Owner of the Royal Butcher
Carl Russel, Farmer, Earth Wise Farm
David and Yesenia Major, Farmer, Vermont Shepherd
Chuck Wooster, Farmer, Sunrise Farm
Bredon Bless, Farmer, Bread and Butter Farm
Lara Dickson, Farmer, Next Chapter Farm
Adam Wilson, Farmer, Brush Brook Community Farm
Maxine Favreau, Farmer, Silver Lining Farm
Philip Wagenbach, Farmer, Stillwater Farm
Cameron McMahon, Farmer, Tree of Life Farm
Thomas and Christine Moseley, Farmers, Kilborn Hill Farm
John and Lauren Cleary, Farmers, Cleary Family Farm
Shona Sanford-Long, Farmer, Flying Dog Farm
Neal & Rebekah Perry, Farmers, Village Farm
Mary Ellen, Farmer, High Goose Farm
Karissa Smith and Kyle Bowler, Farmers
Caroline Persson, Farmer
Peter Backman, Farmer
Elizabeth Wood, New Leaf CSA Farm
Post Oil Solutions
Brattleboro Winter Farmers' Market
Keri Ryan, Manager, Capital City Farmers Market
Rachel and Ryan Yoder, Farmers, Yoder Farm

Additionally, 101 respondents to an ongoing poll want to see the allowances for On-Farm Slaughter to be increased (thereof 49 farmers and 30 homesteaders)

