Date: 10/26/2012 Meeting with West Pawlet Area Farmers

Attendees: 11 total

These summaries reflect a range of views expressed on the issues as discussed during informal conversation in small focus group meetings. They do not reflect the formal or public position of any one group of people, organization or coalition. All errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of EMC/CBI.

Italics contain comments from attendees that are indicative of common elements, themes and sentiments expressed. The conversations were not recorded and, therefore, they may not be verbatim quotations.

I. **What practices, if any, does your farm conduct to improve water quality?**

A. Cover crops

B. Rip rap- that keeps the topsoil out of the river. This is not a cost share so farmers who do this have to pay for it on their own but those that have invested in this practice report that it works well. The goal is to protect the banks and this does it.

C. Drag line systems

D. Lagoons – acknowledged as very effective but a PR nightmare because of the smell. Although expensive to put in if the farm was small.

E. Buffers

F. Tile drains in some cases, depends on soil

II. **What Practices Are Not Working Well?**

A. Aeration has its pluses and minuses depending on where the practice is used on the farm. It's very hard on the equipment. Over a two year period, did not see appreciable difference in preventing manure run off or a yield increase that was significant enough to make it helpful. On pasture land, saw manure was absorbed quicker, grass did better.

We have an NRCS contract so we will continue the practice but otherwise no.

B. Spreading ban—discussion of differences with NY where winter spreading is permitted on specified fields. Discussion of the 15 years this practice has been in effect and the lake is not improving.

C. Storage of manure is expensive – hard to move, need equipment, facilities, time to set aside to do it when it has to be done in response to a time frame that may not be what a farmer thinks would be the correct thing for his farm.

III. **Feedback on Practices, Regulations & Ideas to Improve Water Quality**

A. Nutrient management plans for smaller farms**:**

1. If it was required, people would do it but it would be expensive.
2. Discussion of how you establish the criteria to decide who had to follow the rules: -By density would be better than numbers in abstract
   -By location—if near a stream
3. Logistical discussion – how to identify farms and what they have
   -Discussion of the animal ID program that was tried previously but met with much resistance.
4. The plans may not solve the problem its whether they are being followed
   You can write anything down on paper.
5. A positive would be the information farms could get about their soil and practices that would be productive. Learn where need to apply more or less for the fields.

B. Inspections on the farms and increased Enforcement

1. Discussion of the fact that NY enforces more and fines more often than VT

2. Larger farms have regulations they had to meet, why not smaller ones?
3. Need for system in place that tells agencies who has what on the land—need a reporting system, need field techs to make visits, etc.
4. Idea of a self-certification on line was discussed. Some thought it would be meaningless because people could say what they wanted, others thought if signed under penalty if lying would be taken seriously.

C. Livestock exclusion – did not appear to be cost effective for the improvement of water quality if it was to be mandatory on every farm. It may not be needed on every farm. Other practices were seen as more harmful—manure stacking where the run off is poorly controlled for example. Acknowledgement that there may be a bigger issues affecting water quality but that it's the cow in the stream that gets the calls.

D. Ban on planting in a flood plain seen as a bad idea.
    1. Ag land was seen as providing a place for the storm water to go and minimize downstream erosion and allows rivers to slow down.
    2. There would be a negative economic impact if more land was taken out of production because it was in the flood plain.

E. Outreach and education on AAPs – small farms or hobby farms may not have an understanding of AAPs or BMPs—people who have livestock other than cows like horses do not know the rules.

IV. **Discussion of a Certainty Program**

A. Discussion of spending money on a new program without understanding whether it would accomplish better water quality. Perception that a lot of money has been spent on water quality programs and the lake is not healthier.

I am willing to do new things to improve water quality but I am not in favor of doing anything that increases my cost of production when it has a direct impact on my pocket and there is no evidence that it works. What is the cost/benefit analysis of the practice? I am not willing to do something just because it sounds goods.

The simpler the better. Tell us what we need to do and why. We have stepped up to the plate so many times and is this really going to reduce pollution?

B. Point system for flexible practices was helpful. If a farm reached a certain level of practices and points then they would be left alone was a good idea.

C. Each farm needed to be evaluated independently and this could be expensive and time consuming—need to look at topography, soil, slope, what the farm had and did, etc. *There are regional differences. Maybe in one county they need to clean out the ditches but not in another, maybe tile drains work on one farm and rip rap on another.*

D. Important to have data to show a practice was cost effective and would fix the problem. Also need to understand the consequences on the farm system as a whole—when a regulation is added, then it has an effect on other parts of a farm operation, sometimes that is not understood until later.

E. Mandatory forms may be an issue—especially where there was no technical help available to fix a problem—need to be sure there is funding available for the fix.

F. Discussion of public perception—did people really understand all of the practices that farmers already do on the land and the impact that this has?

G. Could there be an outreach campaign? Ads on TV—on network stations in prime time.

H. Could there be education in the schools? The children will tell their parents what they learned and help make the connection between the grocery store and the farm.

I. A recognition for farms with BMPs was helpful if it was made meaningful by letting public know what it meant for those farms.

Public perception is driving some of this and I want to know the science behind the practices.

Public education would be good.

Maybe the public needs to go hungry.

V. **Discussion on Other Ideas**

A. Rip Rap – provide funding for this it is effective and farmers put it in on their own.

	Commonly Used Agricultural Terms
Acronym	**Definition**
BMPs	Best Management Practices
FAPs	Farm Agronomic Practices
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
LCB	Lake Champlain Basin
AAPs	Accepted Agricultural Practice regulations
MFOs	Medium Farm Operations (200-699 mature animals)

LFOs	Large Farm Operations (700+ mature animals)