Date: October 26, 2012 Meeting with Rutland Area Farmers

Attendees: 7 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

-But if a farmer fall tills then cover crops are not useful

-for clay soils, not as useful

-some farms use shredder and bush hog

B. Field stacking and filters for run off

C. No till and conservation tillage

D. Having extension technical assistance is very helpful

I wouldn't consider doing a nutrient management plan without these folks, we need them to stay in place.

II. What Practices Are Not Working Well?

A. Liquid Manure

1. Probably the worst thing on farms, difficult to manage.

2. Expensive containment systems, then must either hire someone to spread it or get equipment to spread it.

3. Everyone needs 1-3 days to get it done, all at the same time each year, not enough people to do the work, not enough time.

In the 1980s farmers were being handed money to put these systems in for containment. It didn't help and it caused more problems and cost more to manage down the road. Now everyone has this system but the water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin is not better—it may be worse.

4. The ban makes it really hard, either make the storage bigger or change the dates for spreading.

5. Spreading needs to respond to both the weather—so not spreading on snow or mud is obvious issue but its ok to spread on frozen ground—and on the land on the farm—where a field does not connect with a stream bed and it is clear that runoff is not an issue then should allow the farm to spread in winter.

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

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

1. Logistical—how do you know who needs the plans, who has what on their land?
2. The plan does give some good information about the soil and the fields and what is happening on the farm, but there was discussion that the plan itself could be too rigid—the farmer is allowing someone else to dictate what he would do on the farm, and had to follow the plan on paper and not in response to weather/soil.
3. The amount of paperwork was excessive.

   Paperwork hasn't done a thing to clean up the water.
4. Putting the plans online helps, but it's still overwhelming, and the cost is unaffordable for small farmers. Commercialization of creating these plans leads to an incentive to keep it expensive and complicated.
5. If there was a way to have a two page document to send in every year that would be ok—documents what is happening and give the state the information that they need—how many animals, how many acres, location, etc.

B. Inspections on the farms and increased enforcement would be helpful

1. Vegetable and fruit farmers – even backyard gardeners people who use mulch are contributing to the problem may not realize that they are doing so.

C. Livestock exclusion

Not just at the streambed but 35 feet either side of it—problem is that no one is maintaining the stream banks and vegetation is growing up all along the banks. The larger trees have root balls and when there is a flood like Irene it looks like a bulldozer went through there. The larger trees block the shade and smaller shoots can't grow up. One participant noted that a good example that illustrated this problem was the destruction that occurred at the Depot Street bridge in Pittsford after Irene. Along that bank, the vegetation had been allowed to grow wild and during the flood there was a lot of erosion. That person was concerned that if cows were excluded along all riverbanks, the landscape would lose a form of natural maintenance and vegetation would grow untended along all stream banks and this would cause serious erosion during floods.

Can't have just one rule. Where cows allowed to graze along banks, the land faired better.

C. Outreach and education on AAPs for more small farms supported.

1. There will be farmers who will not respond well, no matter what is done, for them the issue is one of freedom and distrust of government.
2. There are not enough people to do this kind of work

People that board horses to make a little money don't understand that AAPs, don't know about them and don't follow them.

3. Need some clout to get people who don't want to go—need some kind of regulation.

One thing I have found is that dairy farmers have a number of agencies that keep track of them, but not horse farms, no one keeps track of them.

4. Good idea to have there be an incentive for attending—put it into a point system, could work like the pesticide credit
5. People are using their land more and need to be able to get information about how to do it right.

D. Blanket Rules are Unworkable

-problem is that in some cases, the slope and grade of the land is so variable that what might work if the land slopes down won't work where there is an upslope.

E. No planting in flood plain

1. Certain flood plains end up with more soil than they lose.
2. A flood like Irene is not an event that erodes soils—people need to focus on the flash floods that are the real issue with erosion. Bank erosion happens in the short, hard rains.

F. Need to look at requirements differently, not about how many acres or how many animals, but how many animals are on how many acres—that will tell you what the land can absorb.

V. <u>Discussion of a Certainty Program</u>

A. In general the idea of recognition for the practices already on the farm was good. The idea of a sliding scale cost share was seen as a reasonable approach. Recognition for the fact that the needs of addressing water quality would result in farmers that have not been following good practices getting funding also and even more of the funding than those who have BMPs, therefore some may resent the program. The program may be more welcome if it balanced the need to improve water quality on non-

compliant farms and provide incentives for those that have been following AAPs and BMPs.

Is there a way to applaud and reward the people who have been doing it right at the same time as funneling money to those bad actors?

Piling more regulations on is not helpful. NRCS works backwards, they give the most money to the farms that are the least proactive.

B. The idea of "certainty" in terms of freedom from regulatory requirements was not as easy to envision and the incentive needed to be tangible.
What happens in year 3 if you don't have the money?

It would have to be for more than five years, too soon. Ten years is better.

D. Some farmers resent the intrusion on their land that came with inspections, some were fine with it.

E. If there will be new programs, there needs to be follow up – are the funds being used correctly, are they having the desired outcome?

VI. **<u>Discussion on Other Ideas</u>**

A. Very out of the box idea—breed a plant 304 inches seed it down and it would capture nitrogen, capture soil stay there with the corn.
B. Phosphorous in the soil—not many ideas on how to fix the problem with erosion and existing phosphorous already in the lake.
C. Similarly, farmers expressed concerns about the fact that farms have been taking more and more steps to address water quality issues and the issues are not

improving. Looking to the history and the science that is known, it cannot be said that all the steps farmers have taken have resulted in positive change for the lake. The amount of time, effort and cost that is being demanded of farmers and government regulators for this may not be the best allocation of resources overall. What about spending some of that cost on lake pilot projects, instead?

Maybe look at low oxygen levels in the lake, where the water is stagnant --can anything be done to make it healthier, can the habitat be improved? Technologies like wind turbines may aerate the water and create healthier lake.

	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)