

The “Agriculture Viability Act of 2007” – actual text of the bill, with some explanations by Rural Vermont.  
For more information, call 802-223-7222.

Explanatory Notes in Blue.

Underlined Text is what will be added to current law. ~~Strikeout Text~~ will be taken out of current law. Plain text is current law.

H.522

AN ACT RELATING TO THE VIABILITY OF VERMONT AGRICULTURE

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

The Goals Section was written to highlight the priorities set by the House Agriculture Committee. These are areas that the committee wants to focus on in order to set good agricultural policy. This section does not change current law.

Sec. 1. GOALS

The goals of this act are for Vermont to:

- (1) Support programs and policies that foster the development of a diversified agricultural sector that:
  - (A) offers farmers an opportunity to sell their products to a marketplace that pays them a reasonable rate of return for their labor and capital investments;
  - (B) offers the public nutritious and safe foods;
  - (C) produces, markets, and distributes agricultural products in a sustainable manner that conserves energy and the environment;
  - (D) fosters on-farm renewable energy production and its infrastructure that maximizes energy conservation and efficiency and limits greenhouse gases;
  - (E) provides economic stability to preserve the necessary infrastructure of the agricultural industry;
  - (F) expands the market opportunities for farm-raised poultry and other meat products.
- (2) Maintain the state’s prominence as a major milk producer in the region, and:
  - (A) assure a continued supply of high quality milk to processors and consumers in the region;
  - (B) enable Vermont dairy farmers, processors, and retailers and their supporting infrastructure to achieve a positive return on their labor and investment;
- (3) Enable agricultural operations of diverse sizes producing a wide array of products to prosper in Vermont and contribute to the state and regional economy.
- (4) Support initiatives such as the development of a mobile slaughtering unit to serve Vermont poultry farmers.
- (5) Assure continued stewardship of the land with respect for the environment and efficient use of energy.

## Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS

The findings section explains the reasons the legislature has passed this bill. Again, these findings will not change current law. They are just statements that the legislature finds to be true.

The general assembly finds:

(1) A viable agricultural sector in Vermont represents part of a secure regional food supply, which in turn lends itself to energy and economic efficiencies.

(2) The general public is increasingly interested in locally produced food.

(3) The benefits of local food systems to local communities include open land, jobs, nutritious and safe foods, and youth education opportunities.

(4) Farms are an integral part of Vermont's overall economy.

(5) Vermont agriculture is dependent upon a reliable and affordable supply of electrical energy, fuel, feed, and other supplies.

(6) Vermont agriculture is dependent upon the availability of a competent work force; the shortage of willing and knowledgeable workers is detrimental to farm operations.

(7) Current workers' compensation insurance rates account for a significant portion of farmers' payroll expenses.

(8) Succession, or the transfer of farms from one generation to the next, is a critical part of a viable future for Vermont agriculture.

(9) Vermont is the leading producer of fluid milk in New England, but only about five percent of its production is consumed in Vermont.

(10) The current federal milk pricing system does not allow a reasonable return on labor and investment for most Vermont dairy farmers.

(11) Regional marketing arrangements such as the Northeast Interstate Compact for Dairy Pricing have provided a positive operating margin without taxpayer subsidies or support.

(12) The general assembly finds that dairy processing facilities in Vermont are crucial to both Vermont dairy farmers and the promotion of the Vermont name.

(13) The "Vermont" name evokes a positive image for people and contributes to the marketing of Vermont products.

(14) Value-added products offer profit potential and economic opportunity for Vermont producers and nonfarmer entrepreneurs alike.

(15) Emerging agricultural sectors such as grape and wine growers and producers and artisan cheese makers have tremendous potential in Vermont and offer exciting value-added and agri-tourism opportunities to communities throughout the state.

(16) Many factors affect the ability of businesses to process value-added food products, including shortage of capital, lack of design and engineering expertise, and issues relating to multi-layered state and federal regulation such as permitting, zoning, and inspection.

(17) Institutional purchasers in Vermont have difficulty sourcing locally raised good quality products, including proteins such as meats and poultry.

(18) There is a shortage of slaughter and meat processors as well as a lack of training opportunities for industry personnel.

(19) Federal restrictions prevent interstate shipment of state-inspected meat from amenable species, although Vermont standards are equal to or exceed federal standards.

(20) Relationship-based food systems such as farm-to-school programs, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, farmers' markets, and pick-your-own operations are increasingly popular and offer areas of opportunity for new farmers.

## Sec. 3. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

The intent section explains what the legislature is trying to accomplish with this particular piece of legislation. Although this section does not change current law, it can be used if there is ever any question on interpreting the law.

The general assembly intends:

(1) To support and develop a more robust and self-sustaining agricultural sector that also promotes emerging agricultural industries.

(2) That the policies and programs of the state will support and promote the Vermont agriculture industry as a vital component of the state's economy and essential steward of our land.

(3) That current policies and programs pertaining to the viability of Vermont's agricultural industry be reviewed and confirmed or changed in order to assure the long-term economic prosperity of the industry.

(4) That Vermont will cooperate and coordinate with other northeastern states to assure stable and fair prices for milk sold in the northeastern market.

(5) That Vermont will promote processing and consumption of agricultural products bearing the Vermont seal of quality.

This is where the actual bill begins – the parts that will change the law.

\* \* \* Local Food Procurement \* \* \*

## Sec. 4. FOOD AND DAIRY PROCUREMENT

This section directs the state to implement rules requiring the purchasing of local products for state agencies and institutions. It first directs the agencies and departments involved in food purchasing to assess the current situation, and then to develop and implement a plan to ensure local purchasing. The draft plan will be presented to the House and Senate Agriculture committees in November 2007, so that they can offer feedback. The final plan must be implemented by October 1, 2008.

(a) The agency of agriculture, food and markets in cooperation with the agency of administration and the department of buildings and general services shall establish a system whereby the state will follow its own "buy local" campaign by purchasing local food and dairy products. In so doing, the agency shall determine:

(1) The amount of food and dairy products purchased annually by the state and state-funded entities, other than primary and secondary schools, and the associated costs.

(2) The number and type of government and state-funded entities that purchase food and dairy products and the quantities and varieties purchased by each.

(3) The person or persons with authority to make food and dairy purchasing decisions within each entity and the scope of that authority.

(4) The implications of a program that directs "local" purchasing.

(b) The agency of agriculture, food and markets, the agency of administration, and the department of buildings and general services shall:

(1) Establish a system for local producers and processors to market their products to state purchasing entities.

(2) Establish a system for state purchasing entities to advertise to and connect with local producers and processors.

(3) Establish a program in the agency of agriculture, food and markets to provide strategic and technical assistance to local producers and processors for creating or enlarging the facilities necessary to produce or process food for sale to the state or other expanded markets.

(4) Establish a system for the purchase of local food and dairy products at all levels of state government, other than primary and secondary schools, and at state-funded entities, other than primary and secondary schools.

(5) Draft rules, policies and procedures for this section and report their findings with respect to feasibility, cost and progress to the joint agriculture committees on or before November 1, 2007.

(c) All rules, policies, and procedures necessary to implement this section shall be adopted on or before October 1, 2008.

(d) In carrying out the provisions of this section, the agency of agriculture, food and markets, the agency of administration, and the department of buildings and general services shall seek input from and work with citizen and farmer organizations such as the Northeast Organic Farming Association, Vermont F.E.E.D., and the Vermont Fresh Network.

\* \* \* Dairy Processing \* \* \*

#### Sec. 5. INSTATE PROCESSING FACILITIES

This section instructs the Secretary of Agriculture to come up with a plan to develop more in-state dairy processing in Vermont. It lists specific goals for this plan and requires that the Secretary present the House and Senate Agriculture committees with his plan in November 2007.

(a) Legislative finding. The general assembly finds that dairy processing facilities in Vermont are an integral part of the infrastructure of both Vermont agriculture and the entire Vermont economy. These facilities provide jobs and create income that is spent multiple times in Vermont.

(b) The secretary of agriculture, food and markets shall:

(1) Determine ways to attract and retain dairy processors to the state;

(2) Determine ways to increase the numbers of producers processing their own milk;

(3) Calculate the additional costs and benefits to dairy producers that may result from these additional processors;

(4) Develop proposals for developing additional instate processing facilities. These proposals and any recommendations for legislative action shall be presented to the house and senate committees on agriculture on or before November 1, 2007.

#### Sec. 6. DAIRY PRICING INITIATIVE

This section instructs the Secretary of Agriculture to try and get the Northeast Dairy Compact re-established, or to figure out an alternative regional pricing system so that Vermont dairy farmers can get a "fair, stable, and equitable" price for their milk.

The secretary of the agency of agriculture, food and markets shall endeavor to reestablish the Northeast Interstate Compact for Dairy Pricing or establish an alternative regional pricing system that assures Vermont dairy farmers of a fair, stable, and equitable price for their milk. The secretary shall collaborate with Vermont's Congressional delegation, the governor's dairy task force, the coordinated milk pricing group, the region's dairy cooperatives, and the Congressional delegations and state legislatures of the other states in the region to take such steps as necessary to assure the continued viability of dairy farming in the northeast and to assure consumers of an adequate, local supply of pure and wholesome milk.

\* \* \* On-farm Poultry Processing and Labeling for Sale \* \* \*

This section deals with sales of poultry that have been processed on the farm. It allows farmers who raise fewer than 1000 birds/year to process those birds on the farm (without an “inspectable” facility) and to sell them at farmers’ markets and to restaurants. Farmers can also continue to sell poultry from the farm, as they have been allowed to do.

Sec. 7. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE,  
FOOD AND MARKETS REGULATIONS

This section effectively amends the current Department of Health requirement for poultry to be inspected if sold to restaurants, IF the farmer meets the criteria below in Section 8. The farmer must follow the requirements of section (b), and (c), in Section 8 below in order to be able to have sales to restaurants be exempt from inspection.

The department of health shall not require inspection of poultry that is exempt from inspection under 6 V.S.A. § 3312(b).

Sec. 8. 6 V.S.A § 3312 is amended to read:  
§ 3312. INSPECTION; ~~EXCEPTION~~ EXCEPTIONS

Subsection (a) is current law. It simply says that if poultry or other meat products are not intended for human consumption, they don’t need to be inspected.

(a) Inspection shall not be provided under this chapter at any establishment for the slaughter of livestock or poultry or the preparation of any livestock products or poultry products which are not intended for use as human food, but these products shall, prior to their offer for sale or transportation in intrastate commerce, unless naturally inedible by humans, be denatured or otherwise identified as prescribed by rules of the secretary to deter their use for human food. These licensed establishments shall be subject to periodic review.

Subsection (b) says that if you meet the criteria in 1,2, & 3 (you **must** meet all three criteria!), then you do not need inspection. So, you **cannot** slaughter more than 1000 birds in the year, you can’t sell birds across state lines, and you can only sell **WHOLE** birds from the farm, at farmers’ market, or to a food restaurant (not an institutional cafeteria). You can also use the birds for your own use.

(b) Inspection shall not be required for the slaughter or preparation of poultry products of the producer’s own raising on the producer’s own farm, whether or not they are intended for use as human food if:

- (1) Fewer than 1,000 birds are slaughtered annually; and
- (2) No birds are offered for sale or transportation in interstate commerce; and
- (3) The poultry products are only sold, as whole birds only, from the farm, at a farmers’ market, or to a food restaurant licensed by the commissioner of health, or are for personal use.

Subsection (c) shows what needs to be on the label of EVERY bird sold at the **farmers' market**, or on the label of every bird or package of birds sold to a **restaurant**. Birds sold from the farm only do not need to be labeled. So, if you have been selling from the farm, this situation has not changed. If you are selling to a **restaurant**, you will have additional labeling requirements, in Subsection (d) – below. Specifically, your label must indicate that the menu must include the name of the farm and the words “poultry processed on the farm and not inspected” near the menu item that includes your poultry.

(c) All poultry sold at a farmers' market or to a restaurant pursuant to the exemption in subsection (b) of this section shall be labeled with the following information:

(1) Name of farm and name of producer;

(2) Address of farm including zip code;

(3) “Exempt per 6 V.S.A. § 3312(b): NOT INSPECTED.” This statement shall be prominently displayed with such conspicuousness (as compared with other words or statements, designs, or devices in the labeling) as to render it likely to be read and understood under customary conditions of purchase and use.

(4) Safe handling and cooking instructions as follows:

“SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS:

Keep refrigerated or frozen. Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.

Keep raw poultry separate from other foods.

Wash working surfaces, including cutting boards, utensils, and hands after touching raw poultry.

Cook thoroughly to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit maintained for at least 15 seconds.

Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.”

(d) Any menu item that includes poultry that is exempt under this section shall clearly state the name of the farm from which the poultry was purchased and shall prominently display the words “poultry processed on the farm and not inspected” on the menu in proximity to the menu item. Poultry sold to food restaurants under the exemption in this section shall include a label alerting the purchaser to these labeling requirements.

In addition to the extra labeling requirement for **restaurants**, you must also get a signed statement from the restaurant stating that they know the things outlined in subsection (e) – below. You must keep a copy of this statement on file at your farm for as long as you sell poultry to this restaurant. You must also send a copy of this statement to the Department of Health. You should also give a copy to the restaurant.

(e) The poultry producer, upon first selling poultry to a food restaurant, must procure a signed statement from the food restaurant stating that the food restaurant is aware that the poultry is exempted from inspection under subsection (b) of this section, and that the menu of the food restaurant must have the information required by subsection (d) of this section. The poultry producer must keep the signed statement on file as long as the producer is selling poultry to the food restaurant under this section. The poultry producer must have a signed statement on file from each food restaurant to which poultry is sold under this section and an exact copy of each statement, including the name of the producer and the name of the purchasing restaurant shall be forwarded to the department of health.

Sec. 8a. 18 V.S.A. § 4306 is amended to read:

Section 8a was added to the bill to clarify that the Department of Health inspectors have the responsibility to ensure that the menus are labeled properly when uninspected chicken is being sold in a restaurant. This would probably be done during an inspection of the restaurant.

§ 4306. INSPECTION

It shall be the duty of the board to enforce the provisions of this subchapter and of 6 V.S.A. § 3312(d), and it shall be permitted to inspect through its duly authorized officers, inspectors, agents or assistants, at all reasonable times, an establishment subject to the provisions of this subchapter.

Sec. 8b. 18 V.S.A. § 4309 is amended to read:

Section 8b clarifies that the Department of Health can enforce against a restaurant if a menu is not labeled properly. The punishment would be the regular fines, already in current law.

§ 4309. PENALTY

A person who violates a provision of this subchapter or 6 V.S.A. § 3312(d), for which no other penalty is provided, shall be fined not more than \$300.00 for the first offense and, for each subsequent offense, not more than \$500.00.

Sec. 9. POULTRY SLAUGHTER STUDY

Section 9 says that the Agriculture committees will get a report in 2 years' time to see how the sale of uninspected poultry is going, and how the mobile processing unit is doing. The report will be at the end of the season in 2009.

(a) The agency of agriculture, food and markets shall review the effectiveness of the mobile processing units authorized by this act and the exemption from inspection authorized by this act. The agency shall also consider the benefits to the poultry industry of each program individually and both programs working together.

(b) The agency shall report its findings and recommendations no sooner than November 1, 2009 and no later than December 1, 2009.

\* \* \* Authorizing Mobile Processing Units \* \* \*

These sections take care of some housekeeping to ensure that the Agency of Agriculture can deal properly with the mobile slaughter unit, and to ensure that if the state sells or leases the mobile unit, the funds from the sale or lease will go into a fund to get more mobile units or to improve the operations of current units.

Sec. 10. 6 V.S.A. § 3302 is amended to read:

§ 3302. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter, except as otherwise specified, the following terms shall have the meanings stated below:

\* \* \*

(42) "Mobile slaughter and processing establishment" means any transportable structure used for slaughtering or processing of meat or poultry products on a farm or on an agricultural fairground registered pursuant to section 3902 of Title 20.

Sec. 11. 6 V.S.A. § 3305(17) and (18) are added to read:

(17) authorize and recognize mobile slaughter and processing establishments as official establishments or exempt them under subdivision 3305(13) of this section;

(18) sell or lease a mobile slaughtering unit and may retain any proceeds therefrom in a revolving fund designated for the purpose of purchasing additional mobile slaughtering units by the agency.

\* \* \* Vermont Seal of Quality \* \* \*

This section allows poultry that is processed under inspection in the state's new (yet to be purchased) mobile unit to display the Vermont Seal of Quality. It also says that the Secretary should review the Seal program every year to find out if the Seal of Quality actually increases the value of VT products.

Sec. 12. 6 V.S.A. § 2964(e) is amended and (f) is added to read:

(e) As used in this chapter, "agricultural products" means any product of a farming operation as defined in 10 V.S.A. § 6001(22)(A), (B), (C) and (D), and poultry slaughtered and inspected using a mobile processing unit authorized pursuant to subdivision 3305(17) of this title.

(f) The secretary shall annually review the effectiveness of the identification program for increasing the value of Vermont agricultural products.

\* \* \* Mobile Processing Units Comply with AAPs \* \* \*

This is another housekeeping section to make sure that the mobile slaughter unit complies with the Accepted Agricultural Practices, and that it's ok to bring the mobile unit onto farms or fairgrounds to process the poultry.

Sec. 13. 6 V.S.A. § 4810(a)(1) is amended to read:

(1) "Accepted Agricultural Practices" (AAPs) shall be standards to be followed in conducting agricultural activities in this state. These standards shall address activities which have a potential for causing pollutants to enter the groundwater and waters of the state, including dairy and other livestock operations plus all forms of crop and nursery operations and on-farm or agricultural fairground, registered pursuant to section 3902 of Title 20, livestock and poultry slaughter and processing activities. The AAPs shall include, as well as promote and encourage, practices for farmers in preventing pollutants from entering the groundwater and waters of the state when engaged in, but not limited to, animal waste management and disposal, soil amendment applications, plant fertilization, and pest and weed control. Persons engaged in farming, as defined in section 6001 of Title 10, who follow these practices shall be presumed to be in compliance with water quality standards. AAPs shall be practical and cost effective to implement. The AAPs for groundwater shall include a process under which the agency shall receive, investigate, and respond to a complaint that a farm has contaminated the drinking water or groundwater of a property owner.

## \* \* \* Enforcement of Accepted Agriculture Practices \* \* \*

This section clarifies that the Agency of Agriculture can take folks to court if they are in violation of the Accepted Agriculture Practices, and other efforts have failed. Some people believed that this was already allowed, but the Agency felt it was necessary to clarify it in the law.

Sec. 14. 6 V.S.A. § 4812 is amended to read:

## § 4812. CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

(a) When the secretary of agriculture, food and markets determines that a person engaged in farming is managing a farm using practices which are inconsistent with practices defined by rules under this subchapter, the secretary may issue a written warning which shall be served in person or by certified mail, return receipt requested. The warning shall include a brief description of the alleged violation, identification of this statute and applicable rules, a recommendation for corrective actions that may be taken by the person, along with a summary of federal and state assistance programs which may be utilized by the person to remedy the violation and a request for an abatement schedule from the person according to which the practice shall be altered. The person shall have 30 days to respond to the written warning. If the person fails to respond to the written warning within this period or to take corrective action to change the practices in order to protect water quality, the secretary may act pursuant to subsection (b) of this section in order to protect water quality.

(b) After an opportunity for a hearing, the secretary may issue cease and desist orders and institute appropriate proceedings on behalf of the agency to enforce this subchapter.

(c) Whenever the secretary believes that any person engaged in farming is in violation of this subchapter or rules adopted thereunder, an action may be brought in the name of the agency in a court of competent jurisdiction to restrain by temporary or permanent injunction the continuation or repetition of the violation. The court may issue temporary or permanent injunctions, and other relief as may be necessary and appropriate to curtail any violations.

(d) The secretary may assess administrative penalties in accordance with sections 15, 16, and 17 of this title against any farmer who violates a cease and desist order or other order issued under subsection (b) of this section.

(e) Any person subject to an enforcement order or an administrative penalty who is aggrieved by the final decision of the secretary may appeal to the superior court within 30 days of the decision. The administrative judge may specially assign an environmental judge to superior court for the purpose of hearing an appeal.

## \* \* \* Permit Amendments \* \* \*

This section fixes an identified problem in Act 250. Agriculture is supposed to be exempt under Act 250. The problem identified was that farmers who were attempting to farm on land that had been permitted under Act 250 were being required to get permit amendments if farming was not specifically allowed in the Act 250 permit. This section makes it clear that if a farmer wants to begin farming on land designated ag land under Act 250 s/he does not need an Act 250 permit to do so and that farming on non-designated ag land that is under Act 250 jurisdiction is always permitted, without an amendment, unless the farming conflicts with the Act 250 permit. It also specifies that permits granted to persons who have designated ag land will state that farming is allowed on that land so that neighbors are aware that farming is allowed and encouraged on the land.

Sec. 15. 10 V.S.A. § 6081(s) is added to read:

(s)(1) No permit amendment is required for farming that:

- (A) will occur on primary agricultural soils preserved in accordance with section 6093 of this title; or  
(B) will not conflict with any permit condition issued pursuant to this chapter.

(2) Permits shall include a statement that farming is permitted on lands exempt from amendment jurisdiction under this subsection.

\* \* \* Farmworkers' Compensation \* \* \*

This section asks several agencies and departments to work together to develop a plan to deal with the rising costs of Workers' Compensation for farm and other agricultural laborers. It specifies several different things to be done, including the development of a farm safety initiative to encourage safety practices and offer lower Workers' Compensation rates to farms.

Sec. 16. FARMWORKERS' COMPENSATION INSURANCE

(a) The secretary of the agency of agriculture, food and markets shall consult with the department of labor; the department of banking, insurance, securities, and health care administration; representatives of the farm labor community; and representatives of the farm community to determine what can be done to lower the cost of workers' compensation for agricultural employers. The secretary shall report with recommendations specific to issues of farm labor to the house and senate committees on agriculture on or before November 1, 2007.

(b) The department of labor, in consultation with the agency of agriculture, food and markets, the University of Vermont extension service, the department of health, the Vermont farm bureau, the Green Mountain Council of Cooperatives, and other interested parties, shall develop a statewide farm safety initiative. The initiative shall perform outreach, technical assistance, and training for farmers and farmworkers in best safety practices to be followed and assist in reinforcing a culture of safety on the farm. In conjunction with this effort, the department of banking, insurance, securities, and health care administration shall work with insurers to get merit rating and other discounts for farms with good safety records.

(c) The agency of agriculture, food and markets shall collaborate with farm organizations to alert farmers of the advantages of consulting alternative providers about the cost of their farmworkers' compensation insurance.

(d) The agency of agriculture, food and markets, the department of labor, and the department of banking, insurance, securities, and health care administration shall submit a brief report on the effectiveness of this section in reducing workers' compensation insurance rates. The report shall be submitted no later than January 15, 2008.

\* \* \* Farm Energy \* \* \*

This section asks the Agency of Agriculture and the electric companies to recommend to the legislature a way for the state to support on-farm energy production.

Sec. 17. FARM ENERGY PURCHASE REPORT

(a) Legislative findings. The general assembly finds that state government buildings use 4.2 megawatt hours of electricity each year.

(b) The agency of agriculture, food and markets, in consultation with the Vermont electric utility companies and other renewable attribute companies, shall study establishing a farm energy purchase program to purchase renewable energy attributes from farm-based renewable energy projects to ensure a market for farm-produced energy. The study shall also consider how farm-based renewable energy can help to support a program of state government electrical usage similar to a voluntary statewide program modeled after Central Vermont Public Service's "Cow Power" program. The agency shall report to the house and senate committees on agriculture on or before November 1, 2007 with its findings and any legislative proposals.

## \* \* \* Statutory Review \* \* \*

This section asks the Agency of Agriculture to work with the legislative staff to review all of the agricultural laws of the state and make recommendations to improve effectiveness of delivering ag programs, and to enhance the long-term viability of VT agriculture.

## Sec. 18. AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND MARKETS REVIEW

(a) The agency of agriculture, food and markets in consultation with the legislative council shall jointly review existing state statutes as they pertain to public or quasi public entities created to provide and promote services to the Vermont agriculture sector. The review shall consider the relevancy of the statutes as they relate to economic conditions in which Vermont agriculture is operating today. The review shall include recommended changes in authorizing language to improve effectiveness in the development and delivery of programs designed to enhance the long-term viability of Vermont's agriculture industry.

(b) The agency of agriculture, food and markets with the legislative council shall report their findings back to the house and senate committees on agriculture no later than November 1, 2007.

## \* \* \* Viticulture \* \* \*

This section tells the Agency of Agriculture to work with grape growers to create a Grape and Wine Council to provide support to growers and the industry, develop a workforce, seek funding for industry initiatives, and foster collaborative partnerships.

## Sec. 19. VERMONT GRAPE AND WINE COUNCIL

(a) The agency of agriculture, food and markets shall help establish a Vermont grape and wine council. The council shall include representatives of grape growers, wine producers, the University of Vermont extension program, the University of Vermont College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the agency of agriculture, food and markets, the department of economic development, the department of tourism and marketing, and the hospitality council of the Vermont chamber of commerce.

(b) The Vermont grape and wine council shall:

(1) provide long-term support to the emerging grape and wine industries in Vermont by providing services, including research and education;

(2) explore mechanisms such as grants and dues from its institutional members for funding its activities;

(3) collaborate with the department of labor in order to seek workforce development funding;

(4) foster the development of partnerships between all parties interested in the emerging grape and wine industry.

## \* \* \* Meat Production \* \* \*

This section simply says that the Department of Labor and the Agency of Agriculture should work with meat processors to expand this vital industry in Vermont.

## Sec. 20. MEAT CUTTERS

The department of labor in cooperation with the agency of agriculture, food and markets shall work with the meat processing industry to provide technical assistance, training, education, and other assistance to help expand the industry in Vermont.

## \* \* \* Labor \* \* \*

This section instructs the Department of Labor to always consider agriculture and work to strengthen the viability of VT agriculture by developing a strong ag workforce in the state.

## Sec. 21. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

(a) Legislative finding. All agricultural industries are experiencing an ever-increasing need for workers who are willing to work the hours involved in agriculture and who have the multiple skills necessary to handle successfully the multiple and varied responsibilities of the various facets of the agriculture industry. Therefore, the department of labor has a crucial and ongoing role in the long-term viability of Vermont agriculture.

(b) The department of labor shall at all times work in cooperation with the agency of agriculture, food and markets as well as the varied agricultural industries in Vermont and shall focus efforts on sustaining and strengthening the viability of Vermont agriculture by recruiting, educating, training, and maintaining a strong agricultural workforce that is not only capable of working in existing agricultural industries but also in emerging areas of Vermont agriculture where the need for skilled workers is even more profound.

## \* \* \* Dairy Pricing \* \* \*

This section says that milk checks to farmers must include certain information, as specified, and the Agency of Agriculture will draft a model payment statement.

## Sec. 22. 6 V.S.A. § 2924(f) is added to read:

(f) Payment Statements. Payment statements provided to producers of cows' milk shall include in the payment statement the national support price, the Boston, Massachusetts price, the producer price differential, and the amount per hundredweight of any charges or deductions where applicable. The format shall be provided with clear language and with no abbreviations, except where the abbreviation is spelled out elsewhere in the statement.

## Sec. 23. PAYMENT STATEMENT DRAFTING

The agency of agriculture, food and markets shall draft a model payment statement that carries out the intent of Sec. 22 of this act and that may be used by milk purchasers.

## Sec. 23a. STUDY ON THE CAUSES OF THE PRECIPITOUS DECLINE IN HONEYBEE POPULATION

This section asks the Secretary of Agriculture to study the cause of the problems in the bee population and how they are affecting Vermont, and report back to the House and Senate Agriculture committees in January 2008.

The secretary of the agency of agriculture, food and markets shall study the causes of the precipitous decline in the wild and domestic honeybee population in Vermont. The secretary shall study the impact of the varroa mite and colony collapse disorder. The secretary shall also determine the effects of the application of pesticides. In addition, the secretary of agriculture, food and markets shall consult with the commissioner of the department of public service in determining the effect, if any, of electromagnetic fields and mobile phone use on honeybees. The secretary shall report his or her findings with recommendations for assisting Vermont beekeepers to the house and senate committees on agriculture on or before January 15, 2008.

## Sec. 24. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect upon passage.