

# VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE

## CURRENT WATER QUALITY INITIATIVES



With all that is happening around water quality in the state of Vermont, it may be hard to figure out how things relate or what it means for you. Outlined below are current initiatives headed or partnered by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM). While each initiative is separate, they are joined by a common goal; to further protect water quality in the state, and enhance the good work being done by farmers by increasing outreach and assistance to farms of all sizes.

For more detail, including links to each initiative, please visit [go.usa.gov/cdGew](http://go.usa.gov/cdGew)

### Act 64 - Vermont's Clean Water Act

Also known as the Vermont Clean Water Act, a legislative law passed during the 2015 session and signed by Governor Shumlin on June 16, 2015. Addresses all sectors impacting our waters – roads, wastewater treatment facilities, developed lands, forests and farms. It mandates new performance standards and programs to protect and improve water quality statewide

### Lake Champlain Revised TMDL

In response to a federal lawsuit filed by the Conservation Law Foundation, the EPA reconsidered its previous approval of the 2002 Lake Champlain TMDL and disapproved the Vermont portion of the TMDL in January 2011. Under federal law, upon such disapproval, the EPA is responsible for establishing a new TMDL to implement the applicable water quality standards. The EPA initiated the process of developing a new TMDL for Lake Champlain in 2011, in cooperation with the State of Vermont, which is anticipated to be signed late spring 2016.

#### Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs)

New water quality rules revised from the formerly known Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs) required to be drafted by VAAFAM Revisions Include;

- Small farm certification
- Nutrient storage
- Soil health
- Buffer zones
- Livestock exclusion
- Nutrient management

#### Clean Water Vermont

An exciting and growing collaboration among municipalities, state agencies, local and regional partners, farmers, businesses and the public to take action that will safeguard the public's access to clean and safe water.

#### Tile Drainage Interim Report

A requirement of Act 64, and submitted to the legislature February 16, 2016. This report provides an assessment of known facts and current findings about the benefits and impacts of subsurface drainage on Vermont's farms.

#### Secretary's Final Decision North Lake Assessment & BMP Initiative

Issued February 3 2016, requires mandatory Best Management Practices for farms in the Missisquoi Bay Basin where the RAPs alone are not sufficiently effective. VAAFAM will lead an assessment and BMP implementation initiative beginning in 2017.

#### Enforcement Report & Tool

Enhanced reporting techniques are being used to communicate with the public about the work that is done to inspect, monitor and regulate to ensure compliance, with water quality requirements. The tool also outlines the enforcement process and procedures VAAFAM follows to resolve compliance issues.

#### VT Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Provides framework for the State of Vermont, in partnership with 25 organizations, agencies, businesses and non-profits to provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural and forest landowners over the next five years. It will help with development and implementation of site-specific farm and forest projects that will directly improve water quality in streams and rivers that flow towards Lake Champlain.

#### Partner Database

A unique tool that will facilitate and improve coordination with agricultural partners statewide on conservation projects. The database will track on-farm conservation practice implementation, increase the ease with which staff can communicate with each other on projects, and allow for customizable reporting while maintaining farmer confidentiality.

#### Vermont Environmental Stewardship Program

A pilot program currently in development, VESP will encourage and recognize agricultural producers to achieve environmental excellence. Farmers will work with conservation planners and technical service providers to go above and beyond what is required by regulation.



Formal rulemaking Spring 2016, final rule - September 15, 2016



Clean Water Fund proposed increased Ag implementation \$ and expanded efforts for FY2016



Next steps include a final report, due in January 2017 and the revision of the RAPs in 2018 to include requirements for tile drainage.



Educational outreach, assessments and implementation of BMPs on farms



Increased regulatory staff as well as presence on small farms, along with additional technical assistance and engineering support



\$16 million in financial and technical assistance



Will allow for easy accounting of the hard work being done by farmers toward meeting the State's water quality goals



Expected to begin accepting applications in Summer 2016.