VERMONT
AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS

Current Water Quality Initiatives

VERMONT CLEAN WATER INITIATIVE

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 (VAAFM). 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

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. It addresses all sectors impacting our waters – roads, wastewater treatment facilities, developed lands, forests and farms.

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

A revision of the formerly known Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs) required to be drafted by VAAFM
Revisions Include;
Small farm certification
Nutrient storage
Soil health
Buffer zones
Livestock exclusion
Nutrient management

Formal rulemaking Spring 2016, final rule by July 1, 2016

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.

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

Tile Drainage Interim Report

A requirement of Act 64, and submitted 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.

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

Revised Secretary's Decision on CLF's BMP Petition

Issued February 3 2016, and requires mandatory Best Management Practices for farms in the Missisquoi Bay Basin where RAPs alone are not sufficiently effective. The Revised Secretary's Decision makes a threshold determination that BMPs are necessary in the basin to achieve compliance with Vermont's water quality goals.

Educational outreach, assessments and implementation of BMPs on farms

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, as well as enforce upon farms for water quality violations. The tool also outlines the enforcement process and procedures VAAFM follows to reach amenable resolutions.

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

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.

$16 million in financial and technical assistance

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.

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

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.

Expected to begin accepting applications in Summer 2016.