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**Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets' Emergency Exemption
Inconsistent with Clean Water Laws**

Groups urge agency to put an end to unlawful farm manure discharges

December 13, 2019 (MONTPELIER, VT) – A coalition of environmental organizations are calling on the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to end blanket emergency exemptions for farm manure spreading that result in pollution discharges into nearby waters. The pollution is putting public health and the environment at risk.

“An increase in rain and snow is not an emergency,” said Jen Duggan Vice President and Director of CLF Vermont.

“Vermont is a wet state and it is getting wetter as a result of climate change. The State should be focused on real solutions instead of relying on blanket waivers that are inconsistent with clean water laws and result in polluted waterways.”

A ban on spreading manure on saturated or snow-covered grounds is in effect to protect against adverse impacts to water quality in Lake Champlain and other waterbodies. With frozen or saturated soils, and little organic material to soak up liquid manure, winter is an especially problematic time to dispose of farm runoff. For that reason, Vermont rules prohibit spreading manure on snow covered fields.

However, due to an increase in precipitation from historic averages, AAFM issued a blanket emergency exemption for farms to permit spreading of farm waste on snow-covered ground beginning November 22, 2019, running through December 15.

“Government agencies in Vermont should be ensuring that our waters are not polluted with runoff, not authorizing activities that they know will degrade our waters,” said Jon Groveman, Policy and Water Program Director for VNRC.

Any exemptions to a manure spreading ban are supposed to address discrete emergencies or help specific farms deal with unique challenges. They are not intended to deal with long-term changes in average conditions due to climate change.

“Dairy Farmers need our help at a moment in which they're facing difficult economic circumstances,” says David Mears, Executive Director of Audubon Vermont. “We should not, however, be trying to help farmers at the cost of clean water and ecosystem health.”

“The blanket emergency exemption doesn't hold water,” said Lori Fisher, Executive Director of the Lake Champlain Committee. “It makes no sense to enact a ban and then waive it at the expense of our waterways. State agencies need to be planning in advance for the reality of a wetter environment, not making exemptions standard practice.”

Experts are available for further comment.

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