

The 2020 Vermont Farming Manifesto: an Economic Rescue

The current stock market and economic meltdown highlight the serious flaws in Vermont's long-standing government policies. In particular, Vermont's dairy farms have steadily diminished in number and economic contribution, through no fault of the farmers. Everyone says they love farming, and no one questions the importance of farms for Vermont's landscapes, tourism, and culture -- but still farms close.

Presented here is a radical plan to reverse that decline, to the benefit of all. These changes are *urgent and necessary*. Helping farms grow and become profitable is just one of many economic improvements Vermont can implement. This plan will work in meaningful ways, and pave the way for other innovative efforts to help *all* local Vermont businesses, improve citizen health, and reduce pollution.

The cornerstone necessary to stimulate growth in capital investment and productivity of Vermont agriculture is property tax abatement. Fundamentally, farms across the country are struggling. But Vermont has the [6th highest](#) real estate tax burden in America, which constitutes a crushing burden for farmers. A property tax credit against farm food production income will alleviate that burden where it is most needed. It will encourage the growing number of young people who wish to farm for a living to invest their futures in agriculture; increase food production to make distribution and markets more profitable; take advantage of the Vermont brand and the locavore movement; reduce pollution from the trucking of food from faraway lands; improve food security for future declines or crises; support existing dairy farms; benefit ancillary businesses such as farm suppliers, feed sellers, restaurants, tourism, and agritourism.

In tandem, an income tax credit will benefit leaseholders, benefit farmers with small land area, and help start-ups.

Vermont's steady decline in farms over the last 100 years has undermined other businesses, community health, schools, population demographics, and state coffers. What is proposed here is NOT a subsidy of farms: it is the removal of an unhealthy and unfair tax *burden*. For decades, Vermont government has told dairy farmers to "Get big or get out!" Now those farms that followed that command are being condemned for

polluting state waters and are told to just get out -- even though most farms are compliant with state water quality management guidelines while suburban and urban sprawl continues. The climate activists insist that the future depends on moving people into cities to reduce commuting: the opposite is true, as will be explained herein.

To understand the interaction between farm economy and food consumption, consider the concept of “externalized costs.” When a person buys a flatscreen TV, the market has traditionally not “factored in” the externalized environmental cost of that production -- the pollution generated by the mines that procure TV components, the factories that spew fumes while manufacturing parts, etc. Some efforts have been made to improve this, such as charging a fee when buying gallons of paint -- but by and large such costs are absorbed at the locations where the consumer goods are produced, not by those who consume them -- these are “externalized pollution costs.”

Some of the greatest externalized pollution costs are associated with modern concentrated agricultural systems and the long-distance transport of those foods. Facilities with 30,000 bred sows (or 10,000 cows, or 100,000 chickens) create massive lagoons of toxic waste; industrial corn production depletes soils rapidly, employs huge amounts of fossil-fuel-generated fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, and increases erosion. These practices create cheap food, but it’s not so cheap when one considers these externalized environmental costs.

When that monetarily “cheap” but environmentally expensive food arrives in Vermont, our farmers are disadvantaged. “Calorganic” brand cauliflower may be certified organic, but it is wrapped in plastic, was harvested for a long journey, and was refrigerated through its long, non-organic distribution journey. It is less fresh, less “green,” and does not support Vermont’s economy -- it sucks wealth for California production. (This is true also of EV cars from Japan, and Chinese solar panels, discussed below).

But now let us examine the externalized “benefits” of local food production. The obvious ones have just been demonstrated -- less fuel consumption and packaging in refrigeration and travel, fresher products, and profits stay local. But Vermont farmers do not get proper recognition of other, less visible attributes of their activities that are economically and environmentally positive. The antidote to soil erosion is soil building -- the best way to accomplish this is from composted manure, bedding, and forage. Farmers do this. Manure is also the best fertilizer in lieu of natural-gas-produced products shipped from far away. The whole controversy over “cow farts” reflects a woeful ignorance of correct regenerative soil practices.

Additionally, farmers keep views open for tourists and natives alike -- those fields will grow up rapidly into forests without maintenance: even more so if land investors are paid fees by California corporations to “sequester carbon” in trees. That is folly, for it only permits West Coast polluters to pay for the privilege to pollute; undermining Vermont agricultural production and scenery. Open fields -- populated with beautiful cows, sheep, or goats -- are also what attract tourists to drive through our hills (yes, burning fuel -- Vermont tourism depends on travel, even as climate activists condemn rural Vermonters for commuting to work).

By producing food locally, Vermont farms decrease the pollution generated by long-distance trucking. As seen by the current crisis, they also provide food security -- it is risky to rely on food transported from California and China. Those regions face unique problems of draught, disruption, disease, and currency fluctuations. How expensive would that California food get if inflation sets in due to excessive federal debt? Where would Vermont be then, with its farmers dismissed as unneeded? Food security is a non-monetary measure of the value of local farms: an unacknowledged benefit.

As to property tax relief, farms are different from most other businesses because they depend on large areas of land. These beautiful acreages are often appraised for property tax purposes based on their residential or commercial development potential. Indeed they have that value, but that has nothing to do with reality when people are farming. An insurance company, factory, or restaurant can generate far more in profits on a small acreage than a farmer ever could -- this is a gross imbalance in tax equity. Current Use is a program that seeks to offset this, but it is used widely by non-farmers (including wealthy land investors who get tax breaks for not developing land but who do not produce any food at all). What is required is property tax relief directly connected to *food production*. This is *not* a subsidy -- it is the elimination of destructive taxation disincentives which harm true farmers while compromising those “externalized benefits” that benefit all Vermonters.

The Proposal

The State of Vermont should grant food-producing farmers a tax credit equal to 50% of gross food sales, through a 25% *income* tax credit against gross sales up to \$50,000 (much like an Earned Income Credit), *and* a 25% *property* tax credit: also on the first \$50,000 of gross sales, but limited to one-half of real estate taxes (*after* the homestead exemption or Current Use program relief).

This will help existing dairy farms of any size, up to a maximum of \$25,000 in total, while encouraging new and existing small-scale farmers to raise more local food. A family

with ten acres could, for instance, raise a few pigs or beef cows, sell the meat, and get a tax credit of 50 cents for every dollar of gross sales. This would make farming profitable, even if there was a small net loss on a cost basis. Those seeking the credit would have to file a Schedule C or other income statement with their federal tax return, then take the credit at the state/town level. This would ensure that any fraud was punishable by the full force of the federal Internal Revenue Code. We already have income sensitivity: it is time for food production sensitivity!

There are numerous young people who seek to be farming entrepreneurs. Many grow vegetables, or raise and sell pigs, sheep or other foods. Many craft value-added food products. This plan excludes (e.g.) hemp, timber and wool production, but those could be considered for relief if this plan proved effective. Maple syrup producers create food, and also maintain large tracts of land -- they too would benefit from this proposal.

It is bizarre that Vermont boasts a “coffee industry,” when we can’t grow coffee -- we import the beans for processing here. Hardly very “green.” Ski resorts defile rivers, consume power, and attract polluting visitors for a purely recreational “industry” -- I do not here propose to ban them, but it is impossible to credibly assess “green” policies that penalize rural native Vermonters without examining such practices. Are tax dollars not employed to advertise our “ski industry”? Yet now the legislature imposes financial penalties on fixed income natives to fund solar panels, pellet stoves, and Japanese EV cars. This farm plan reveals the folly of these short-sighted and hypocritical wealth transfers. Let’s help existing and aspiring farms to produce green food.

Compounded Economic Benefits

The effects of this tax proposal would extend well beyond helping farmers. [Agritourism](#) would expand, as would hay, equipment and feed sales, veterinary services, restaurant business, farmers’ markets, Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA’s), out-of-state sales of produce, value-added agricultural ventures such as cheeses, jerky, sausages, kraut, yogurt, jellies, etc. Increased production would make distribution systems like Regional Agricultural Centers (RAC’s) viable; greater diversity and quantities of goods would increase inventory available to supply larger permanent outlets in Boston, and throughout New England.

In contrast, let us view the supposed “prosperity” that will result from compliance with the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) as [expounded on its web site](#):

Accrual of benefits from transportation projects and spending can be both direct and indirect. Direct impacts include job creation directly related to the project and improvements to mobility, accessibility and ease of travel. Indirect impacts

include multiplier effects related to jobs created (e.g., consumer spending by those employed, income tax revenue, and additional jobs and money spent through the materials supply chain), as well as new economic activity associated with improved accessibility.... In many jurisdictions, there is growing recognition that the combined costs of housing and transportation can be burdensome to many families, reduce economic growth potential and [sic] creates other societal costs.... One-time benefits derive from expenditures on the materials and labor needed throughout the project design and construction phases.

The nature and magnitude of the economic effects of transportation improvements will vary according to the type of project undertaken, the area in which it occurs, the types of industries impacted, and myriad other factors.

The so-called “economic benefits” of forced investment in solar panels and EV cars are few. Much like building the Jay Peak Waterpark, the short-term benefits are acknowledged to be “One-time benefits.” But note that the “one-time benefits” to manufacturers of solar panels, EV cars, and pellet stoves are *huge* -- to the rest of us these are *costs*. The so-called “prosperity” is for those manufacturers, at the expense of most Vermonters. Yes, there are installers, and site engineers for government-mandated stormwater installations, but those “economic gains” are also “transfer payments” -- money spent by businesses and homeowners to fuel someone else’s business. There are no goods produced by Vermonters to sell out-of-state, which is the bedrock of actual economic growth. On the contrary, this scheme (scam) pumps up the gross revenue of Chinese and Japanese corporations while taxing rural Vermonters’ gasoline -- those who pay for gas must earn money in some traditional “job,” unless they are positioned to capitalize on this TCI spending in the short term.

There are few if any positive “financial impacts” under the TCI, GWSA, or RGGI -- they are all *costs*, masquerading as investments. A handful of “stakeholders” will benefit, but there is pollution generated in the short-term in manufacturing production (with environmental costs externalized from Vermont and excluded from consideration in those fictitious “25% reduction” projections), almost zero increase in actual Vermont economic expansion, and an illusion of “saving the planet” -- all those solar panels become so much garbage when they have expired. And what exactly is the “alternative energy source” that Vermonters must employ to heat their homes? -- Those who would shift us to wood pellets also howl at the logging industry for cutting the trees shipped to the woodchip manufacturing plant. None of this enhances “sustainability,” except for the government bureaucrats who increase their power, employees and salaries to lord it over us under a pretentious lie that they are helping the economy and the environment -- they *hurt both*.

Consider now an investment into farm food production. People who build housing for animals, food storage or processing facilities, or acquire land or equipment for food production will indeed provide one-time boosts to the Vermont economy. But in doing so they will forge a foundation for future production of food, which will earn profits on an ongoing, not merely “one-time,” infrastructure: yielding taxes, jobs, and boosting satellite businesses. Teachers in our schools are important, but they work in a “service industry” -- they do not produce goods for sale. The sale of *goods* is what generates actual wealth increase: service industries depend on that wealth creation to exist, period.

In contrast to the weak effort of TCI proponents to conjure “non-user” or other economic benefits for their scheme, the non-user benefits of nurtured farm production do not need to be fabricated -- there will be fresher, less expensive food for citizens to eat, which is [subsidized already](#) by our government for low income Vermonters. A doubling of those subsidies would further improve both farm sales and public health. Greenhouses will spring up, along with diverse novel businesses in sales, distribution and marketing enterprises capitalizing on the food grown by farmers. Prices, selection and availability at farmers’ markets will improve. Owners of historic barns and farm outbuildings will be motivated to incur the expenses to repair or restore these agricultural assets, which also serve as part of our Vermont scenery and history.

The health benefits of fresh local food (grown in undepleted, regenerated soils) will be augmented by the climate benefits of less trucking from far away. The trucking or rail shipments of Vermont foods for export, in contrast, will be closer to home, in traditional markets like Boston. And with actual profits from economic production, Vermonters won’t sink into yet deeper bureaucratic manure and debt -- they will have growing incomes to buy EV cars and solar panels *without* mandated government subsidies imposed through gasoline taxes and electricity fees (transfer payments that sap economic vitality). Farmland will be preserved and reclaimed, rather than developed or allowed to lapse into disuse.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets acknowledges that Vermont can and should avail itself of growing regional demand for its agricultural products. In its January 15, 2020 [“Vermont Agriculture and Food System Plan: 2020”](#) it notes:

“History has demonstrated that Vermont farmers prosper when they take advantage of their location, brand, and environment, as well as local and regional markets, to develop their farms and enterprises and distribute products that appeal to consumers. Joint marketing and distribution through farmer-owned

cooperatives have helped products such as milk, cheese, and vegetables reach a variety of consumer markets in and outside of Vermont.”

What the VAAFV does not mention is that taxes, and complex, costly regulations, hamper rather than support the ability of existing and aspiring farmers to “take advantage” of this growing opportunity. Instead, it proposes (on page 10) to hire “21 full-time personnel” at the state VAAFV “to assist Vermont farmers through this time of transition and crisis.” Farms close, bureaucracy grows!

That is where this Manifesto launches something ambitious and effective -- supporting agriculture and farmers by incentivizing THEM rather than hiring more state workers in the name of protecting them. For a change, let’s invest in our *farms and farmers* rather than more bureaucracy.

How to pay for it

First of all, much of this venture would be self-funded. “Incentivized” to produce and sell food, Vermonters’ incomes will rise, perhaps only modestly at first for farmers, but immediately for grain, equipment, and animal dealers; hardware and lumber companies; carpenters and mechanics; veterinarians; and farmers’ markets and other grocers. More dollars will remain in Vermont rather than be transferred to out-of-state growers.

But the plan is to provide yet more relief for Vermont taxpayers by reducing government waste, excessive regulations, and inefficient administrative expenses. These in turn will reduce the underlying property tax and income tax burdens for farmers and all taxpayers, in a positive economic cycle to displace the current vicious cycle of government predation in the guise of “saving us.” Government in Vermont has become more problem than solution.

Consider these proposals:

-- Shortened legislative session

By abbreviating the legislative session to eight weeks in post-election years, and two weeks for budget-only passage in alternate years, taxpayers would save more than \$5 million dollars annually, which exceeds the savings projected by Governor Scott if Vermont permitted keno gambling. More importantly, shortening the session would enable more regular Vermonters to serve as legislators, rather than lengthy disruptions of their businesses or regular jobs. In fact, more farmers could serve! Also, with more than 1,200 new laws put forth in 2020’s session, the government could restrain itself to reality. We need to repeal laws, not pass thousands more.

-- Pension reform

If teachers and state workers do not work together with taxpayers to reign in the bloated explosion of unfunded pension obligations, Vermont will suffer more credit downgrades, more restrictions on available assets for other programs, and eventual default. The current stock market decline means that all those rosy games of projecting returns on pension investments at 7.5% are now revealed as nothing short of fraud. If Vermont does not embrace leadership to remedy those growing threats, the unfunded pensions system will lead us *all* over a financial cliff.

-- Reduce government waste and size

Vermont's bureaucracy grows like Imelda Marcos' shoe closet. The overflow of laws and programs exceeds the carrying capacity of taxpayer wallets, however well-intentioned. State employees receive annual raises even as taxpayer incomes stagnate. Over 500 people earn more than \$100,000 per year in Vermont's bloated state government. School superintendents earn an average of \$153,000 annually, despite shrinking enrollment and rising administrative expenses.

Vermont's state and local employees now exceed 51,000 -- [26% larger](#) than the national average; nearly double that of neighboring New Hampshire. Across-the-board cuts are unwise: targeted reductions and limits on expansion are necessary steps to bring the government into service for the governed rather sap economic growth.

Like farms, everybody talks about the problem of bloated government, but nothing is done. Why is it that the state will spend itself into oblivion to sustain unsustainable school and state employee expenditures, but do nothing at all to rescue the farms and businesses upon which the former depend? We are overdue to reverse this insanity.

-- Welfare reform

People should have public support in down times, especially for healthcare. However, Vermont does have those who commit welfare fraud, by working illegally while receiving benefits, taking aid to which they are not entitled, or refusing to seek employment because they get benefits. Many working Vermonters are leaving the state because of the high costs of living; many non-working welfare recipients move here from states such as New Hampshire which require proof of efforts to seek work.

Vermont spends some [\\$1.7 billion annually](#) in welfare benefits, [one of the highest benefit packages](#) in the nation. The legislature forces higher minimum wages on employers who compete with large retail and other businesses, but with such high welfare benefits there is a disincentive to work even for \$12 per hour. If people can

work, they should get jobs -- Vermont employers report a lack of qualified workers. Perhaps it is a lack of *motivated* workers. Vermont government does not adequately police welfare fraud -- ask any working-class Vermonter if they know someone receiving welfare benefits fraudulently.

-- Reduce regulations

The government is quick to justify how it is protecting the public with burdensome regulations, but the opposite is true. For instance, failing car inspections for tiny rust spots puts perfectly good vehicles off the road -- this is not "green," as huge amounts of fossil fuels and materials are invested in the manufacture of existing vehicles; also, it is not economical for those on fixed and low incomes. Neither the economy nor the environment is protected -- though car dealerships benefit: is that the goal?

Act 250 and Current Use have grown year-by-year. Now there are calls to employ Act 250 as a climate change tool, and to [transfer wealth](#) from white to black people to counterbalance allegedly unfair "intergenerational wealth transfers." In 2020, the legislature has tried to *exempt* urban areas from Act 250 requirements while *expanding* its application to farms and farmers -- once again, this reveals an abusive effort to burden rural Vermonters and benefit urban dwellers. The gentrification of Vermont for the wealthy is in full swing -- and full view. Act 250 must be pared back to its original intention.

Vermont imposed restrictive regulations against on-farm slaughter even though no one was being sickened by the practice. This threatened itinerant slaughterers, custom processors, and small farmers, as well as intervened between farmers and those customers who wanted to know their food had been humanely slaughtered and locally produced. Those regulations were finally repealed (in large part) in 2019, due to public outcry. *Farms close, bureaucracy grows*. It's time to explain to those in the business of governing that government is not meant to be a business. This is the Farmers' Manifesto.

The Department of Agriculture charges a \$150-\$300 fee for small farmers to sell local meats. Does the State charge artists \$150 to sell greeting cards, sculptures, or oil paintings? What is Monsanto's annual fee payment to our state? How bad must it get for farm production before the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets (VAAFAM) lacks any remaining agriculture, food or markets to parasitically destroy? When there are only 100 dairy farms, will there be 800 VAAFAM employees? That is the current trajectory in Vermont, much like schools and healthcare.

-- Reduce healthcare costs

[OneCare Vermont](#) is unaffordable, but taxpayers are told it will take four years of multi-million dollar expenditures to even know whether it works. “Administrators” at “nonprofit” hospitals are paid obscenely more in salaries than the physicians and nurses who have invested their lives to serve the sick. Meanwhile, Vermont has had a mental health facility crisis for ten years, but it only worsens, putting even greater burdens on small rural hospitals. The solution is not reduced care: the solution is reduced bureaucracy.

Vermont also has an opioid crisis, compounded by a terrible (hopeless?) economy. As domestic violence, mental illness, suicide rates, and opioid abuse increase, the government uses those crises to leverage even greater control and solutions -- which is to say, even more costs. Government is not the solution to these problems: it is the problem. Vermonters need this bloated pig to get its snout out of their trough. Let businesses try to earn a profit. Let’s make Vermont more attractive for new businesses.

The cost of using tax dollars to indefinitely fund synthetic opioids for all who want them climbs annually, including for prison inmates. We must be compassionate toward those with substance abuse disorder, but that includes helping those who wish to free themselves from pharmaceutical dependency to do so. The resources are being expended to get people ON suboxone and methadone: more needs to be done to help get people OFF. Farm work is [good therapy](#), and gives people hope and purpose.

More widely available, affordable fresh produce will [help Vermonters of all incomes](#) combat obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other ailments, preventively reducing medical costs, improving workforce productivity, and attracting people of all ages and professions to want to live here! This shift alone might pay for this entire initiative.

-- Reduce education costs.

This is a complex area, and a separate Manifesto is required for our schoolchildren. But suffice here to consider that the current trajectory for our schools is unaffordable. *Schools close, bureaucracy grows.* Vermont has the [second-highest per student costs](#) in the nation as a function of median income. Vermonters were promised that their local schools would not be compelled to close against their local will -- but that’s precisely what has been done.

Act 46 was touted as the cost-saving solution: instead, costs are *rising* while schools are closed. No one disputes that we need good schools for our children. But we also

need schools for our local communities -- how is Vermont to attract young couples to settle here in towns that have no school? What is the future for those municipalities?

So we face a conundrum: we MUST support and nurture our students and local schools, but the current plan is financially unsustainable, and getting worse. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, though that is precisely what is being imposed through the bloated state takeover of our communities. The number of students in Vermont schools has declined by 25.5%, but the number of administrators, and their salaries, have not declined -- they increase steadily. More local control, and more school options, are the way to institute "proficiency based" school systems.

-- Improved agritourism

The more farms Vermont has, the more our roads become alluring to tourists -- this is the first agritourism benefit. Additionally, many farms, maple syrup producers, cider makers, and other agricultural businesses are finding innovative ways to supplement income by attracting the public to pay to view their operations, or to stop in and visit to buy goods at retail. This also helps dispel widespread modern ignorance about where and how food is grown, processed and distributed. *Education* is a community benefit.

-- Improved property values

Improved views; farming opportunities; more widespread healthy, fresh, local food -- these all improve property values for all landowners, increasing the tax base, improving financing opportunities for investment, and attracting cyber-workers, retirees and young families to resettle here -- *without* a silly short-term [bribe of \\$10,000](#).

-- Advertising for lottery

The state expends over \$10 million annually to operate the state lottery, including nearly a million dollars a year *advertising*. The lottery encourages dangerously addictive gambling habits, and regressively draws money from the pockets (and grocery budgets) of the poorest citizens. The sales pitch that the money is used to fund education is a shallow sham. The net return on this activity is about \$30 million. This is a dubious state enterprise -- the savings on advertising alone would be better invested in property- and income-tax abatement for farms and food production. Yes, ticket sales might decline -- and that money will be spent more fruitfully elsewhere in the economy.

Ancillary investments:

-- Regional Agricultural Centers

The state must support RACs, which can be established in strategic locations where agricultural production can be coordinated effectively. These can be flexible, and serve

in varying degrees as collection points for products, as farmer's markets (retail outlets), possibly for processing, inspection, or packaging, and for distribution. Such facilities could also support farmers by informing them what products are most in demand, share farming tips and pricing information, and refer customers to individual farm CSAs. Perhaps most helpful, by concentrating diverse products in quantity in one regional location, RACs would make it more economical for potential wholesale buyers (retailers) or distributors to purchase Vermont products.

-- The Big E fairgrounds is an effective, long tradition of advertising Vermont farm products and agritourism. It hosts approximately [30 producers annually](#), and serves as a huge opportunity to educate and advocate for the Vermont brand and sales of Vermont products, reaching an audience of some [1 million potential visitors](#).

However, the Vermont building at the Big E is in need of significant repairs, and the State of Vermont has failed to maintain the building despite requests from the Big E Fairgrounds. This is a modest investment that must be undertaken to "freshen up" Vermont's image -- *before* the building collapses and costs even more to resurrect.

-- low-interest loans could be procured for strong start-ups who will transport Vermont products to regional and out-of-state markets, or establish retail operations. Properly secured, there would be no loss to taxpayers as this short-term effort helped jump-start more high-end retail sales to southern markets.

Cultural Contrast with "Climate Initiatives"

The difference between investing in Vermont businesses to develop Vermont products (especially food) for export stands in compelling contrast to current ramrodded efforts to force Vermont drivers and taxpayers to subsidize *out-of-state* (and overseas!) production of goods to *supposedly* help the climate. Those efforts target carbon dioxide, which is not a pollutant, and cannot accurately be measured despite claims otherwise. Improving local food production creates very obvious reductions in pollution, chemicals, GMOs, fossil fuels, animal cruelty, overuse of antibiotics -- however measured. Concurrently, it provides fresher, healthier, safer, more sustainable food supplies without recourse to an artificial and regressive gasoline or other tax. It pays for itself, and provides long-term instead of one-time economic improvement.

Moreover, Vermont has seen an increasing "urbanization" that has "developed" certain regions in an irreversible direction that hurts the ecosystem, changes the landscape, makes areas look more like other commercialized areas of America, and is in direct conflict with Vermont's traditional agrarian culture. But this is *exactly* what the TCI and

other “incentivizing initiatives” seek to do. It’s “stakeholders” seek to drive a stake into the heart of Vermont’s way of life, irreversibly.

Consider [this Rockefeller-funded “analysis”](#) by Rutgers University prepared for the TCI:

Housing and transportation represent, on average, the two largest categories of household expenditures. For every dollar spent on housing, most families spend 77 cents on transportation (Lipman, 2006). When the costs of housing and transportation are considered together, and a benchmark affordability level of 45% of household income is set, the percentage of US neighborhoods that can be described as being affordable to their residents drops dramatically, to just 28% (CNT, 2012). Wishing to avoid the housing cost premium associated with neighborhoods closer to the urban core, many working class families move farther from their places of employment into outer fringe suburbs. Interestingly, because of the nature of the housing/transportation relationship, this decision often fails to reduce combined expenditures in these categories, but it does extend commute times and distances (Lipman, 2006); thereby increasing VMT [vehicle miles driven] and transportation sector emissions. This trend is only exacerbated by the fact that such far flung areas are typically less well served by transit than urban centers and their immediate surroundings, making personal vehicles the primary mode of travel. **Central to decreasing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector – a primary goal of the Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) – is the reduction of vehicle miles traveled;**

But Vermont is not a place where “many working class families move farther from their places of employment into outer fringe suburbs” -- Vermont is a place where generations of people never left their beloved Green Mountains despite external economic forces that have for decades sought to exploit this natural beauty, and destroy farms and farm communities. Monsanto, Cargill, and other industrial behemoths are well aware that there is HUGE PROFIT in food production, and have actively conspired in their boardrooms to increase their “market share” by pushing farmers out of the equation.

The backbone of the TCI -- recounted above from its web site as “central” -- is the reduction of “greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector.” In Vermont, many of the “gases” emitted in the rural sector have been from tractors, and trucks carrying high-quality milk to consumers. This is not an evil to be stamped out, but a lingering way of life to be revered and preserved. Food is not produced in cities, and trucking vegetables from California to New York City is not mentioned in this biased paper. Vermont must champion a “Farmer and Consumer Environmental Sanity Initiative”!

In Vermont, the “Energy Action Network” and other mysteriously-funded “nonprofits” work to advance the profitability of the renewable energy industry “stakeholders” by dressing up their agenda via stealthy propaganda. Their website coins catchy phrases to deceive gullible “climate virtue-signallers” about “... the [economic and technological opportunity](#) presented by transitioning to a sustainable energy future,” fantasizing that “Transitioning off fossil fuels is [an economic development and affordability strategy.](#)”

As income taxes, school expenses, state pensions, healthcare and welfare costs, and real estate taxes rise inexorably, more and more Vermonters are pushed into poverty. Then, the “progressive” legislature invokes those people as reason to increase the expansion of expensive, inefficient government programs to “rescue” them. Farmers have long experienced this perversion of the proper role of government -- it is just being expanded to more and more areas. Vermont’s education costs, [pensions](#), [bureaucratic bloat](#), and healthcare administration expenses are all *unsustainable*. Our nation’s unhealthy, environmentally destructive, corporate-dominated industrial food production system is *unsustainable*.

Vermont’s government is “serving” us by being the largest consumer of our earnings, while destroying farms and local communities in a fool’s errand to “save” us. The answer cannot be to simply soak the wealthy and enlarge the nanny state ad infinitum, as is so often said -- this cancer is soaking all of us except the bureaucratic “stakeholders.”

It is time for the citizens to *become the stakeholders* -- and the stakes have become extremely high. Instead of a grand government plan to rescue Vermonters, this is a simple plan to rescue Vermonters from grand government plans. Unlike the lose-lose agenda of self-proclaimed climate change “warriors,” nurturing Vermont farms is a win-win-win: food security and quality, pollution reduction, and sustained economic and agricultural growth. It’s a no-brainer for traditional Vermonters.

This is the 2020 Vermont Farming Manifesto. This is a *movement*... in the right direction.

Links

John Klar Campaign website: <https://klar2020.com>

A 2-page summary of this document (with video): <https://klar2020.com/FM>

This document: <https://klar2020.com/FM.pdf>