



Environmental Regulations and Legal Education for Vermont Farms

In 2015, the passage of Act 64 in **Vermont** introduced new water quality regulations to the state. The statute has created significant challenges for agricultural businesses both large and small, as producers attempt to understand the law and implement new “required agricultural practices (RAPs)” on their farms. Vermont has approximately 850 active dairy farms, of which 750 are classified as “small farms” (milking less than 200 cows). Although previously exempt, small farms are now required to adopt new practices to meet regulatory standards. Following passage of the law, **University of Vermont Extension** staff received numerous calls from producers inquiring about their legal rights and obligations. In addition, area agricultural service providers and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) both encouraged UVM to pursue a project that would enhance the capacity to reach farms with critical legal education on this topic.

In response, **Mark Cannella** and his team at UVM developed and provided risk management education programming to farmers during 2016-2017, through workshops located in the state’s agricultural counties. Producers came together with legal experts to address

farmer rights and obligations, to document feedback for policy makers, to identify specific legal risks on their farms, to analyze existing resources, and to develop an action plan to mitigate risks to their businesses.

Through this project, 185 Vermont farmers participated in educational workshops. Seven legal education fact sheets and reports were developed and distributed to participants, as well as being made available online. One hundred and forty (140) farm managers completed a risk management planning worksheet to assist in assessing potential changes to their operations. However, compliance with the new regulations is proving challenging, and by the end of the project only twenty-one farms were able to verify that actual changes had been implemented. In addition, several producers made very difficult but informed decisions to exit farming due to the impact of the new requirements.

Some of the current challenges facing farmers in Vermont are captured in an episode of the local TV program “Across the Fence” that highlighted one participant of the legal workshops: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tuQpCj5PR4>. Viewers of this segment get to see first-hand what it takes to farm in the 21st century in Vermont – new legal rights and responsibilities, management adaptations, input costs, and the types of assistance now needed if a farmer wants to continue his or her operation.



“Thank you for putting these ‘real issues’ (the legal rights and responsibilities for all parties) right out there in the public.”

- Vermont Farmer





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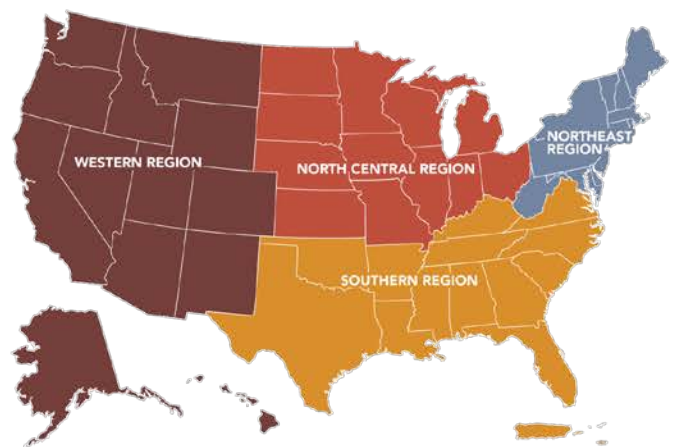
National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

“Educating America’s farmers and ranchers to manage the unique risks of producing food for the world’s table.”

Extension Risk Management Education (ERME) is delivered through four regional centers that provide grant funding and leadership within their regions.

Projects are producer-focused, results-based and encourage public-private partnerships. Funded projects must identify targeted results that will help producers manage risk and then describe how the project will measure those results.

Extension Risk Management Education has funded innovative programs that have generated tangible results for producers in every state. ERME is committed to funding results, providing transparent accountability, and encouraging collaboration. View the accomplishments of all funded projects on our website.
<http://ExtensionRME.org>



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RISK
MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION**

University of Nebraska
Dept. of Agricultural Economics
303 Filley Hall
Lincoln, NE
68583-0922

(402) 472-1742
NCERME.org



**NORTHEAST
EXTENSION
RISK
MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION**

University of Delaware
Dept. of Applied Economics
and Statistics
112 Townsend Hall
Newark, DE
19716-2130

(302) 831-6540
NERME.org



**SOUTHERN
EXTENSION
RISK
MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION**

2301 South University Ave.
Little Rock, AR
72204

(501) 671-2165
SRMEC.uark.edu



**WESTERN
EXTENSION
RISK
MANAGEMENT
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222 N. Havana St.
Spokane Valley, WA
99202

(509) 477-2168
WESTRME.wsu.edu



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