Dear Legislators,

A community of small-scale farmers who struggle to find nearby meat processing facilities that meet their needs and who decided it would be best for their animals to be slaughtered on the farm where they were raised need your support!

On-Farm Slaughter is being penalized with new restrictions that the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets announced January 6, 2021, as coming from the superseding federal agency, the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS). These restrictions now require every livestock owner who purchased the animal from a farmer for its slaughter on the farm, to be at least present during the act of slaughter, if not engaging also in the slaughter themselves. In testimony, VAAFM staff further stated that farmers who organize On-Farm Slaughter would not be allowed to hire itinerant slaughterers on behalf of the owners of the livestock they raise. Finally, VAAFM penalizes those who demand local meat in direct relationship to their farmer by stating in testimony to the House Agriculture and Forestry Committee that the agency would understand the owners, and not farmers, need to be the ones to transport the carcass off the farm and to the butcher. Sincerely, would you have the skill, vehicle, and machinery to transport a quarter of a cow? We have not seen any of these restrictions in writing coming from FSIS in guidance nor can we find related provisions in state or federal law. Rural Vermont members of the agricultural community have successfully advocated for over a decade to improve Vermont state law through the democratic process just to find these laws not implemented, supported or yet even promoted by our state agency. In consequence, many practitioners remain confused about the legalities of on-farm slaughter and rather continue to operate under the radar.
We are grateful for the legislators of the Senate Committee on Agriculture support in reaching out to FSIS via letter from January 31, 2022 stating: “There is no reference in the FSIS guidance to a requirement that all owners be physically present at the site of the slaughter, and, frankly, we do not know if this requirement is documented anywhere.”

Signatories kindly ask legislators to consider the urgency that farmers face now that spring is here and a new generation of livestock sold for being slaughtered on the farm where they were raised is being born. Without the confidence that VAAFM will not enforce against their practice (without sufficient legal basis) these farmers might lose their good standing with the agency and thus access to any future state support for their agricultural practices. After the legislature allowed for multiple owners per animal in 2019, repealed the sunset of 6 V.S.A § 3311a and increased the allowances for on-farm slaughter in 2021 to now 10 cattle, 30 swine, or 80 sheep or goats - we now ask to repeal the registration and reporting requirements for farmers who organize on-farm slaughter in 6 V.S.A. § 3311a (c) (2) and (8). While we desire VAAFM to promote On-Farm Slaughter in Vermont - this measure appears urgently needed to protect practitioners NOW.