

The business model we now refer to as conventional farming was introduced in the 1950s. The model exchanged cheap but toxic chemicals for time consuming and expensive crop rotation and mechanical weed control. As designed, the model's efficiencies raised crop yields and lowered costs to such a degree that by the 1970s its adoption was near universal.

Unfortunately the model also entrained other results farmers were less enthusiastic about, first among them over production, which drives down farm prices and drives up farm attrition. Second, the model deposited ten times more soluble nitrogen and phosphorus in the soil than crops could take up. These substances ran predictably down the hill into the nearest stream and eventually into the lake where near half the pollution is attributable to "agriculture."

Organic agriculture was also introduced in the 1950s as an antidote to these problems. However, farming organically costs more and organic food also costs more. Farmers were understandably interested in greater yields at lower cost and not understandably concerned that the knock-on effects would decimate their income and their numbers.

Be that as it may, Vermont permits farmers to farm conventionally even as the legislature enacts at great cost dozens of programs designed only on their faces to reduce problems these programs have empirically failed for sixty years to reduce. This Faustian bargain serves neither farmers, taxpayers or the environment yet it lives on.

Now we have learned that conventional farming also pollutes the atmosphere and Vermont is very concerned that this problem requires an immediate and strong response. Consequently in 2021 the legislature enacted — over the governor's veto — the Global Warming Solutions act, which seeks to reduce GHG emissions 25% by 2025, 50% by 2030 and 80% by 2050. These goals are not guidance: they are mandates.

In spite of the fact that the state provides both explicit and implicit support to dairy farmers to continue farming conventionally, conventional farming is heavily dependent upon synthetic fertilizer and herbicides, both derived from fossil fuel. Conventional farming cannot "reduce" its use of fossil fuels and cannot therefore ever be "climate friendly." Consequently, the state cannot both support conventional farming AND meet the mandated goals of the GWSA. These two goals stand in DIRECT contradiction to one another.

Will the CAC advise the legislature of conventional farming's inherently flawed design and of organic farming's capacity to remedy it in this years annual recommendations?

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