

## **Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Policy Stacking on Vermont Farmers**

Final Report for the James M. Jeffords Center for Policy Research

Dr. Meredith T. Niles, Assistant Professor, University of Vermont

### **Project Overview**

This pilot research, and outreach and engagement project, sought to document and map existing policy stacking in Vermont agriculture. Through this documentation, the project will provide policymakers, Extension, industry, and others with a detailed understanding of the ways that multiple levels of policy (city, county, state, and federal) co-exist and the timelines and reporting burdens of different agencies and policies. It was proposed that data be collected through interviews (n=20) in various agricultural sectors. The project proposed to deliver a policy brief and host a panel at UVM made up of regulators and policymakers and farmers.

### **Project Methods**

When this project began, it became immediately clear to the PI that there was immense interest in the topic among farmers throughout the state, and among regulators. While the initial scope was only for interviews, the PI expanded the reach of the project to capture the energy and enthusiasm of the agricultural community and beyond. The PI and her team conducted a total of 16 interviews across Vermont with farms of various sizes and kinds. The PI then developed a two page survey, which was deployed at several farmer conferences including the Vermont Grass Farmers Association Conference and the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Producers Conference. The survey was also programmed to go online, and was sent out through various listserves and community partners including the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, The Vermont Farm Bureau and multiple farmer list serves. All told, 88 farmers participated in this research (far exceeding the original goal of 20). The survey also provided a much greater capacity to hear from more farmers in a shorter format and to more fully gather representative perspectives.

The qualitative interviews and data from the survey have been transcribed and analyzed using N-Vivo software including key themes that have emerged from this portion of the research. The quantitative data from all of the surveys has been analyzed using statistical software. The PI and her team are in the process of continuing to analyze this data and write up an academic article.

### **Key Deliverables and Impact**

The project proposed to develop a policy brief and a panel discussion, both of which came to fruition. The policy brief, attached, highlights the key points from the research and suggestions for future research and policy opportunities. The brief has been shared with key stakeholders that participated in the research process including the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, The Vermont Farm Bureau, The Center for a New Agricultural Economy, Rural Vermont, NOFA Vermont, Vermont Farm to Plate Network, and multiple farmer listserves including the Vermont Beef Producers Association and the Vermont Veg and Berry Growers Association. The research brief was also shared with key policymakers including from our Federal delegation. The research brief is housed on the PIs website on a section of the website dedicated to this topic.

In addition to the policy memo, a panel discussion and reception was held on November 28, 2018 with farmers and policymakers at the UVM Alumni House Silver Pavillion. An estimated 75 to 100

people attended including students, staff, faculty, media and Congressional staffers. Six panelists were invited to participate including:

- Laura DiPietro, Director of Water Quality, Vermont Agency of Agriculture
- Jackie Folsom, Legislative Director, Vermont Farm Bureau
- Steve Palmer, Farmer and Owner, Shelburne Sugarworks
- Representative Carolyn Partridge, Chairwoman Vermont House Agriculture Committee
- Chuck Ross, Director of UVM Extension, Former Vermont Secretary of Agriculture
- Loren Wood, Dairy Farmer and Owner, Woodnotch Farms

The panel event began with an overview of the research results given by the PI, then opening remarks and questions for the panelists, followed by a Q&A with the audience. A reception and conversation followed. A flyer advertising the event and photos from the event are attached.

### **Additional Funding and Project Future**

In addition to the support from the Jeffords Center, additional funding and opportunities have arisen from this project. The PI received a \$5,000 grant from UVM Extension/College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to assist with communicating research outcomes from her work in collaboration with Cooperative Extension. A portion of the grant will be used to communicate the findings of this work and the panel through Cooperative Extension blogs and listserves to farmers and others throughout the state. As well, the PI is currently exploring a potential spring collaboration with the Vermont Law School's agriculture and food law clinic to further explore the regulations that farmers comply with, and the overlap in regulatory reporting.



Panelists discuss audience questions during the event.



Audience members before the event began.



Audience members listen to Jackie Folsom from the Vermont Farm Bureau

# Government Regulations and Policies in Agriculture

## A Panel Discussion on Farmer and Policymaker Perspectives

Come hear research results from a recent study of farmer perspectives on regulations followed by a panel discussion with farmers and policymakers



Photo: Melissa Pasanen

### **A panel discussion featuring:**

Laura DiPietro, Director of Water Quality, VT Agency of Agriculture

Jackie Folsom, Legislative Director, VT Farm Bureau

Steve Palmer, Farmer and Owner, Shelburne Sugarworks

Representative Carolyn Partridge, Chairwoman VT House Agriculture Committee

Chuck Ross, Director of UVM Extension. Former VT Secretary of Agriculture

Loren Wood, Dairy Farmer and Owner, Woodnotch Farms

**Wednesday November 28**

**3:30pm- 5:00pm with reception following**

**Silver Pavilion, UVM Alumni House**

**61 Summit St. Burlington, VT**

**free and open to the public**

Contact Meredith Niles, [mtniles@uvm.edu](mailto:mtniles@uvm.edu) for more information

Made possible with support from the James M. Jeffords Center for Policy Research  
and the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences

# Farmer Perspectives of Government Regulations: Benefits, Challenges and Opportunities

Dr. Meredith T. Niles, Assistant Professor

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Vermont

## Background

Throughout New England, farmers face regulations across a wide range of areas in the agrifood system. From environmental to labor to economic policies, these rules are administered and regulated by many different agencies. Recent years have seen a number of new large policies introduced nationally and in Vermont, including the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) and the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). Given these changes, this research explores farmer's perceptions of regulations, perceived benefits and challenges, and potential opportunities for policy and regulatory issues.

## Data Collection

Data were gathered through farmer interviews and online surveys. Farmers were recruited for interviews via the Vermont Agency of Agriculture's publication AgriView, through Cooperative Extension, and via farmer list serves. Fifteen farmers were interviewed and compensated \$50 for their time. Surveys were conducted at various conferences in winter 2018. In addition, online surveys were conducted via list serves such as the Beef Producers Association, The Farm Bureau, and through advertisements in AgriView between April and July 2018. In total, 73 farmers responded to the survey, and were eligible for one of 10 randomly chosen prizes for \$50. Survey responses were analyzed using statistical methods and qualitative analysis for open-ended responses.

88

number of farmers participating in the research.

## Key Descriptive Results

### Respondents

Farmer respondents produced a variety of crops, animals, and products on their farms. Respondents most commonly reported producing at least one of the following: dairy (32%), beef cattle (29%), vegetables (29%), fruit or fruit trees (25%), berries (23%), corn or row crops (23%), maple (23%), and pasture (23%). In addition:

- 71% of respondents were from Vermont, while other respondents reported farming in New York, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut.
- 16.4% of farmers were certified organic in some capacity.
- Respondents reported that the principal farm operator was most commonly the individual responsible for paperwork and government reporting.
- 70% of farmers reported that farming is their full time occupation, with a mean of 38% of their income coming from off the farm.
- 60% of farmers identified that they had a succession plan for their farm.
- Farmer respondents reported a mean age of 54 years old, with 70% identifying as male and 29% identifying as female.

## Farmer Perceptions of Changes in Regulations

Legend: Significantly decreased (dark brown), Decreased (orange), Stayed the Same (yellow), Increased (light blue), Significantly increased (dark blue), Not sure (grey)

The number of government regulations in the past five years has...



The level of complexity of government regulation in the past five years has...



The number of farm visits/audits from government regulators in the past five years has...



## Farmer Perceptions of Federal Regulations

Strongly disagree Disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly agree Not sure

I feel confident that I know how to comply with federal regulations



I feel certain about how federal regulations will affect my farm



The federal regulatory environment is steady and predictable



The cost to comply with federal regulations is reasonable



### Farmer Perspectives on Regulations

Survey respondents were asked about changes in regulations over time and their impact on farms.

- 84% of farmers reported a increase in regulations in the past five years. (53.1% significantly increased, 33.1% increased)
- 83% of farmers felt that regulatory complexity had increased in the last five years (44.6% significantly increased, 38.5% increased).

Our results suggest that farmer’s largely had similar views on both state and federal policies and processes. They feel confident in compliance but uncertain about changes and cost challenges.

- Almost 61% of farmers agreed and strongly agreed that they felt confident in complying with both state and federal regulations.
- 34.9% and 30.4% of respondents stated that they feel certain to some extent about how state and federal regulations, respectively, will impact their farm.
- Finally, cost was cited as a barrier or challenge within the surveys, as 22% of farmers stated that the cost to comply with both state and federal policies was reasonable.

**More than 60% of farmers felt confident with compliance, but only 22% of farmers felt costs were reasonable**

## Farmer Perceptions of State Regulations

Strongly disagree Disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly agree Not sure

I feel confident that I know how to comply with state regulations



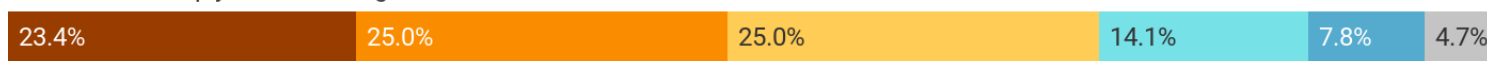
I feel certain about how state regulations will affect my farm



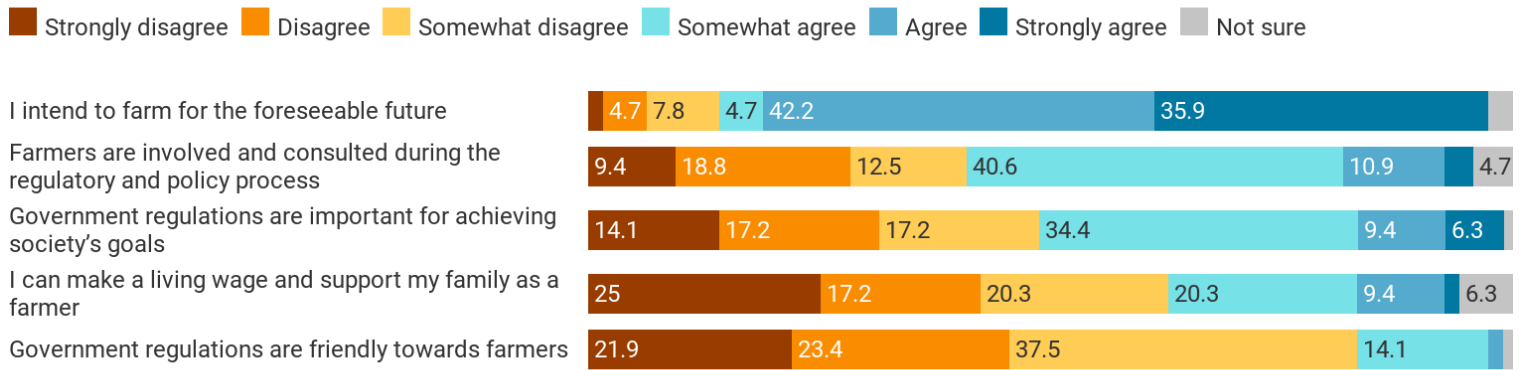
The state regulatory environment is steady and predictable



The cost to comply with state regulations is reasonable



## Farming and Regulations



Farmers reported on society and government's impact on the state of their farm.

- Despite indicated challenges with regulations, almost 83% of farmers stating that they agree or strongly agree that they intend to continue to farm in the foreseeable future.
- 82.8% of farmers felt that government regulations were not friendly towards farmers; yet, half of respondents shared that regulations are important to achieve goals as society as a whole.
- 31.3% of farmers agreed that they are able to make a livable wage from their farming operation.

**83% of farmers intend to farm for the foreseeable future**

### Regulatory Breadth

Survey respondents discussed 22 specific regulations ranging from municipal, state, to federal level policies. Table 1 outlines the five most commonly discussed policy types. It should be noted that the most frequently discussed policy, the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs), is a regulation in the state of Vermont.

Table 1. The five most frequently listed regulations

Regulation	Scale	Administering Body	Mentions
Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs)	State	Vermont Agency of Agriculture	35
Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)	Federal	Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – Food and Drug Administration (FDA)	11
Organic Food Production Act	Federal	United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)	10
Federal Meat Inspection Act	Federal	USDA	8
Farm Bill	Federal	USDA	5

Table 2. Total number policy types mentioned

Policy Category	Total Mentions
Environment	50
Food Safety	24
Economics/Financial	7
Labor	5
Viticulture	2
Healthcare	1

Environmental policies (e.g. focus on land, water quality, climate, or soil) were most commonly mentioned by farmers. Food safety (e.g. FSMA, HACCP, food inspections, animal transportation regulations) were the second most commonly cited regulation, followed by economic and financial policies, which surround the regulation of production insurance and taxes. Labor policies were mentioned five times, regarding regulation of migrant work and employees. Lastly, viticulture policies (such as specific regulations impacting the production and retailing of wine products) and healthcare (e.g. the Affordable Care Act) were mentioned least.

## **Perceived Benefits**

When asked about the benefits of government regulations, respondents reported a variety of benefits ranging from on and off the farm. Farmers reported the main benefits to regulations were improved environmental quality; enhanced health and safety for farm workers, consumers, and society; and more awareness and confidence of agricultural practices across communities.

***"Regulations have made farmers better land managers"***

**-Vermont Farmer**

## **Perceived Challenges & Opportunities**

Farmers were asked about challenges and barriers they faced surrounding government regulations that impacted their farm. The most commonly stated challenges to comply with policies are associated with the economic cost associated with changing practices, farmer education of the regulations, and disconnect between government officials and farmers. Many farmers expressed that they didn't know how to participate in the process, or were not heard in the process.

***"Regulations change frequently and often are stricter and harder to afford implementation without significant cost and/or loss of efficiency"***

**- Vermont Farmer**

Respondents shared potential changes they would like to see within the regulatory system to make compliance more accessible. The most common opportunities included simplification of regulations, input from farmers when making regulatory decisions, improved communication, better economic opportunities, and increased science-driven policy.

***"[There's] a long list of changes.. but primarily I'd like to see science based research and trial data to support any new regulations"***

**- Vermont Farmer**

***"I would like farmers to have more access and involvement in the discussion of the regulations to come up with common sense solutions"***

**-Vermont Farmer**

## **Policy Implications**

- Despite the perceived increase in number and complexity of regulations, the majority of farmers surveyed intend to continue to farm in the foreseeable future.
- Farmers most significant policy challenges include regulatory certainty, cost, administrative capacity (e.g. paperwork), participation, and knowing who to reach out to for questions.
- Farmers suggest opportunities for improvement include communication and technical assistance, simplification of regulations, economic opportunities accompanying regulations, and science-driven policies.

## **Future Research**

Future research of a similar fashion could be expanded into other regions facing similar federal, but different state regulations, and work with farmers over time to understand more specifically how policies are implemented and what benefits and challenges they experience. Further complementary research could document all existing state and federal policies and analyze the paperwork and other regulatory reporting required across different policy structures.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research was funded by The James M. Jeffords Center for Policy Research at The University of Vermont. Special thanks to Olivia Peña and Luis Alexis Rodriguez Cruz for their research assistance. Additional thanks to the farmers and farm groups who participated and shared the survey, especially The Vermont Farm Bureau and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

For additional information please contact:  
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802-656-4337



A vintage red McCormick Farmall tractor is the central focus, parked in a lush green field. The tractor has a prominent black exhaust stack and the words "McCormick Farmall" are visible on its side. The background shows a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds and a line of trees in the distance. The overall scene is bright and rural.

# Government Regulations and Policies in Agriculture

**A Panel Discussion with Farmers and Policymakers**

**With support from the James M. Jeffords Center for Policy Research**

# Policies and Regulations in Agriculture

- Agriculture has a variety of federal, state and municipal policies and regulations to comply with
- Several new recent policies at both federal and state levels
- Agriculture in Vermont is changing-
  - More on-farm businesses
  - Changing demographics
  - 11% reduction in dairy farms in 2018

## FDA To Explain New Food Safety Rules At Event In Brattleboro

By HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN • DEC 11, 2015

## Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets adopts drainage rule

By Press Release

Nov 21 2018 | 0 comments



0

SHARES

News Release — Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets  
Nov. 14, 2018

Contact:

Ryan Patch

(802) 272-0323

[ryan.patch@vermont.gov](mailto:ryan.patch@vermont.gov)

VAAFM Files Adopted Subsurface Tile Drainage Water Quality Rule

*RAPs amended to include language addressing nutrient contributions from subsurface tile drainage.*

November 14, 2018 / Montpelier, VT – On Thursday, November 8, 2018, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) filed the adopted rule amendment to the Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) with the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) and the Secretary of

# Key Questions

- What are farmer perspectives of state and federal policies?
  - What policies are farmers complying with?
- How do policies and regulations affect farming and farm decisions?

# Study

- 15 in-depth interviews with a range of farmers (size and type) in 2017-2018
- Farmer survey at farmer conferences and through online distribution in 2018
- 88 total respondents
  - 32% dairy
  - 29% beef cattle
  - 29% vegetables
  - 25% fruit
  - 23% each of berries, corn, maple, & pasture



Vermont Farm. Photo: Melissa Pasanen

# Farmer Perspectives

- **84%** of farmers reported an increase in regulations in the last 5 years
- **83%** reported an increase in regulatory complexity in the last 5 years
- **45%** felt farmer visits/audits had increased in the last 5 years

## Farmer Perceptions of Changes in Regulations

Significantly decreased   Decreased   Stayed the Same   Increased   Significantly increased   Not sure

The number of government regulations in the past five years has...



The level of complexity of government regulation in the past five years has...

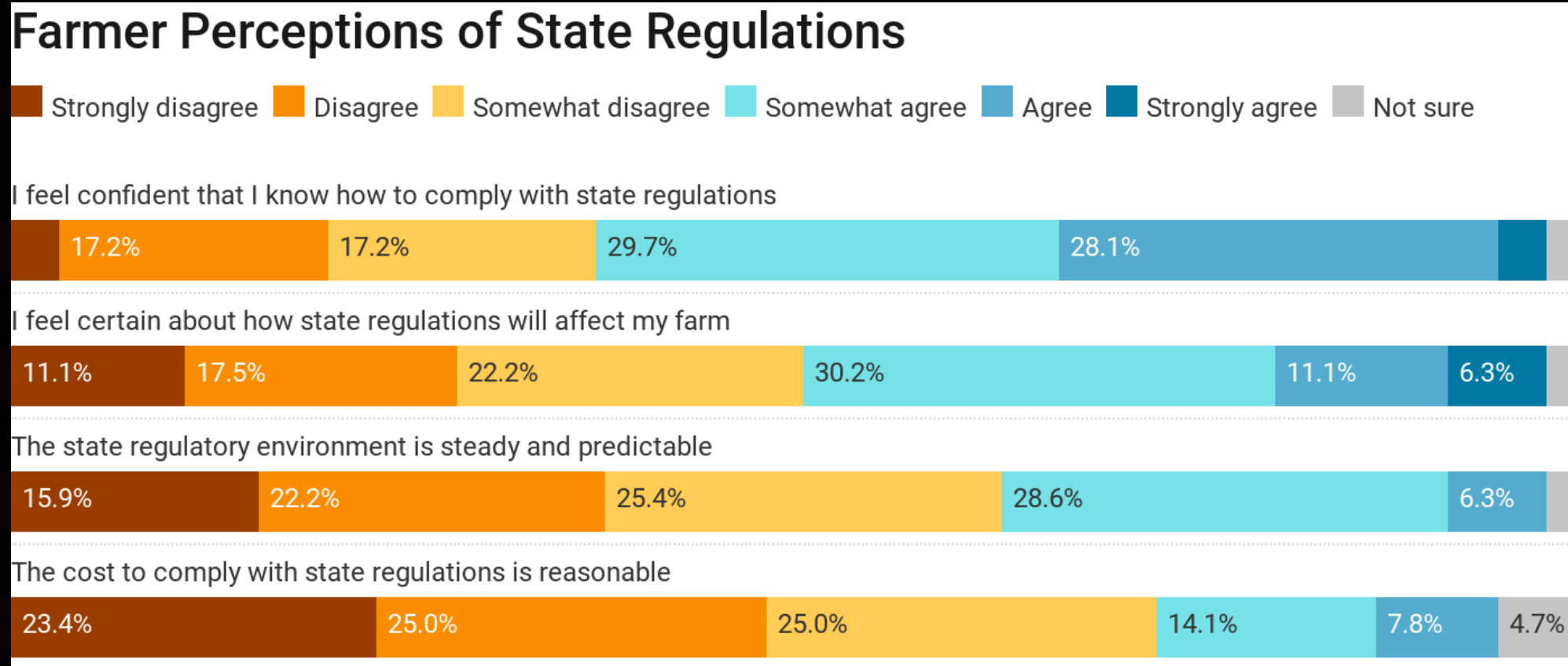


The number of farm visits/audits from government regulators in the past five years has...



# State and Federal Perspectives

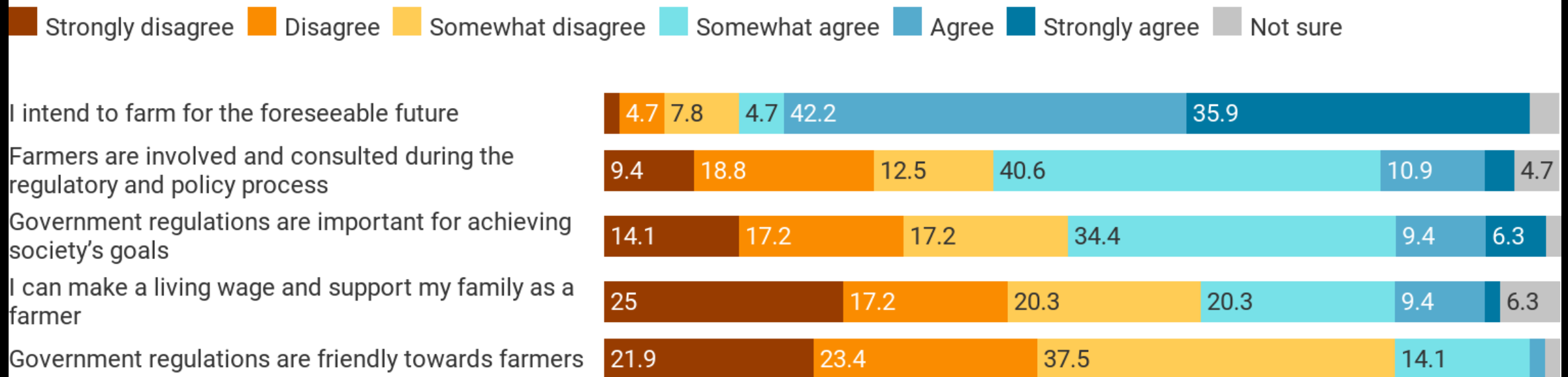
- Very similar perspectives between state and federal policies
- The majority felt confident with compliance, but had concerns about predictability and cost for compliance



# Farming and Society

- **83%** of farmers intended to farm in the future
- **82%** felt regulations weren't friendly towards farmers, but half of all farmers felt regulations were important for society's goals;
- More than half felt farmers were involved in the regulatory process
- **30%** of farmers felt they could make a living wage in farming

## Farming and Regulations



# Common Policies in Agriculture

- Environment and food safety policies were most commonly mentioned by farmers

*Table 2. Total number policy types mentioned*

<b>Policy Category</b>	<b>Total Mentions</b>
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# Perceived Benefits

- Farmers cited a number of benefits of regulations:
  - Consumer confidence
  - Food safety
  - Water quality
  - Protection of natural resources
  - Better awareness
  - Social responsibility

“We are the postcard for the state”  
- Vermont farmer

“Regulations have encouraged us  
to be better stewards of the land  
and apply our manure in a  
responsible way”  
-Vermont farmer

# Challenges and Opportunities

- Perceived challenges included:
  - Cost of compliance and permits as well as practice change
  - Farmer knowledge of the new regulations
  - Disconnect between farmers and policymakers
- Opportunities cited included:
  - Regulatory simplification
  - Communication- who to reach out to
  - Better science informed policies

“Regulations change frequently and often are stricter and harder to afford implementation without significant cost and/or loss of efficiency”  
– Vermont Farmer

“I would like to see more structures in the regulations that economically reward good behavior”  
- Vermont Farmer

“I would like farmers to have more access and involvement in the discussion of the regulations to come up with common sense solutions”  
- Vermont Farmer

# Acknowledgements

- Funding from the James M. Jeffords Center for Policy Research
- Research assistance from Olivia Pena and Luis Alexis Rodriguez Cruz
- Those who assisted with dissemination of the survey including the Center for an Agricultural Economy, Champlain Valley Farmer's Coalition, Rural Vermont, UVM Extension (Terry Bradshaw, Jeff Carter, Vern Grubinger, Beth Holtzman), Vermont Agency of Agriculture and Food Marketing, Vermont Beef Producers Association, Vermont Farm Bureau, Vermont Sheep and Goat Coalition
- All of the farmers who participated in interviews and the survey

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Photo Credit: Melissa Pasanen