

Conservation Agriculture Policy Course Syllabus

June 25, 26 & 27, 2021

Class Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89273041073?pwd=MDdjcy8rNXRQR2YvZVNVWTBDMWR6dz09>

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Introduction

Hello! I am looking forward to our class this summer. We will be meeting virtually **on Zoom** on Friday and Saturday, 6/25 and 6/26 from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm and in person for farm visits on Sunday, 6/27 from 8:30 am - 2 pm. Please have your video on for class (if you have connectivity restraints, reach out to me and we can find ways to accommodate). If you have any questions outside of class, please feel free to contact me by email or phone to set up a meeting.

This one credit course will examine state and federal standards for natural resource conservation on agricultural land in Vermont and the associated effects of conservation policy on farmers. We will discuss Vermont's Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) and the variety of environmental conservation programs available at the state and federal levels which are designed to assist farmers to achieve conservation compliance. Students will learn how to identify on-farm natural resource concerns and how to effectively communicate with farmers.

The course will incorporate 2 farm visits where students will see specific types of conservation practices implemented by farmers to protect natural resources and increase air, water, and soil quality on- and off-farm.

Students will acquire a basic understanding of the interplay between state and federal regulations in Vermont and how regulations affect farms on-the-ground. In addition, students will be introduced to environmental issues on farms, common conservation methods, and cost benefit analyses of conservation practices. For the final project, students will complete an overview of another state's agriculture regulatory systems in comparison to Vermont's RAPs and provide policy improvement recommendations.

Class 1 - June 25

Federal Conservation Policy

- USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Conservation Districts (NRCD)
- Conservation Planning

Read:

- 2018 Farm Bill Title II Primer <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IF11199.pdf>
- Food Security Act <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/99-198%20-%20Food%20Security%20Act%20of%201985.pdf> **Skim pg 79-89, pg 94-109** Chapter 4 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program

- Explore the White River NRCO and NRCS website (especially EQIP)
www.whiterivernrcd.org
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/>

Class 2 - June 26

State Conservation Policy

- VT Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs)
- Payment for Ecosystem Services

Read:

- Explore Vermont RAP website: <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/rap>
- RAP Legislation:
https://agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/agriculture/files/documents/RAPFINALRULE12-21-2018_WEB.pdf
- Explore Payment for Ecosystem Services in VT website:
<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>
- CAFS Report on PES in VT (sent as an email attachment)

Supplemental Reading:

- [Examining Vermont State Spending on the Dairy Industry from 2010 to 2019](#) - VT State Auditor
- [A Lens for Analysis of Payment for Ecosystem Services Systems: Transitioning the Working Lands Economic Sector from Extractive Industry to Regenerative System](#) - by VLS alum Gordon Merrick

Class 3 - June 27 **8:30 am start time**

Farm Visit: [Shire Beef](#), [Cedar Mountain Farm](#)

Meet at VLS Oakes parking lot at 8:30am. A bus will take us to our farm visits. You may want to pack a lunch and bring water! We will be recording the farm visits with a handheld device and uploading videos for the virtual students to tune into after class!

Final Assignment

Students may choose between the following topics for their final paper:

1. Compare and contrast Vermont's RAPs with another state's agriculture conservation standards. Students should craft policy recommendations to improve their state's current agriculture policies based on what they have learned in this class. The recommendations may take the form of legislative draft edits, if applicable.
2. Discuss similarities and differences between existing conservation programs and Payment for Ecosystem Services. Suggest options for funding sources, administration, replacement of programs, practices vs outcomes, etc.
3. Develop a draft rule for a Conservation District. Make the case for why such a rule should be developed at the District level as opposed to the state level, how the rule would be implemented across the district, and why a resident of the district would vote for or against this rule.

The final paper should be between 6-10 pages. **Due Sunday July 11th.**