Conservation Agriculture Policy Course Syllabus
June 10-12, 2022

Jennifer Byrne, Adjunct Faculty
Director, White River Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD)
Environmental Masters Fellow, Environmental Justice Clinic @ VLS
jbyrne@vermontlaw.edu, whiterivernrcd@gmail.com
862-432-3980

Introduction
Hello! I am looking forward to our class this summer. We will be meeting on campus on Friday and Saturday, 6/10 and 6/11 from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm and in person for farm visits on Sunday, 6/12 from 8:30 am - 2 pm. 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 10
Federal Conservation Policy
- USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Conservation Districts (NRCD)
- Conservation Planning
- Community Engagement in Conservation

Watch: Explore Conservation at Work https://www.farmers.gov/conserve/conservation-at-work

Read:
- 2018 Farm Bill Title II Primer
- CFR Title 7 Subtitle B Chapter XIV Subchapter B Part 1466:
  - § 1466.1, 1466.2, 1466.3, 1466.6, 1466.8
- Food Security Act
- **Skim pg 79-103** Chapter 4 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program
  - Explore the White River NRCD and NRCS website (especially EQIP)
    - [www.whiterivernrccd.org](http://www.whiterivernrccd.org)
    - [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/national/home/)

**Supplemental Reading:**
- VT Soil Conservation Act

**Class 2 - June 11**

**State Conservation Policy**
- VT Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs)
- Payment for Ecosystem Services

**Read:**
- Explore Vermont RAP website
- RAP Legislation
- Explore Payment for Ecosystem Services in VT website

**Supplemental Reading:**
- [A Lens for Analysis of Payment for Ecosystem Services Systems: Transitioning the Working Lands Economic Sector from Extractive Industry to Regenerative System](https://www.vt.gov/legislature/vtstatutes/fullchapter/10/031) - by VLS alum Gordon Merrick
- CSP+ Proposal - by White River NRCD
- [Examining Vermont State Spending on the Dairy Industry from 2010 to 2019](https://www.vt.gov/legislature/vtstatutes/fullchapter/10/031) - VT State Auditor

**Class 3 - June 12 **8:30 am start time**

**Farm Visit:** [Cedar Mountain Farm, Cedar Circle Farm](https://www.cedarmountainfarm.com)
Meet at VLS Oakes parking lot at 8:30am. A bus will take us to our farm visits.
Wear boots, pack a lunch, and bring water!

**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, how the rule would be implemented across the District, and why a resident of the district would vote for or against this rule.

see § 724 [https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/fullchapter/10/031](https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/fullchapter/10/031)

The final paper should be between 6-10 pages. **Due Sunday June 26th.**