

# Vermont Agency of Agriculture For Immediate Release

Tuesday August 15, 2006

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## **Premises Registration Proposal On Hold**

Vermont Agriculture Secretary Steve Kerr is putting the process of adopting new rules that would make premises registration mandatory in Vermont on-hold. The decision comes after receiving information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture concerning the confidentiality of data collected.

“USDA had promised us complete confidentiality at every step of this process,” Kerr said. “Now we have reason to believe that may not be the case. Without 100% confidentiality, we will not be sending any information on Vermont farms to the USDA database.”

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture has been drafting the rules mandating premises registration as a tool to help contain an outbreak of animal disease. The Agency simply needs to know where the animals are should a disease like BSE, Avian Influenza, or Exotic Newcastle strikes. That process will continue once the issue of where to keep the database is settled.

The Agency of Agriculture has been hosting hearings and educational sessions on the proposed new premises registration rules over the past month. Meetings that had already been scheduled will continue with an emphasis on education. Special evening hearings for those who couldn't attend during the day will be postponed until the official process re-starts.

“Educating the public on how to keep their animals and themselves safe is a critical part of these meetings,” Kerr said. “We want these forums to continue so we can share that valuable information and answer any questions the public may have on biosecurity.”

Through Vermont's voluntary premises registration program, about 300 local farms have supplied their name, location, and types of animals housed there. Kerr has written to USDA Secretary Mike Johanns (letter is attached) to seek absolute assurances that the database is secure. Failing that, Kerr has asked that USDA give Vermont farms already on the database the option of having their information removed.

“It is still highly unlikely that this information would ever get out, and if it did it isn't much more than you could obtain by just opening a phone book,” Kerr said. “However, the Agency of Agriculture and the farmers were assured that this information would be secure, and we need to know that it is.”

For more information, contact Mark Bosma, Agency of Agriculture Public Information Officer, at 802-828-3829.

Schedule of remaining hearings:

August 15, 2006	American Legion Hall	Middlebury	9:30-11:30
August 15, 2006	Williston Town Hall	Williston	1:00-3:00
August 17, 2006	Vermont Technical College - Langevin Building (room 103)	Randolph	9:30-11:30
August 17, 2006	Pavilion Building	Montpelier	1:00-3:00