

To the Honorable members of the NH House Environment and Agriculture Committee,

I'm writing today to oppose HB 1133, an act defining and regulating livestock guardian dogs.

For the last 35 years, I have raised sheep in New Hampshire and surrounding states. I've used livestock guardian dogs to keep my flock safe since 2000. I have also used livestock guardian dogs to protect pastured poultry.

Livestock guardian dogs are by far the most effective deterrent to livestock depredation by wild, domestic, and feral animals. Most importantly, they are nearly 100 percent non-lethal to the predators they deter, allowing New Hampshire's wildlife to coexist on the landscape with livestock agriculture.

HB 1133 would jeopardize pasture-based agriculture by imposing undue burdens on farmers. As written, the legislation does not provide a farmer with a realistic way to prove that a dog's barking was warranted.

One of the main ways that livestock guardian dogs deter depredation is by establishing a vocal territory. With their keen hearing and sense of smell, they can detect the presence of predators that humans would never notice. By barking, they tell predators – in a language that predators understand – this place is off limits.

The bill's restrictions on parcel sizes also makes it difficult for farmers who use rented fields for grazing to move their animals as required. New Hampshire's landscape is highly fragmented and broken up into small lots. Some of these small lots provide valuable pasture resources and are very capable of producing badly needed food and fiber for the NH agricultural economy. Small ruminants and pastured poultry are often the best way to utilize these small, fragmented parcels.

This bill would require farmers to remove livestock guardian dogs or split up working pairs if a parcel they were grazing was smaller than the arbitrary limits set by this bill. This requirement would pertain even if no one in the area objects to their presence.

Finally, the bill does not provide farmers with any sort of hearing or due process rights before they are required to get rid of livestock guardian dogs. In addition to violating the farmer's due process rights under the fifth amendment of the US Constitution from the mere loss of the dog or dogs, it could impede the farmer's ability to continue to operate their farm altogether if they can no longer protect their livestock effectively.

I urge you to vote this bill inexpedient to legislate, and I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bill Fosher
Edgefield Farm
Surry, NH