

[By Matt Sutkoski, Burlington Free Press](#)

FRANKLIN — A family who has owned a Franklin farm since 1946 said planned improvements to a remote border crossing into Canada could destroy their property.

The Morses Line crossing into Quebec is adjacent to the farm owned by J. Clement and Elizabeth Rainville. Officials want to upgrade the crossing to meet federal security standards and to repair a deteriorating facility.

One of the couple's children, Brian Rainville, said a proposal would take 10 acres of the farm and cut off access to a large field in the northwest side of the property. That would make the dairy farm too fragmented and small to succeed economically, Rainville said.

Rainville said the family was blindsided by the planned upgrades to the border crossing because federal officials told him at a meeting in April the family would be kept informed of developments in the plan. Rainville said he has had almost no contact with the agencies planning the border improvements since April.

"We were absolutely assured they were going to come back to us. They told us this could be a long process," Rainville said.

Rainville said his mother ran across a small classified advertisement nearly two weeks ago in the St. Albans Messenger regarding Morses Crossing. The ad referenced a 168-page report that includes a proposal to take 10 acres of the family's farm and appeared to show the project had already been put out to bid.

The report outlines three scenarios for the small border crossing. Doing nothing, taking 10.5 acres of Rainville land for a larger complex, or modernizing the border station without taking more land from the Rainvilles. The report is an environmental assessment of the improvement prepared by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Customs and Border

Protection Office of Field Operations.

Rainville said he is concerned the federal agencies will go with the 10.5-acre option, since their report concludes it will have no significant impact on the surrounding area. Rainville said contrary to the report, the potential loss of the farm is a significant impact. He said he feared the government would go with the 10-acre option to accommodate border detection devices.

Tom Herington of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is involved in the project, said the plans for the Moses Crossing border improvements are preliminary. The project has not yet gone out to bid, but the federal agencies have put out a proposal to find contractors who could later bid on the project.

Herington said Tuesday his agency and officials with U.S. Customs and Border Protection would need at least until today to respond to further requests from the Free Press for further details of what federal agencies are planning for the site, whether they will take land from the Rainvilles, and whether the agencies are still exploring various options for the improvements, and a timetable for when the work would begin.

According to a project fact sheet on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Web site, the project is part of \$720 million in federal stimulus money dedicated to improving land ports of entry. A design/build contract — in which the contractor provides both design and construction services — was chosen to better facilitate “the aggressive project schedule required by (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act).” The fact sheet includes a project timeline that calls for the contract to be awarded this winter and the construction to begin next summer and be completed in 2011.

Rainville said he fears the family will be powerless to stop the project from taking the land and destroying the farm. The family has sought help from Vermont’s congressional delegation.

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., said he will be as supportive as possible of the Rainvilles and make clear to Customs and Border Protection the hardship this plan will cause the family. Welch said he would urge the agency to find an alternative that will not cause the Rainville family hardship.

Rainville said he supports security and safety improvements at the Morses Line crossing, but he does not want the changes to ruin the farm.

The Morses Line port of entry was constructed in 1934, 12 years before the Rainvilles bought their farm. It is one of 15 ports of entry between Quebec and Vermont, though not nearly as heavily trafficked as crossings in Highgate, Derby Line and Richford.