

FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARINGS

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WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE (WLEI):

As a member of the Working Lands Coalition, we ask you to please support the Governor's appropriation of \$4 million for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative in FY24.

- The Working Lands Fund has a big impact and strategically strengthens multiple supply chains in both the farm and food sector and the forest and wood products sector. Each year the Board awards grants based on a deep understanding of where limited general fund dollars can have the biggest impact based on emerging market trends and needs.
- Each year, the Working Lands Program is over-subscribed with significantly greater demand for financial assistance than available resources. For example, in FY22 the Board had a total of \$5.3M dollars to award, while \$11M dollars in requests were received from 181 applicants.
- The Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) experiences oscillating appropriations making it hard for businesses to plan for when is the best time for them to apply for funding support. For instance:
 - In FY21 the WLEB only had about \$600k to award, then \$5.3M in FY22, and in FY23 they only have \$2M (\$1M base + \$1M of 1 time) ... so it makes it really hard for businesses to plan and count on funding being available for when it is best for them to apply (understanding that it is always competitive). Having stable, consistent funding levels year over year, really helps businesses to plan for when it is right for them to seek grant funding. Just like a business can rely on bank funding to always be available, we want consistent levels of grant funds to be available too.

Please support the Governor's appropriation of \$4 million for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative in FY24.