

Working Lands Enterprise Fund: Investment for Transformative Impact

The Vermont Working Lands Coalition appreciates the \$1 million in base funding and the \$3 million in 1-time funds recommended by the Governor for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative in the FY'24 budget. The Coalition encourages the legislature to consider an investment of \$4 million in base funding for greater security in future years.

An annual investment at this scale in Vermont's farm & forest businesses would allow potential grantees and agency staff alike the time needed to plan and implement larger scale projects with transformational positive impacts on the future resiliency and economic viability of the state's local production and supply chains.

Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) Mission:

The Vermont WLEB unites state, non-profit and private sector leadership to invest in creative economic development in Vermont's working landscape by making essential, catalytic investments in critical leverage points of the Vermont farm and forest economy, from individual enterprises to industry sectors.

Act 142 – the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative

The Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Investment Bill was passed by the legislature in 2012 and signed by Gov. Shumlin as Act 142. The bill created the Working Landscape Enterprise Fund and the Working Lands Enterprise Board, which oversees the Fund (Working Lands Enterprise Initiative). The initiative stimulates economic development in Vermont's agriculture and forest products sectors by systematically advancing entrepreneurship, business development, and job creation.

Investment Areas

Grants directly support **working lands businesses** with investments in infrastructure, marketing, and research and development to develop new products, expand production and sales, and create jobs.

Service provider grants for technical assistance to help Vermont working lands businesses with: market development, marketing plans, and sales; business and financial planning; succession planning; access to capital; and manufacturing efficiencies.

Vermont prospers and its unique sense of place thrives in large part because of intelligent investment in the people and enterprises that comprise its farm, food, and forest-based economy.

The Working Lands Enterprise Fund:

- Creates *jobs* in working lands enterprises
- Keeps *young entrepreneurs* in Vermont
- Builds *new markets* for value-added products
- Increases *capacity* for in-state production
- Leverages *more investment* for growing enterprises

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Gets Results!

To date:

- Funded **250** agriculture and forestry projects
- Distributed over **\$7** million in WLEF funding
- Leveraged **\$11** million in matching funds
- All **14** Vermont counties impacted!

In just eight years, WLEF grantees:

- Created **524** new (FTE) jobs
- Employed **1015** people
- Impacted **19,721** acres
- Generated over **\$36** million in additional sales for the Vermont economy

Throughout COVID-19:

Working Lands funding helped over 200 Farm & Forest Businesses statewide remain viable through the challenges of the pandemic.



Working Lands Coalition Partners:

Cabot Creamery Cooperative | Center for an Agricultural Economy | NOFA Vermont | Preservation Trust of Vermont | Shelburne Farms | Vermont Association of Conservation Districts | Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies | Vermont Community Loan Fund | Vermont Council on Rural Development | Vermont Farm Bureau | Vermont Land Trust | Vermont Natural Resources Council | Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and Farm to Plate | Vermont Woodlands Association | The Woodstock Foundation