



Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association

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TO: Representative David Durfee and the House Committee on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry
FR: Allison Hope, Executive Director, and James Buck, Board Chair, Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association
RE: Request for reconsideration of Vermont Building Big E Commission Requirements

Thank you for meeting with us and sharing conversation about Vermont's robust maple economy last month. We're following up on our testimony with a specific request related to Big E commissions as a part of Vermont Building vendor contracts. Our request advocates for non-profits and producer associations that represent a diversity of producers that make some of Vermont's most iconic products, like pure maple syrup.

Limiting Big E commissions for non-profits and producer associations is an important way to support these groups working to benefit Vermont's agriculture and forestry communities. For these vendors, VMSMA is advocating for an updated commission starting with the 2024 fair of \$2,500 annually or 12% of sales, whichever is less. This would allow VMSMA, and similar vendors, to maximize profits from the Big E to fund their producer and consumer-facing work that ultimately benefits the state's working landscape, the tourism economy, and the state's agriculture and forestry producers.

Currently, our Big E contract indicates that the goals of the State of Vermont Building are:

1. To promote the Vermont brand.
2. To increase sales of Vermont Agriculture and Specialty Products.
3. To enhance exposure to Vermont products and companies.

The Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association exists to meet these goals for their producers and are a natural fit as vendors in the Vermont Building. As a non-profit, VMSMA markets Vermont maple products and producers, offers opportunities for producer education, shares science and best practices, collaborates with a variety of partners and stakeholders, educates the general public about Vermont maple and coordinates statewide events to showcase maple. We have a long-standing and dynamic Big E booth where we connect with millions of consumers through tastings, recipes, conversations, and information about the variety of producers in the state. These producers volunteer their time to make products for the booth as well as manage and staff the booth over the 17 days of the fair.

The net proceeds from the Big E are generally second only to VMSMA's annual member dues; every dollar earned is used to support Vermont's maple producers. In 2023, VMSMA paid VAAFMM \$24,901 and in 2022 we paid \$25,384. In 2023, VMSMA's net proceeds, after this commission, totalled just under \$22,000 which means we paid over half of our net proceeds to VAAFMM. Capping VMSMA's commission in each of these years at \$2,500 would have allowed us to offer more robust educational programs as well as spend additional staff time improving consumer-facing activities and increasing collaboration with stakeholder and partner organizations.

We appreciate your consideration of this important request and your interest and advocacy for Vermont's working landscape. Please reach out with any questions or for additional information.

Vermont Maple...the Official Flavor of Vermont!