



February 28, 2023

Representative Diane Lanpher  
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Dear Chair Lanpher and Representatives of the House Appropriations Committee,

The members of the Rural Caucus would like to express our strong support for the conversion of the \$3 million in one-time funding for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative in the Governor's proposed budget into base funding for the program. This conversion would result in a \$4 million base budget for this valuable and productive program.

The Rural Caucus has been a staunch supporter of Working Lands for years because of the program's proven ability to make essential, catalytic investments in farm and forest economy in all 14 counties. These investments have created hundreds of jobs, returned about \$5 in new economic activity for every \$1 invested, and supported Vermont businesses to make investment in value-added businesses, more efficient energy use, and more resilient supply chains.

Year after year, the Working Lands program receives more applications and requests for assistance than it can meet. For example, in FY22 with a total of \$5.3M dollars to award, \$11M dollars in requests were received from 181 applicants. Even though the proposed \$4 million in base funds is slightly lower than the FY22 funds awarded, having a high base funding number for this critical program would allow Vermont farm and forest businesses and Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets staff alike the time needed to plan and implement larger scale projects with transformational impacts in our state.

Thank you for your consideration,

Representative Katherine Sims, Co-Chair  
Representative Laura Sibilgia, Co-Chair  
Representative Lisa Hango, Co-Chair  
Representative Monique Priestley, Clerk  
Representative Joseph Andriano  
Representative Sara Coffey  
Representative Carl Demrow  
Representative James Gregoire  
Representative Jubilee McGill  
Representative Logan Nicoll  
Representative Tristan Roberts  
Representative Terri Williams