

S.34

An act relating to rural economic development.

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

* * * Rural Economic Development Initiative * * *

Sec. 1. 10 V.S.A. chapter 15, subchapter 4 is added to read:

Subchapter 4. Rural Economic Development Initiative

§ 325m. RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

(a) Definitions. As used in this subchapter:

(1) “Industrial park” means an area of land permitted as an industrial park under chapter 151 of this title or under 24 V.S.A. chapter 117, or under both.

(2) “Rural area” means a county of the State designated as “rural” or “mostly rural” by the U.S. Census Bureau in its most recent decennial census.

(3) “Small town” means a town in the State with a population of less than 5,000 at the date of the most recent U.S. Census Bureau decennial census.

(b) Establishment. There is created within the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board a Rural Economic Development Initiative to promote and facilitate community economic development in the small towns and rural areas of the State. The Rural Economic Development Initiative shall collaborate with municipalities, businesses, industrial parks, regional development corporations, and other appropriate entities to access funding and other

assistance available to small towns and businesses in rural areas of the State when existing State resources or staffing assistance is not available.

(c) Services; access to funding.

(1) The Rural Economic Development Initiative shall provide the following services to small towns and businesses in rural areas:

(A) identification of grant or other funding opportunities available to small towns, businesses in rural areas, and industrial parks in small towns and rural areas that facilitate business development, siting of businesses, workforce development, broadband deployment, infrastructure development, or other economic development opportunities;

(B) technical assistance to small towns, businesses in rural areas, and industrial parks in small towns and rural areas in writing grants, accessing and completing the application process for identified grants or other funding opportunities, including writing applications for grants or other funding, coordination with providers of grants or other funding, strategic planning for the implementation or timing of activities funded by grants or other funding, and compliance with the requirements of grant awards or awards of other funding.

(2) In providing services under this subsection, the Rural Economic Development Initiative shall give first priority to projects that have received

necessary State or municipal approval and that are ready for construction or implementation.

(d) Services; business development. The Rural Economic Development Initiative shall provide small towns and rural areas with services to facilitate business development in these areas. These services shall include:

(1) Identifying businesses or business types suitable for a small town, rural areas, industrial parks in a small town or rural area, or coworker spaces or generator spaces in rural areas. In identifying businesses or business types, the Rural Economic Development Initiative shall seek to:

(A) identify businesses or business types in the following priority areas:

(i) milk plants, milk handlers, or dairy products, as those terms are defined in 6 V.S.A. § 2672;

(ii) the outdoor equipment or recreation industry;

(iii) the value-added forest products industry;

(iv) the value-added food industry;

(v) phosphorus removal technology; and

(vi) composting facilities.

(B) explore with a small town or rural area whether underused or closed school buildings are appropriate sites for coworker or generator spaces.

(2) Recommending available grants, tax credits, or other incentives that a small town or rural area can use to attract businesses.

(3) In providing services under this subsection, the Rural Economic Development Initiative shall coordinate with the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development in order to avoid duplication by the Rural Economic Development Initiative of business recruitment and workforce development services provided by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

(e) Report. Beginning on January 15, 2018, and annually thereafter, the Rural Economic Development Initiative shall submit to the Senate Committees on Agriculture and on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs and the House Committees on Agriculture and Forestry and on Commerce and Economic Development a report regarding the activities and progress of the Initiative. The report shall include:

(1) a summary of the Initiative's activities in the preceding calendar year;

(2) an evaluation of the effectiveness of the services provided by the Initiative to small towns, rural areas, and industrial parks;

(3) a summary of the Initiative's progress in attracting priority businesses to small towns and rural areas;

(4) an accounting of the grants or other funding that the Initiative facilitated or provided assistance with;

(5) an accounting of the funds acquired by the Rural Economic Development Initiative for administration of grants or other funding mechanisms and whether these funds are sufficient to offset the cost of the Rural Economic Development Initiative; and

(6) recommended changes to the program, including proposed legislative amendments to further economic development in small towns and rural areas in the State.

Sec. 2. FUNDING; LEGISLATIVE INTENT; RURAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

It is the intent of the General Assembly that \$75,000.00 appropriated to the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets in fiscal year 2018 shall be allocated by the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for implementation of the Rural Economic Development Initiative under 10 V.S.A. chapter 15, subchapter 4.

* * * Vermont Milk Commission * * *

Sec. 3. VERMONT MILK COMMISSION; EQUITABLE DAIRY PRICING

On or before October 1, 2017, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall convene the Vermont Milk Commission under 6 V.S.A. chapter 161 to review and evaluate proposals that enhance and stabilize the dairy industry in Vermont and New England and that may be appropriate for inclusion in the federal Farm Bill 2018. The Secretary of Agriculture, Food

and Markets shall submit to the congressional delegation of Vermont proposals that the Milk Commission recommends for inclusion in the federal Farm Bill 2018.

* * * Cross-promotion of Development Programs * * *

Sec. 4. EXECUTIVE BRANCH CROSS-PROMOTION OF LOAN, GRANT,
AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

(a) The General Assembly finds that it is within the authority of the Executive Branch to manage a process of continuous improvement for agency and statewide programs and operations. While undertaking these efforts, the Executive Branch shall ensure that State loan, grant, and other incentive programs cross-promote:

(1) the availability of financial and technical assistance from the State through education and outreach materials; and

(2) the State policies funded by State incentive programs, including the adoption of renewable energy, rural economic development, public access to conserved lands, and water quality improvements.

(b) The Secretary of Administration shall provide material or information regarding the cross-promotion of State policies on State websites and within application materials available to the public regarding State loan, grant, and other incentive programs.

* * * Energy Efficiency * * *

Sec. 5. REPORT; ENERGY EFFICIENCY CHARGE; COMMERCIAL AND
INDUSTRIAL CUSTOMERS

(a) On or before January 15, 2018, the Commissioner of Public Service (the Commissioner) shall submit a report with recommendations as described in subsection (b) of this section.

(1) In preparing the report, the Commissioner shall consult with the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, the energy efficiency utilities (EEU) appointed under 30 V.S.A. § 209(d)(2), the regional development corporations, the Public Service Board, and other affected persons.

(2) The Commissioner shall submit the report to the Senate Committees on Finance, on Natural Resources and Energy, and on Agriculture and the House Committees on Ways and Means, on Energy and Technology, on Commerce and Economic Development, and on Agriculture and Forestry.

(b) The report shall provide the Commissioner's recommendations on:

(1) Whether and how to increase the use by commercial and industrial customers of self-administered efficiency programs under 30 V.S.A. § 209(d) and (j), including:

(A) Potential methods and incentives to increase participation in self-administration of energy efficiency, including:

(i) Potential changes to the eligibility criteria for existing programs.

(ii) Use of performance-based structures.

(iii) Self-administration of energy efficiency by a commercial and industrial customer, with payment of an energy efficiency charge (EEC) amount only for technical assistance by an EEU, if the customer demonstrates that it possesses in-house expertise that supports such self-administration and implements energy efficiency measures that the customer demonstrates are cost-effective and save energy at a benefit-cost ratio similar to the EEU.

(B) The potential inclusion of such methods and incentives in EEU demand resource plans.

(C) Periodic reporting by the EEUs of participation rates in self-administration of energy efficiency by commercial and industrial customers located in the small towns in the State's rural areas. As used in this subdivision (C):

(i) "Rural area" means a county of the State designated as "rural" or "mostly rural" by the U.S. Census Bureau in its most recent decennial census.

(ii) "Small town" means a town in a rural area of the State with a population of less than 5,000 at the date of the most recent U.S. Census Bureau decennial census.

(2) The potential establishment of a multiyear pilot program that allows a category of commercial and industrial customers to apply the total amount of their Energy Efficiency Charge (EEC), for the period of the pilot, to investments that reduce the customer's total energy consumption.

(A) The goal of such a program would be to reduce significantly all energy costs for the customer, and to transform the energy profile of the customer such that significant savings would be generated and endure over the long term. Customers in the program would receive the full amount of their EEC contributions, for the period of the pilot, in the form of direct services and incentives provided by an EEU, which would consider how to lower customers' bills cost-effectively across electric, heating, transportation, and process fuels using energy efficiency, demand management, energy storage, fuel switching, and on-site renewable energy.

(B) In the report, the Commissioner shall consider:

(i) the definition of eligible commercial and industrial customers;

(ii) the potential establishment and implementation of such a program in a manner similar to an economic development rate for the EEU;

(iii) the interaction of such a program with the existing programs for self-managed energy efficiency under 30 V.S.A. § 209(d), including the Energy Savings Account, Self-Managed Energy Efficiency, and Customer Credit Programs;

- (iv) the benefits and costs of such a program, including:
- (I) a reduction in the operating costs of participating customers;
 - (II) the effect on job retention and creation and on economic development;
 - (III) the effect on greenhouse gas emissions;
 - (IV) the effect on systemwide efficiency benefits that would otherwise be obtained with the EEC funds, such as avoided supply costs, avoided transmission and distribution costs, avoided regional network service charges, and lost revenues from the regional forward-capacity market;
 - (V) the potential impact on commercial and industrial customers that may not be eligible to participate in such a program;
 - (VI) the extent to which such a program may result in cost shifts or subsidization among rate classes, and methods for avoiding or mitigating these effects;
 - (VII) the effect on the budgets developed through the demand resource planning process;
 - (VIII) the costs of administration;
 - (IX) any other benefits and costs of the potential program; and
- (v) the consistency of such a program with least-cost planning as defined in 30 V.S.A. § 218c; with State energy goals and policy set forth in

10 V.S.A. §§ 578, 580, and 581 and 30 V.S.A. §§ 202a and 218e; and with the State energy plans adopted pursuant to 30 V.S.A. §§ 202 and 202b.

(c) The report submitted under this section shall include a proposed timeline to phase in the recommendations contained in the report. In developing this timeline, the Commissioner shall consider the impact to the established budgets of the EEU's, the regulatory requirements applicable to the EEU's, and the value of rapid implementation of the recommendations.

Sec. 6. 30 V.S.A. § 209(d)(3) is amended to read:

(3) Energy efficiency charge; regulated fuels. In addition to its existing authority, the Board may establish by order or rule a volumetric charge to customers for the support of energy efficiency programs that meet the requirements of section 218c of this title, with due consideration to the State's energy policy under section 202a of this title and to its energy and economic policy interests under section 218e of this title to maintain and enhance the State's economic vitality. The charge shall be known as the energy efficiency charge, shall be shown separately on each customer's bill, and shall be paid to a fund administrator appointed by the Board and deposited into ~~an~~ the Electric Efficiency Fund. When such a charge is shown, notice as to how to obtain information about energy efficiency programs approved under this section shall be provided in a manner directed by the Board. This notice shall include,

at a minimum, a toll-free telephone number, and to the extent feasible shall be on the customer's bill and near the energy efficiency charge.

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* * * Environmental Permitting * * *

Sec. 7. 3 V.S.A. § 2822(j) is amended to read:

(j) In accordance with subsection (i) of this section, the following fees are established for permits, licenses, certifications, approvals, registrations, orders, and other actions taken by the Agency of Natural Resources.

(1) For air pollution control permits or registrations issued under 10 V.S.A. chapter 23:

(A) Base service fees. Any persons subject to the provisions of 10 V.S.A. § 556 shall submit with each permit application or with each request for a permit amendment, a base service fee in accordance with the base fee schedule in subdivision (i) of this subdivision (1)(A). Prior to taking final action under 10 V.S.A. § 556 on any application for a permit for a nonmajor stationary source or on any request for an amendment of a permit for such a source, the Secretary shall assess each applicant for any additional fees due to the Agency, assessed in accordance with the base fee schedule and the supplementary fee schedule in subdivision (ii) of this subdivision (1)(A). The applicant shall submit any fees so assessed to the Secretary prior to issuance of the final permit, notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (i) of this

section. The base fee schedule and the supplementary fee schedule are applicable to all applications on which the Secretary makes a final decision on or after the date on which this section is operative.

(i) Base fee schedule

(I) Application for permit to construct

or modify source

(aa) Major stationary source \$ 15,000.00

(bb) Nonmajor stationary source \$ 2,000.00

(cc) A source of emissions from \$ 1,000.00

anaerobic digestion of agricultural
products, agricultural by-products,
agricultural waste, or food waste

(II) Amendments

Change in business name, division name,
or plant name; mailing address; or
company stack designation; or other
administrative amendments \$ 150.00

(ii) Supplementary fee schedule for nonmajor
stationary sources

(I) Engineering review \$ 2,000.00

- (II) Air quality impact analysis
 - Review refined modeling \$ 2,000.00
- (III) Observe and review source emission testing \$ 2,000.00
- (IV) Audit performance of continuous emissions monitors \$ 2,000.00
- (V) Audit performance of ambient air monitoring \$ 2,000.00
- (VI) Implement public comment requirement \$ 500.00

(B) Annual registration. Any person required to register an air contaminant source under 10 V.S.A. § 555(c) shall annually pay the following:

(i) A base fee where the sum of a source's emissions of sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and hydrocarbons is:

(I) ten tons or greater: \$1,500.00;

(II) less than ten tons but greater than or equal to five tons: \$1,000.00; and

(III) less than five tons: \$500.00.

(ii) Where the sum of a source's emissions of sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and hydrocarbons is greater than or equal to five tons: an annual registration fee that is \$0.0335 per

pound of such emissions except that a plant producing renewable energy as defined in 30 V.S.A. § 8002 shall pay an annual fee not exceeding \$64,000.00.

(C) Anaerobic digesters. Notwithstanding the requirements of subdivisions (1)(A) and (B) of this subsection (j), a person required to register an air contaminant source under 10 V.S.A. § 555(c) or subject to the requirements of 10 V.S.A. § 556 shall not be subject to supplementary fees assessed under subdivision (1)(A)(ii) of this subsection (j) and shall pay an annual registration fee not exceeding \$1,000.00 when the source of the emissions is the anaerobic digestion of agricultural products, agricultural by-products, agricultural waste, or food waste.

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* * * Phosphorus Removal Technology; Grants * * *

Sec. 8. 6 V.S.A. § 4828 is amended to read:

§ 4828. CAPITAL EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

(a) It is the purpose of this section to provide assistance to contract applicators, nonprofit organizations, and farms to purchase or use innovative equipment that will aid in the reduction of surface runoff of agricultural wastes to State waters, improve water quality of State waters, reduce odors from manure application, separate phosphorus from manure, decrease greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce costs to farmers.

(b) The capital equipment assistance program is created in the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to provide farms, nonprofit organizations, and custom applicators in Vermont with State financial assistance for the purchase of new or innovative equipment to improve manure application, separation of phosphorus from manure, or nutrient management plan implementation.

(c) Assistance under this section shall in each fiscal year be allocated according to the following priorities and as further defined by the Secretary:

(1) First priority shall be given to capital equipment to be used on farm sites that are serviced by custom applicators, phosphorus separation equipment providers, and nonprofit organizations and that are located in descending order within the boundaries of:

- (A) the Lake Champlain Basin;
- (B) the Lake Memphremagog Basin;
- (C) the Connecticut River Basin; and
- (D) the Hudson River Basin.

(2) Next priority shall be given to capital equipment to be used at a farm site ~~which~~ that is located in descending order within the boundaries of:

- (A) the Lake Champlain Basin;
- (B) the Lake Memphremagog Basin;
- (C) the Connecticut River Basin; and
- (D) the Hudson River Basin.

(d) An applicant for a State grant under this section to purchase or implement phosphorus removal technology or equipment shall pay 10 percent of the total eligible project cost. The dollar amount of a State grant to purchase or implement phosphorus removal technology or equipment shall be equal to the total eligible project cost, less 10 percent of the total as paid by the applicant, and shall not exceed \$300,000.00.

* * * Forestry Equipment * * *

Sec. 9. 32 V.S.A. § 9741 is amended to read:

§ 9741. SALES NOT COVERED

Retail sales and use of the following shall be exempt from the tax on retail sales imposed under section 9771 of this title and the use tax imposed under section 9773 of this title.

* * *

(51) The following machinery, including repair parts, used for timber cutting, timber removal, and processing of timber or other solid wood forest products intended to be sold ultimately at retail: skidders with grapple and cable, feller bunchers, cut-to-length processors, forwarders, delimiters, loader slashers, log loaders, whole-tree chippers, stationary screening systems, and firewood processors, elevators, and screens. The Department of Taxes shall publish guidance relating to the application of this exemption.

Sec. 10. 32 V.S.A. § 9706(kk) is added to read:

(kk) The statutory purpose of the exemption for timber cutting, removal, and processing machinery in subdivision 9741(51) of this title is to promote Vermont's commercial timber and forest products economy.

* * * Workers' Compensation * * *

Sec. 11. WORKERS' COMPENSATION; INDUSTRIES AND
OCCUPATIONS WITH HIGH RISK, HIGH PREMIUMS, AND
FEW POLICYHOLDERS; STUDY; REPORT

(a) The Commissioner of Financial Regulation, in consultation with the Commissioner of Labor, the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, the National Council on Compensation Insurance, and other interested stakeholders, shall identify and study industries and occupations in Vermont that experience a high risk of workplace and on-the-job injuries and whose workers' compensation insurance is characterized by high premiums and few policyholders in the insurance pool. The industries and occupations addressed in the study shall include, among others, agriculture and farming, logging and log hauling, as well as arborists, roofers, and occupations in sawmills and wood manufacturing operations. In particular, the Commissioner shall:

(1) examine differences in the potential for loss, premium rates, and experience and participation in the workers' compensation marketplace

between the industries and occupations identified, and the average for all industries and occupations in Vermont;

(2) study potential methods for reducing workers' compensation premium rates and costs for high-risk industries and occupations, including risk pooling between multiple high-risk industries or occupations, creating self-insured trusts, creating voluntary safety certification programs, and programs or best practices employed by other states; and

(3) model the potential impact on workers' compensation premiums and costs from each of the methods identified pursuant to subdivision (2) of this subsection.

(b) On or before November 15, 2017, the Commissioner of Financial Regulation shall submit a written report to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on Finance regarding his or her findings and any recommendations for legislative action to reduce the workers' compensation premium rates and costs for the industries identified in the study.

* * * Repeals * * *

Sec. 12. REPEALS

(a) 10 V.S.A. chapter 15, subchapter 4 (Rural Economic Development Initiative) shall be repealed on July 1, 2021; and

(b) 6 V.S.A. § 4828(d) (phosphorus removal grant criteria) shall be repealed on July 1, 2023.

* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 13. EFFECTIVE DATES

(a) This section and Sec. 3 (Vermont Milk Commission) shall take effect on passage.

(b) Sec. 7 (environmental permitting) shall take effect January 1, 2018.

(c) All other sections shall take effect on July 1, 2017.