

REPORT TO THE VERMONT LEGISLATURE

Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Board 2013

Introduction

The Vermont Agriculture Development Board (VADB) was created by Statute, Title 6, V.S.A Sec. 2966 that defined the Charges and Duties, with twelve members appointed. The first meeting of this newly formed board was October 10, 2010. As part of the creation of the Working Lands Enterprise Development Board (WLEB) in 2012, VADB was modified to include four members representing aspects of the forestry and wood products industry as voting members and the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation. The name of the board was changed to the Vermont Agriculture and Forest Products Development Board (VAFPDB).

The composition of the board has changed this year with the retirement/resignation and subsequent appointment of several board members. In addition, Leonard Bull stepped down as Chair and Lynn Coale was elected to fill this position. Jackie Folsom continues to serve as Vice Chair.

Actions by the VAFPDB through December 2013

During the year VAFPDB initiated and/or accomplished the following:

Development of Working Plan

The mission of VAFPDB is to advise and make recommendations to the Secretaries of relevant state agencies, the Governor, the director of the state experiment station, the University of Vermont Extension Service, and the General Assembly on the adoption and amendment of laws, regulations, and governmental policies that effect agriculture and forestry development, land use, access to capital, the economic opportunities provided by the Vermont agriculture and forest products industries, and the well-being of the people of Vermont.

In accomplishing this mission, the VAFPDB shall:

1. Optimize the agricultural and forestry use of Vermont lands.
2. Expand existing markets and identify and assist in the development of new profitable markets for food, fiber, forest products, and value-added products.
3. Identify opportunities and challenges related to infrastructure, product development, marketing, training, research, and education.
4. Confer with the Governor and the Secretaries/Commissioners of respective agencies, The Senate Agriculture Committee, The House Agriculture Committee, and The Working Lands Enterprise Board to identify emerging opportunities and obstacles associated with the accomplishment of our mission.

VAFPDB has developed a work plan that started in 2013 and will extend through 2014. This work plan is not a static document but items that arise as concerns throughout the year are

added, researched, and discussed. Generally, the Board will then develop a position paper based upon our combined understanding of the issue. Issues that are presently on the work plan are: Reports from Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) Financing Committee, Composting, Forestry Strategic Planning, Current Use, Energy, Vermont Products Use in State Buildings and Institutions, Water Quality, and the Farm Safety Modernization Act.

Board Members on Industry Boards

The members of the VAFPDB are an active group that not only serve this board but also represent the entire food and forest product systems. As outlined by the legislation that created the board, we have worked closely with the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan adding our voice to the Steering Committee as well as having representatives on all task force committees. The board works closely with the Working Lands Enterprise Board to insure that funding from this source is going to leverage the most benefit for the agriculture and forestry segments of our economy. We also have members who serve on a multitude of industry specific committees and task forces.

WLEB Financing Committee

VAFPDB has co-lead a Financing Committee which has been charged to make recommendations to WLEB concerning the following questions:

What portfolio of financial services should WLEB consider providing to help achieve its statutory goals? What entities and/or vehicles might WLEB consider as viable partners in delivering financial services? What are some useful next steps in developing financial services partnerships?

By "financial services" we mean any component of the financial continuum from grants, to loans, to equity investments or any tool that might improve the utility of any such component. The Committee convened a panel of conventional and alternative lenders in the Statehouse on November 19th, 2013. It will continue gathering input over the winter and expects to deliver recommendations to WLEB by May 1st, 2014.

Genetically Engineered Organisms, Feed and Food

Introduction of proposed legislation regarding the labeling of genetically engineered (GE) organisms, feed and foods in Vermont, prompted then Chair Leonard Bull to establish a subcommittee in late 2012 to compile science-based background information in order to provide support to the legislature and others deliberating that legislation. This committee convened a GE Panel Forum on February 15, 2013 in Room 11 at the State House. This forum was well attended by members of the legislature as well as the public. Although the board did not come to consensus about this politically-charged issue, we did provide a forum for thoughtful discussion.

Composting

In May, the board received a letter from Rep. Carolyn Partridge, Chair of House Agriculture and Forest Products Committee. In this letter, Rep. Partridge outlined three major concerns that the legislature had taken initial testimony on the issue of composting. Those issues were:

1. The Vermont Tax Department considers compost to be subject to sales and use tax. Even when used for agricultural production.
2. Composters are faced with difficult resource/input challenges, in part because of the presence of persistent herbicides, specifically clopyralid and aminopyralid, which are found in horse manures and food scraps.
3. Act 148 of 2012 requires that all organic materials be removed from our waste stream by 2020, and by extension, compost becomes a critical part of our solid waste planning solutions.

The board thus far has taken testimony and read research from a variety of sources. We have prepared a position paper attending to each of the above mentioned concerns.

Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

The VAFPDB has reviewed this act and has submitted comments to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). We support the need to supply the consumer with safe food but we also feel that the FSMA is not appropriate to the scale of Vermont agriculture.

Forest Products Strategic Plan

The VAFPDB has had this item on the work plan for some time. All board members agree that there is a need to conduct a forestry & forest products systems analysis to inform the design and implementation of a forestry strategic plan, similar to the plan for food systems established through the efforts of Farm to Plate. Jointly, the VAFPDB and the WLEB have been working on a request for proposals to accomplish such a task. The Boards hope to move this process forward in early 2014.

In comparing the current staffing of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, the Board recognizes the lack of resources in the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation to provide the necessary and critical support for advancing Vermont's Forestry economies. Vermont agriculture has made great strides over the past decade and its growth has been supported by Agricultural Development staff at the Agency of Agriculture. VAFPDB sees additional support for VT Forests, Parks & Recreation as vital in advancing Vermont's Forestry industries, and in moving forward with the planning, design and implementation of a strategic plan that will identify opportunities for leverage, investment, and enhancement of the working landscape.

Needs for 2014

As part of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund, funding has been provided for travel, per diem stipends for members and administrative support to assist the chairperson of VAFPDB. It is essential to our work that this support continues. The estimated budget is \$25,000.00. The VAFPDB also endorses and supports the continuation of funding of the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund and to increase funding of this essential economic tool.

The VAFPDB would like to thank the following businesses and organizations for hosting our meetings during 2013. Viewing the work of these agriculture and forest products leaders is essential to our understanding and continued work:

Patricia A Hannaford Career Center

Black River Produce and Meats

UVM Extension

Harlow Farm (Westminster Organics)

Amoskeag Woodworking

Vermont Economic Development Authority

Respectfully submitted by: D. Lynn Coale - Chair