



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
AND FOREST PRODUCTS

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To: Rep. Johnson
From: Rep. Partridge
Date: March 12, 2015
Subject: Agriculture Funding Priorities

The House Agriculture and Forest Products Committee has reviewed and supports the provisions relating to agriculture in the governor's proposed FY 2016 budget. The committee strongly recommends the appropriation of additional funds to provide full support for critical agricultural programs that have been underfunded or eliminated in that budget. Specifically:

- Working Lands should receive a total of \$1.5 million, which was the governor's recommend for FY 2015.
- Farm to School should receive a total of \$140,000.
- Agricultural Fair stipends should be restored to \$175,000.
- The 2+2 program should receive an additional \$60,000 to continue the program.

In addition, the committee has deep concerns about the elimination of the Milk Quality Enhancement Program position and strongly recommends that it be fully funded.

These programs are critical to supporting Vermont's agricultural renaissance and maintaining the character of our state. The programs provide both revenue and positive health benefits for Vermonters.

We ask the Appropriations Committee to allocate the funds requested. If current revenue projections cannot provide funding for these important programs, we urge that these priorities be at the top of the list when an improved economy brings in additional revenue for FY2016.

Our Committee is committed to providing sustainable funding for these critically important programs. In support of this commitment, we are working on a bill that will provide additional revenues to help meet this goal through a dedicated fund.



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FINDINGS

Farm to School

The Farm to School program provides some of the most essential hands-on learning opportunities to Vermont's students. At a time when the current generation of children is predicted to be the first to live shorter lives than their parents, instilling food literacy is just as important as STEM curricula. Knowledge of food and its provenance is a basic life skill that must continue to be prioritized in our education system, and Farm to School has a proven track record of providing this service. Furthermore, Farm to School helps to foster interest in agricultural careers in one of the fastest growing sectors of the Vermont economy.

Farm and Agricultural Resource Management Stewards (FARMS) 2+2 Program

The FARMS 2+2 Program was created in 1999 to attract college age students to study dairy science and dairy farm management at Vermont Technical College and the University of Vermont. A limited number of scholarships are provided to qualified students to complete this program. As a result of this very successful program, the majority of students graduating from this program have remained in Vermont, becoming farm managers and owners, agricultural consultants, and leaders in the dairy industry. The dairy industry is a major driver of Vermont's economy, and education is critical to today's demands on dairy farms.

Vermont Agricultural Fairs and Field Days

The Vermont Agricultural Fairs and Field Days have significantly contributed to Vermont's tourism economy. In 2014, approximately 424,500 people attended Vermont Fairs and Field Days. Over 100,000 of those attending were from out of state. In 2014, Fairs and Field Days contributed to the state \$180,000 from the meals tax and \$109,000 from amusement ride taxes. The Fairs connect their patrons to the importance of Vermont agriculture. The Stipend Fund is a critical funding mechanism to insure the future of Vermont Fairs and Field Days.

Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund

The Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund is an investment fund aimed at growing the economies, cultures, and communities of 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.

To date, the Working Lands Enterprise Board has invested in 74 agriculture and forestry projects in all fourteen Vermont counties, distributing \$2.1 million dollars in Working Lands funds, and leveraging an additional \$3.1 million dollars in matching funds. The latest round of funding (FY15) is currently being deployed with decisions to be announced in May.

The need for this kind of funding has clearly been established: In FY13 the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) received 387 applications with requests that totaled \$12 million. They were able to fund 37 projects with the \$1 million that was available. In FY14 WLEB received 129 requests that totaled \$5.52 million, funding 37 projects with just over \$1 million. In FY15 WLEB received 129 requests totaling \$5.56 million that are currently under review.

The Working Lands Enterprise Fund represents part of the state's commitment to Farm to Plate implementation which has led to significant job and enterprise creation over the past five years. 4,189 new jobs (a 7.2 percent increase) were created in the food system from 2009 to 2013. For every one food system job created there are 1.28 additional jobs created in Vermont. From 2007 to 2012 food system economic output expanded 24 percent, from \$6.9 billion to \$8.6 billion. 665 new farms and food businesses (a 5.9 percent increase) were launched in the food system from 2009 to 2013.

Milk Quality Enhancement Program Position

Vermont's Milk Quality Enhancement Program promotes and implements a statewide program to monitor and improve the quality of milk and dairy products produced in the state of Vermont. Since 2003, Vermont's milk quality has improved by 34 percent, ranking second in the nation.

Each year Vermont dairy brings \$2.2 billion in economic activity to the state of Vermont and brings approximately \$3 million in circulating cash to the state every day. Every Vermont dairy cow provides \$12,500.00 in economic activity to the state annually. Milk generates more sales than any other Vermont agricultural product, accounting for 70 percent of agricultural activity. The continued support of this program is critically important to maintaining Vermont's high quality dairy industry.