

My name is Kathleen Wanner. I'm a woodland owner and Tree Farmer in Chittenden and also the Executive Director of the VT Woodlands Association and the VT Wood Manufacturers Association. I'm here this evening to speak to you about the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative and its impact on the landowners and businesses I serve in my official capacity.

The Working Lands Initiative, Act 142, has been the single most important legislation for the \$1.5 billion dollar forest and wood products sector – but I'm guessing you already know that. Our farms and forests that comprise the working landscape are emblematic of what we, as Vermonters, truly cherish.

The Working Lands Enterprise Board recently released its 2015 annual report outlining the remarkable results of the first two years of grant making. The VWMA and its members have directly benefitted from these investments. Technical assistance grants to VWMA have allowed us to bring in experts in various fields such as lean manufacturing and mass customization, marketing, customer service, transformative change in corporate culture, innovation, and workforce development and training. Companies have experienced growth and secured a future for their employees. This type of technical assistance was only available through WLE funding. But these services were not giveaways. Each company that received technical assistance matched dollar for dollar the cost of the services they received.

WLEB funding of the Forest Viability program, managed through the VT Housing and Conservation Board, helped to support technical assistance for landowners needing to plan for transitional ownership of their lands. The fragmentation of our forest is of serious concern and helping landowners keep their property intact and in forest will help to stem this trend. The VT Woodlands Association was able to introduce succession planning to about 70 landowners through a series of workshops and provide follow-up assistance, on a 1-1 basis for five of these attendees engaged in the planning process. *This small grant of \$15K helped to protect thousands of acres of forest.* The Working Lands Enterprise initiative has proven to be a highly successful economic development engine. The Governor has proposed \$696,000, for level funding of the initiative. The Working Lands Coalition, representing about 15 farm and forest organizations – including VWA and VWMA, is united in its desire to see this program funded at \$1 Million for the coming year. The results of the past investments speak for themselves in job creation, revenue generation, and additional leveraged funds. *funding levels from 2012 & 13*

The cost of administering this grant program is neither increased nor decreased with less or more funding and thus \$1 million leverages the most return on the cost of administration that is already written in at the current recommended funding level of \$696,000.

The legislature has championed the Working Lands Initiative and can be so proud of the results on the ground. I urge you to consider funding the Working Lands at \$1million to help us continue supporting the many farm and forest businesses that ensure Vermont will remain the place we all love and cherish. My VWA members numbering about 1,000 landowners and my VWMA member companies employing about 2,000 people have benefitted from this investment and on their behalf I thank you for your past support.