



Working Lands Coalition Partners

**The Center for an
Agricultural Economy**

**Green Mountain Dairy
Farmers Cooperative
Federation**

NOFA Vermont

**Preservation Trust of
Vermont**

Shelburne Farms

**Vermont Association
of Planning and
Development Agencies**

**Vermont Council on
Rural Development**

Vermont Land Trust

**Vermont Natural
Resources Council**

**The Vermont
Sustainable Jobs Fund**

**Vermont Wood
Manufacturers
Association**

**Vermont Woodlands
Association**

**The Woodstock
Foundation**

Testimony to Senate Appropriations: April 7, 2015

**Madam Chair and Members of the Vermont Senate Appropriations
Committee:**

I am Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development. I'm here to speak as the coordinator for the Vermont Working Lands Coalition to ask you to support the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) with an appropriation of \$1,000,000 for 2016.

We appreciate the leadership of the Vermont Senate in developing and implementing Act 142 establishing WLEF; we see this as the agriculture and forest products policy and investment bill of the decade. Thank you for your leadership.

Resources committed are designed to support the three statutory features Enterprise Investments, Service Provider Grants, and Capital and Infrastructure Improvement.

The Working Lands Enterprise Fund:

- **Creates jobs in working lands enterprises**
- **Keeps young entrepreneurs in Vermont and encourages and attracts new enterprises**
- **Builds new markets for value-added products**
- **Increases capacity for in-state production**
- **Leverages more investment for growing enterprises**

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Gets Results!

So far WLEF has:

- **Funded 74 agriculture and forestry projects**
- **Distributed \$2.1 million in investments**
- **Impacted all 14 Vermont counties!**

Is Anyone Better Off?

We have some information for the first 23 completed projects* out of the 74 grants made thus far (2 years), representing \$500,059 funds distributed (~23% of total funds to date)

- **Leveraged \$3.1 million in matching funds**
- **Created 25 new (FTE) jobs**
- **Increased Aggregated gross income by \$880,831—a 25% increase in output from these companies**

It is important to see that WLEF investments are the spearhead of the Vermont Working Lands Renaissance.

Since 2008 Vermont has seen the creation of 4,100 jobs in Working Lands enterprises. It is important that so many of these jobs are in rural towns outside of Chittenden County—they add up to a huge economic victory in the face of lost jobs and lost manufacturing. Rooted in the land and brand of VT, they are not going away.

Economic Development work is not a quick fix and shouldn't change seasonally...it needs consistency and predictability to reach full potential. We see the results this year as a wedge which, with subsequent years, ramps up steadily as growth proceeds in first year investments, and new investments continue to seed the future.

We urge you to support the farmers, the forest products businesses, and the value-adding entrepreneurs who are building new jobs, renewing rural communities, and creatively conserving the best of Vermont in production for the future.

Please support the Working Lands Enterprise Fund with a \$1,000,000 investment in the 2016 budget.