

Presented to House Committee on Agriculture & Forestry
January 3, 2018
By Secretary Anson Tebbetts

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with Deputy Alyson Eastman.

It's hard to believe it's been one year since we first met.

We thank this committee's leadership on a host of issues.

As we begin a new year—our team will look at issues through this approach.

We will look for opportunities to grow our economy, make Vermont more affordable and take care of our most vulnerable.

Before we look at issues that may be presented to us in the coming weeks, we wanted to share a few nuggets from the past year.

Let's begin with growing our economy. The Working Lands Program which the agency manages, continues to thrive. The demand for infrastructure and planning grants remains. The board received 87 applications requesting \$2.7 million dollars. We were able to fund 19 projects totaling \$680,000.

The Big E. The Agency manages the Big E building in West Springfield MA. 30 vendors sold their products totaling \$1.8 million dollars. It's a great change for Vermont to sell Vermont. The Agency also undertook more partnerships this fall. Vermont State Police used the 17 days to recruit new troopers...labor was there to recruit new workers...and tourism was there to entice visitors to visit our state. The Governor was able to attend on Vermont Day visiting with companies and a host of young people involved in 4-H.

Industrial Hemp continues to expand. It's being driven by the Cannabidiol or CBD market, oilseed, fiber. We had more than 90 farmers tell us they were planting the crop. Could this become a cash crop for our farmers? Issues to work on; getting quality seed, processing and making sure we are not running up against federal law.

One of our priorities is customer service. We have made strides but continue to work on serving Vermonters in a timely manner. We want to ensure we are accessible to all our customers. We have undergone training and that will continue.

Meat plants continue to come on line...value added is in the works...

- 1) Beef Jerky – Essex
- 2) Red meat slaughter – Pawlet
- 3) Poultry Slaughter and processing - Barnard (mobile unit)
- 4) Smoking, curing, red meat processing, cooking - Pawlet
- 5) Further processing – Charlotte
- 6) Vermont Goat Collaborative – Colchester looking to transition from custom to commercial and adding an exempt poultry operation for up to 5000 birds

These are establishments that have expressed interest but have not followed up asking for additional technical assistance to this point:

- Sausage, Ravioli's and meat sauce - Barre
- Ready to Eat Korean meals - So. Burlington
- Beef Jerky – Swanton
- Hillier – Smoking and Curing – Fair Haven

These are plants that are federal, but we are continuing to assist with technical support:

- Pete's Greens – expansion for salami production as well other raw products - Craftsbury
- currently covered under CU program
- Vermont Heritage Pork - Bahncks – Pork Processing, curing and smoking– Bridport

Rural Development. We will be working with you and a number of partners on this. We hope we can deliver a rural enterprise bill.

We also are committed to growing our workforce. We want to increase the number of students going into vocational education and agricultural schools each year. We need to let our young people now Agriculture can lead to a great job and career.

Dairy. There is good news and bad news for Dairy. (Data from Annual Report for 2017 to be released later this month)

1. Dairy plants continued their rise in number as has been the trend over the past few years. Plants hit the 100 mark during January of 2015, and hit 143 at the end of Fiscal Year 2017. Growth is expected to continue in this sector.
2. The dairy section provided technical assistance to 83 different producers ranging from those interested in manufacturing value added products to dairy farm infrastructure modernization.
3. On the farm side, pressures on the price continue. Low prices in 2017 are expected to continue or go even lower in 2018. The Vermont Milk Commission continues to meet. We have one more meeting before we issue recommendations likely in February.

These are just a few highlights. There is much more but we are committed to growing the economy, which includes NO new fees or taxes, making Vermont more affordable and of course helping the state's most vulnerable.