

I'm Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, speaking for the VT Working Lands Coalition.

Vermont's rural economy is at a challenging point of transition.

One of our greatest and growing opportunities in this economy is for diversification and value added development in the food and forest products sector.

Since the House led in the development of Act 142 establishing the Working Lands Enterprise Fund, \$3.8 million has been invested in over 129 projects.

These investments have leveraged 7.4 million in matching funds and have already driven over \$18,000,000 in added sales.

They have raised employee wages and directly created 428 permanent full time jobs—not counting all the multipliers.

That's a job is created for every \$9,000 invested. It is almost impossible to identify any other state or federal program with that level of efficiency.

Just as importantly—the grants have gone to some of Vermont's most creative entrepreneurs and stimulated projects that dramatically change the market with tremendous effects on sectors and value chains.

We see this in:

Wood pelletization—VT Wood Pellet—and all it does for loggers and forest stewards;

The regeneration of the apple Industry;

The dramatic expansion of meat production—and opportunities for new farms—connected with Black River Meats and other processors;

The growth of businesses that sequester carbon in compost with clean water as a by-product;

The expansion of artisanal cheeses—with world-class bio-science at Jasper Hill as it flagship;

The jump-starting of next gen businesses in aging rural places—like Fat Toad Carmel in Brookfield;

The expansion of goat farming, pig farming, poultry, cranberries, organic milk and vegetables, ice cream, character wood, bowls, Timber framed homes...we are seeing a dynamic resurgence through these working lands investments.

Leadership is coming from creative entrepreneurs in every county of the state.

Please, with your leadership, let's stabilize this program with a budget of \$1,000,000 as a foundation for the renewal of Vermont's most rural communities.