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AND FORESTRY

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**MEMORANDUM**

To: Rep. Kitty Toll, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

From: Rep. Carolyn Partridge, Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

Date: February 25, 2019

Subject: Comments on Provisions in the Governor's Proposed FY 2020 State Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the provisions relating to Agriculture and Forestry in the Governor's Proposed FY 2020 State Budget.

We are in agreement with the Provisions in Sec. D.101(a)(3) and Sec. E.224.

House Agriculture and Forestry understands the constraints of the FY 2020 budget and appreciate your efforts to produce a balanced budget. Having said that, we would request that if by some miracle there are one-time funds available, you consider applying them to the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, the Farm to School Program, the 2+2 program, the Agricultural Fairs Field Days, and Festivals stipend grants, and the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative for the reasons outlined below.

The 2+2 Program is in need of \$18,000 to meet the students' needs in the upcoming year. In out-years, there will be a significant increase in need, and we would hope that the governor and administration will include additional funds for this valuable program in coming years.

The other three agricultural programs are economic development successes with good return on investment in terms of economic output.

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative in collaboration with the Farm to Plate Program has proven itself to be incredibly important to rural economic development. Working Lands consistently funds successful, grass-roots entrepreneurship that moves Vermont's food economy toward an independent sustainable future. We have taken testimony indicating that there is a need for some larger investments that would have a ripple effect down the supply chain. While we know this is a significant amount of money, it is thought that any amount up to \$3 million would have a very positive effect on the food and food system sectors of the State, especially given our current transition point in

agriculture and the challenges faced by our farmers. The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative is a perfect place in which to invest one-time funds.

We ask that you attempt to level fund Farm to School at the FY 2019 level of \$231,000, and if possible, add \$75,000 for FY 2020. These small increases have a big impact on this program, as small grants can help a school take big steps toward integrating Farm to School in the cafeteria and the classroom. We know that the Farm to School Program has been very instrumental in improving our children's diets, nutrition, health, and ability to learn, which makes more cost-effective the dollars we spend on education.

The Agricultural Fairs, Field Days, and Festivals bring money into the State and promote agricultural education and literacy. It would be beneficial to increase their appropriation to previous funding levels of \$150,000 for stipend grants given that 14 volunteer organizations apply for these grants and make these fairs happen yearly.

In the forestry section, the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative had \$100,000 with which to make grants this year. In testimony, we heard that they, in fact, had grant applications of nearly \$1.7 million so it is clear that this program has great potential. We do not have an amount to suggest but trust your judgment as you make these hard decisions.

One possible reduction in the AAFM General Fund budget would come from cost savings associated with the fitting up of the recently opened Vermont Agricultural and Environmental Laboratory. An approximate \$20,000 reduction in General Fund appropriation could be realized due to the fact that the Laboratory does not need additional start-up costs in the coming fiscal year.