

Page 1, Line 7, **Sec. 1: Strategic Plan to Stabilize and Revitalize the Vermont Agricultural Industry**

- General Statement: Rural Vermont appreciates the change in direction of Section 1, specifically the incorporation of Farm to Plate - which is tasked with developing and reporting on a strategic plan for the VT food system. We appreciate the work of those who drafted this section, and their efforts to do so in a relatively short period of time based given the point of time in the legislative session.
- Rural Vermont recommends changing:
 - Page 2, (b) (3) beginning at Line 6 to read: “(3) recommend methods for improving the marketing of Vermont agricultural products inside the State, outside the State, outside the region, and outside the country.”
 - We recommend including intra-State markets as well as those outside of the State. The majority of Vermont producers are SFO or smaller in scale. It’s often challenging for them to meet wholesale price points and remain viable - and most of them rely significantly upon local restaurants, retailers, coops, and direct market opportunities to remain viable. Simultaneously, and for a number of reasons, the vast majority of our community members do not access the products grown, harvested, and / or processed by these producers. Given predictions for changes globally and locally related to Climate Change, we also consider it critical to maintain a focus on cultivating local and regional cooperation, infrastructure, and resiliency. Vermont Farm to Plate and many other organizations have made progress on connecting these dots - and we consider it important to maintain the inclusion of addressing intra-State markets as we have a long way yet to go.
 - Page 2, (c) (2) line 15: (2) “alternatives or methods for encouraging, maintaining, or increasing the amount of land in agricultural production in the State - and the number and diversity of people participating in the growing, harvesting, and / or processing of agricultural and forest products in the State, and who have equity in - and access to - this land;”
 - This passage is currently specific to land - but not the people who manage it, live on it, are dependent on it for their livelihoods. We feel it is important to include both the land and people aspects of this broad goal explicitly in the tasks of this strategic plan. Land remaining in agricultural production is dependent on the people who want to work that land (within

and without the State) - and their ability to access that land, gain equity and long terms security in it, and find viable markets for their products.

- Page 3, Line 1, (c) (4): “(4) strategies, techniques, and/or systems for improving the ecological footprint; ~~and~~ the environmental sustainability; and the environmental and climatological resilience of farming in the State;
 - We appreciate this particular point offered; and feel it’s important to explicitly address climate change adaptation and resilience given its present and inclement impacts. The inclusion of “strategies” allows for the inclusion of a broader range of responses than “techniques” and “systems”.

- Page 3, Line 3, (c)(5): “(5) the potential to increase the amount of Vermont agricultural products that are purchased by school nutrition programs, and other publicly funded institutions, in the State;”
 - This suggested language broades the focus from “school nutrition programs” to all publicly funded institutions (hospitals, prisons, etc.). These institutions - being publicly funded - all share an interest in, and are opportunities for, further support of VT agriculture, the dissemination of its products to more community members, and just and equitable livelihoods for those working in VT agriculture.

- Page 3, Line 5, (c)(6): (6) approaches for improving transparency in the agricultural industry so that the public is educated and aware of the ~~need for and costs and~~ effects of different agricultural ~~certain dairy~~ practices”
 - Rural Vermont and many other farming organizations have been uniting around the challenges all types of farmers face with respect to public awareness of the work they do, its impacts, and its costs. We have all been making a point of not identifying particular types of farms or particular types of practices which deserve particular privilege over others. This change in language follows that lead in suggesting that it is the State’s responsibility to contribute to the education and awareness of the public about the various ways different scales and types of farms practice, and their impacts.
 - We suggest removing the phrase “need for” as we feel that it is not the position of this body to convince a public of a predetermined need - rather to provide the public with information and relationships which allow them to come to their own conclusions.

- Page 3, line 8 (c)(7): “(7) approaches for improving agricultural and food literacy among Vermonters so that they are better informed about where their food comes from and how it is produced; [amend to read, or add as a separate bullet]

as well as agricultural and ecological education so that they better understand and have experience with how to grow, harvest, and process agricultural and other resources in Vermont's working landscape in ways which are ecologically beneficial'

- This amendment could be added as a separate bullet. We have consistently heard from members and attendees at events about the need for more experiential agricultural education for youth in VT (recognizing this proposed amendment is not unique to youth). The percentage of the population that farms has dramatically declined in the last 100 years, and offering opportunities to learn about and experience Vermont's working lands and its ecosystems is important to increasing the number of people committed to their health and longevity.

- Page 3 add, at Line 13 a subsection (c) (9): "techniques, strategies, or systems for improving the nutrient density of VT's agricultural crops"
 - Numerous scientific studies suggest that nutritional density of crops have significantly deteriorated over the decades for a number of reasons. There are many farmers and researchers working to understand how this has happened, its impacts, and how to improve nutrient density in crops and revitalize our soils. As we look forward, considering not only how much food we grow, and on how much land - but also the nutritional quality of it, is important.

- Page 3 add, at the end of the list (c)(9) or (10) depending on additions: *"opportunities for addressing the impact of non-agricultural costs - such as, but not limited to: health care, paid leave, education, child care, transportation, housing, and access to broadband - on the agricultural and working lands community and farm viability."*
 - We encourage you to consider that some of the most influential things which contribute to a resilient, viable, and healthy agricultural economy in VT may not traditionally be considered agricultural policies. It is critical that we recognize them as agricultural policies, and assess and address their impacts on the agricultural community, and our communities more broadly.

- Page 3, Line 14 (d): "(d) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets in partnership with the Vermont Farm-to-Plate Investment Program shall hold at least ~~four~~ 6 public hearings around the State to receive public input on priorities for stabilizing and revitalizing the agricultural industries in Vermont to be included in the strategic plan required under subsection (c) of this section."
 - We appreciate the inclusion of a public hearing process, and recognize the limited period of time this committee will have to complete its work and conduct these hearings. If possible, we recommend 6 hearings in

order to more comprehensively provide access to people from different geographic regions of VT to the process.

Page 7, Line 14, **Sec. 4: Soil Conservation Practice Working Group**

- Rural Vermont recommends changing:
 - Page 8, Line 1, (a)(1): “(1) identify agricultural standards or practices based upon soil health principles of:
 - (A) keeping soil covered;
 - (B) minimizing soil disturbance on cropland and minimizing external inputs;
 - (C) maximizing biodiversity;
 - (D) maintaining a living root; and
 - (E) integrating animals into land management, including grazing animals, birds, beneficial insects or keystone species, such as earthworms;that farmers, ranchers, and other people managing land can implement that improve soil health productivity, improve biodiversity, enhance crop resilience, and reduce agricultural runoff to waters;”
 - Including these soil health principles as a framework is in line with the general approach which farmers, technical assistance providers, and agricultural non-profits are supporting: making policy based on outcomes and principles vs. practices in and of themselves. It has been included in significant soil health legislation in other States - in particular New Mexico - and is broadly agreed upon as an acceptable set of principles.
 - Page 8, Line 16 (b): “(b) The Soil Conservation Practice Working Group shall consist of persons with knowledge or expertise in agricultural water quality, soil health, ecosystem and biological health, economic development, or agricultural financing. The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall appoint the members that are not ex officio members. The 20 Working Group shall include, but not be limited to, the following members:”
 - Rural Vermont feels it’s important to include people without a real or perceived conflict of interest in agriculture for a group which is charged with assessing and recommending environmental outcomes. We feel this is critical to achieving buy-in of the results of this working group - and follows the lead of the “Dairy and Water Quality Collaborative” which has determined that the next phase of its work will be in facilitating discussions between agricultural and environmental stakeholders. Specifically including somebody who can speak to impacts in associated biological and ecological communities is important to include in this group.

- Page 9, line 12, “a member of the ~~Healthy Soils Initiative~~ Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition”
- Page 9, line 13, “a member of the Northeast Organic Farmers Association or Vermont Organic Farmers.”
- General Concerns and Recommendations for part (b)(1):
 - Consider how to include in this working group *people who do not have a real or perceived conflict of interest in agriculture*, and who have experience in soil science and conservation, wildlife biology, ecology, or other environmental goals of this working group.
 - It is important that different scales, locations, and types of farming and farming practices are adequately represented through the organizations invited to send delegates to this working group.

Page 20, Line 9, **Sec. 11: Vermont Carbon Sequestration Working Group Report**

- Page 22, Line 16, add (c)(8): “(8) Evaluate the real and potential role of agroforestry in carbon sequestration, and carbon markets”
 - Rural Vermont offers this as a potential amendment - recognizing that this is a particular project which have not been involved in to this point. We offer it in recognition of the presence and potential of tree and other woody crops deliberately integrated in the agricultural landscape - and the likelihood of these practices becoming more widespread over time. Resources for people to contact with respect to agroforestry are included after S.160 testimony below.

Page 29, Line 8: **Section 17: Composting, Food Residuals (YET TO BE ADDED):** Rural Vermont recommends that you approve the proposed language provided by Rural Vermont and the Poultry Farmers for Compost Foraging which proposes a stakeholder group and process for resolving conflicts and developing recommendations for the legislature around this issue.

Page 30, Line 4: **Section 18: Pesticide Regulation**

- Page 30, Line 20, (4): “(4) Prior to sale, distribution, or use of a new genetically engineered seed in the State and after consultation with a seed review committee convened under subsection (c) of this section, review the traits of the new genetically engineered seed, and the real and potential impacts of substances these seeds are engineered to tolerate (for example, pesticides). The Secretary may prohibit, restrict, condition, or limit the sale, distribution, or use of the seed in the State when determined necessary to prevent an adverse effect on agriculture, human health, or ecological health in the State.
- Page 31, Line 8, (c)(1): “(c)(1) The Secretary shall convene a seed review committee to review the seed traits of a new genetically engineered seed proposed for sale, distribution, or use in the State; as well as substances which they are engineered to tolerate (for example, pesticides).”

- Page 31, Line 11:(2) A seed review committee convened under this subsection shall be comprised of the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or designee and 13 the following members appointed by the Secretary:
 - (A) a certified commercial agricultural pesticide applicator;
 - (B) an agronomist or relevant crop specialist from the University of Vermont or Vermont Technical College;
 - (C) a licensed seed dealer; and
 - (D) a member of a farming sector affected by the new genetically engineered seed.”
- **GENERAL CONCERNS:** The current list is very industry heavy, and Rural Vermont recommends including people without a real or perceived conflict of interest in this topic. We recommend that this group include people with expertise including: genetics and genetic drift, human health, plant and soil science, toxics, wildlife biology, entomology, ecology, etc. The impacts of the genetic engineering itself is important to consider - which is currently the task of this group; however, as important, and irrevocably interconnected, are the products which they are engineered in relationship to and their impacts.

Agroforestry Resource Recommendations: (all members of the VT Agroforestry Working Group)

- Kate MacFarland, USDA Agroforestry, Vermont: kate.macfarland@gmail.com
- Meghan Giroux, Masters in Agroforestry, University of Wales, Interlace Agroforestry Farm and Education, NY / VT: meghan.giroux@gmail.com
- Mark Krawczyk, Keyline VT, New Haven, VT: keylinevermont@gmail.com
- Juan Alvez, PhD, UVM Extension / Center for Sustainable Agriculture: jalvez@uvm.edu

There are many organizations, individuals, and other resources on this topic in the US and globally: the World Agroforestry Center, the USDA, NRCS, etc. I recommend starting with these local people as they have a substantial amount of field experience locally, nationally, and globally and can discuss particular local and regional examples with you.

I have discussed with the Agroforestry Working Group asking the House and Senate Ag Committees for time to make a presentation on this subject - they are willing and excited. We recognize it is the busy last few weeks of the session. Please let me know if you have interest in this this year, in the next half of the biennium, or at another time - Rural Vermont would be happy to facilitate.