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Sec. 1 STRATEGIC PLAN TO STABILIZE AND REVITALIZE THE VERMONT AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

Specific suggestions:

(b) (3) recommend methods for improving the marketing of Vermont agricultural products within the State, outside the State, outside the region, and outside the country

(c) (4) ~~techniques or systems~~ strategies for improving the ecological footprint and environmental sustainability of farming in the State

(c) (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;

(d) The Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets in partnership with the Vermont Farm-to-Plate Investment Program shall hold at least ~~four~~ six public hearings around the State...

Add language related to getting more people on the land, whether by reducing barriers to land access and affordability, incentivizing people to come from outside the state to farm in Vermont, or by increasing opportunities for Vermonters to learn how to grow and process food.

(c) (2) alternatives or methods for encouraging, maintaining, or increasing the amount of land in agricultural production and the number and diversity of people participating in the growing, harvesting, or processing of food in the State;

Alternatively, or in addition, this could be addressed by adding language in (c) (7) such as:

(c) (7) approaches for improving agricultural and food literacy among Vermonters including increased understanding of ~~so that they are better informed about~~ where their food comes from and how it is produced; enhanced opportunities to learn about and participate in the growing and processing of crops for food and fiber; and

Sec. 2 LOCAL FOOD PURCHASING WORKING GROUP

Specific suggestions:

In (a)(1)(E), "School Nutrition Associations" should be School Nutrition Association (singular).

(a)(1)(E) two representatives of the School Nutrition Associations, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets; and

Add a representative from the Agency of Education Child Nutrition Program by adding a subsection (G), as follows:

(a)(1)(G) a representative of the Agency of Education Child Nutrition Program

General comments:

In reference to (b)(1), a state definition for “local food” already exists (VT plus a 30-mile perimeter), but different definitions are currently used by different entities in the state. The working group should focus on understanding existing definitions of “local food” and the implications of various approaches, rather than necessarily prescribing a new definition.

Reiterate the need for funds to be allocated in order to carry out the proposed planning and field testing required in this section, as stated in subsection (c).

Please contact Abbie Nelson, NOFA-VT Food Systems Education Director, at (802) 999-3458 for additional information or with any questions.

Sec. 3 DAIRY MARKETING ASSESSMENT; REPORT

Support the change of the assessment from a dairy plant feasibility study to a market study.

Sec. 4 SOIL CONSERVATION PRACTICE WORKING GROUP

Incorporate the 5 soil health principles by amending (a)(1) to read:
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 can implement that improve soil health productivity, enhance crop resilience, and reduce agricultural runoff to waters;

Correct the name of the Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition by amending (b)(12) to read:

(b)(12) a member of the Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition ~~Initiative~~.

Add a representative from NOFA Vermont to the working group. Vermont Organic Farmers currently certifies over 700 farmers and food processors in the state, all of whom must meet standards based on principles of conserving biodiversity, maintaining or improving soil health, and others related to land stewardship that benefits the health of land, animals, and people. A representative of NOFA or VOF would add an experienced and essential voice to the working group.

Add subsection to this effect.

(b)(13) a representative of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont, appointed by the association;

Sec. 18 - § 642. DUTIES AND AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY

General comments:

Support the addition particularly of (a)(4) allowing the Secretary to “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 in the State.”

Specific suggestions:

Amend (c)(2) to include a scientist versed in genetic engineering, separately from an agronomist or crop specialist.

(c)(2)(E) a biologist or ecologist with expertise in the subject of genetic engineering.