

My name is Erin Lorentz, I serve as the Executive Director of the Vermont Wood Works Council, work for the Vermont Woodlands Association, and serve on Vermont Forest Industry Network committee as chair of the Local Wood Action team. I'm here this evening to speak to you about the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative and its impact on our local landowners, farms, and forest product businesses.

I'm also here to express the gratitude of the Working Lands Coalition for your ongoing efforts to fund the working lands enterprise initiative. We are unified in the belief that an annual \$3 million investment for the next 5 years is the right investment to fund future grants and technical assistance. The results of past investments speak for themselves in job creation, revenue generation, and additional leveraged funds. I've seen funding help strengthen our supply chain with something as simple as a flatbed truck to help The Treehouse Hardwoods and Millshop transport wood from a small mill up to Burlington. <sup>and after funding hired 5</sup> Lean Manufacturing workshops held at JK Adams Co in Dorset has helped them to identify opportunities to reduce cost and improve their efficiency, which ultimately has helped them to better compete in a global marketplace and to preserve jobs here in Vermont.

Since its inception in 2013, Vermont's Working Lands Enterprise Initiative has invested in 118 farm and forest enterprises, creating 501 direct jobs (that's 1.08 jobs for every \$10,000 invested) and leveraging \$59,000 in additional annual sales per business which adds up to a cumulative total of more than \$31,000,000 in additional sales because of WLEI grants. Further investment can assist us in addressing crisis situations in dairy and low grade wood markets that require innovation and diversification.

An investment of \$3,000,000 annually for five years would boost our agricultural and forest products sectors and have a great impact on our overall economy, while strengthening and stewarding our natural resources for future generations. The legislature has championed the Working Lands Initiative and can be so proud of the results on the ground. I ask that as you navigate this year's budget, you remember our unified belief that \$3million is the right investment in our farm and forest businesses.

Our farms and forests that comprise the working landscape are truly what we, as Vermonters, love and cherish. I, again, am here representing organizations that support our forest product supply chain and businesses, but more importantly I am here as a mother of two children that I would like to see grow up in the state where we can continue to value the working lands that provide clean air & water, our green mountains, our maple syrup, and our local food & products. It is the reason why Vermont residents choose to stay and why people come from all over the world to visit.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening and again, thank you for your past support.

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