



STATE OF VERMONT
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AND FORESTRY

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MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Kitty Toll, House Committee on Appropriations

From: Representative Carolyn Partridge, House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry

Date: February 21, 2020

Subject: Comments on Provisions in the Governor's Proposed FY2021 State Budget

The House Agriculture and Forestry Committee wants to thank you for the opportunity to offer our thoughts regarding the FY2021 budget. We also want to thank you for your hard work and honor the hard decisions you have to make.

First, we support the money in the Governor's Budget for the Working Lands Enterprise Fund. As we find ourselves in the midst a major transition in the agricultural sector, now more than ever, we need support for our established and emerging agriculture and forestry businesses. The Working Lands Enterprise Fund is critical to this goal.

In addition, we support the amount appropriated for Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) livestock ear tags. This will aid farmers as we move into the new world of animal identification and traceability.

Should there, by some miracle, be additional funds available, we would make the following recommendations given our theme of agricultural transition.

1. The work done on the *Vermont Agriculture and Food System: 2020 Part I Report*, requested by us in Act 83 of last year, was beyond expectation. We have attached a copy for your information. Their recommendation has been whittled down to asking for an additional \$200,000 for the Working Lands Enterprise Fund, on top of the Governor's recommend: \$43,000 for increased support for public health and food access; \$25,000 to help jumpstart a hemp trade association; and \$15,000 to investigate the creation of a searchable database to connect available bookkeepers and accountants with Working Lands businesses.
2. Farm to School and Early Childhood Program – additional funds for this proven, win-win-win program, will help put more fresh, locally produced, nutritious food on Vermont children's plates.

3. Soil Conservation Practice and Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group, also mandated by Act 83 - the work of this working group and its subsequent report has been exemplary. Because of the complexity of this topic, they would like to continue to meet next year. While their total request (\$500,000) is beyond our means at this time, any amount dedicated to this work would be a sign of our commitment to their work, the future of agriculture, and a recognition that farmers are part of the climate change solution. It would also be an indication of the state's commitment which may help the working group leverage additional funds through grants. We are attaching a copy of their report as well.

We would also like to acknowledge the important work that the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board contributes to the agricultural sector.